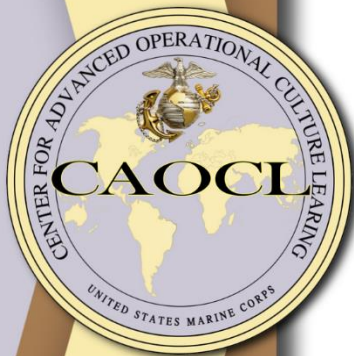**Insights from the Marine Corps Organizational Culture
Research Project: Sexual Assault and Harassment**

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Marine Corps Organizational Culture (MCOCR) Project
Report Front Matter

The following seven pages of front matter provide background relevant to the report that may be of interest to some readers. This material accompanies all reports from the MCOCR Project posted in the Open Anthropology Research Repository. MCOCR reports were designed for an applied audience of military and civilian officials of the U.S. Marine Corps rather than a scholarly audience. Therefore some background information, such as research team composition and the incidents of social media harassment that led to the project, is assumed rather than explicit. Included in the front matter are:

Pages	Information
1-2	Project Overview
3	Frequently Asked Questions
4	Media and Congressional Attention to the Project
4	Background on the "Marines United" Scandal
5-7	Background on the Translational Research Group

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Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research
Project Overview

June 2020 *(updated Sep 2022)*

Project Overview

The Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research (MCOCR) Project was an exploratory research effort requested by the U.S. Marine Corps, Manpower and Reserve Affairs (M&RA), in July 2017 to gather information on Marine Corps culture. The project arose in part from concerns related to the Marines United social media misconduct (see page 4 of this document for more information) and also from longer-term leadership questions regarding shifts in Marine Corps culture. The research was conducted by the Translational Research Group (TRG) at Marine Corps University (MCU). [See pages 5-7 for more information on TRG.] The project was governed by Marine Corps Human Subjects Protection Protocol #USMC.2017.0005 and the provisions of academic freedom in MCU's *Academic Regulations*. The Principal Investigator for the project was Dr. Kerry Fosher.

The intent of the project was to develop a broad, robust base of data and analyses related to Marine Corps culture that could be mined over the years to provide context and insights that could be used to inform problem-framing and decision-making on a range of issues and to complement/enhance other research methods, such as surveys. Additionally, the project was intended to support scholarly analysis and publication. The project was not intended to be representative of the entire Marine Corps or to support statistical analyses. As with most exploratory research, results were intended to inform discussion rather than make claims or advance particular positions regarding any Marine Corps program or policy. For additional information see the Frequently Asked Questions on page 3.

The **first phase** of MCOCR involved research design, data gathering, initial analysis, and production of two expedited reports. The research team collected data from Aug-Oct 2017 at installations in the United States and Japan, conducting 182 interviews and focus groups that were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Initial analysis focused on issues related to leadership, cohesion, and gender bias, captured in reports to the Marine Corps' Personnel Studies and Oversight (PSO) Office, later renamed the Talent Management Oversight Directorate (TMOD).

A *Quick Look Report* on issues specifically related to the Marines United misconduct was delivered to PSO in February 2018. A broader initial *Report to PSO* was expedited and delivered on 30 March 2018. This report organized preliminary analysis into the following themes:

1. Marines United and the Prevalence of Online Misconduct
2. Challenges with and for Leadership
3. The Procedural and Social Uses of PFT/CFT Scores
4. Experiences of Female Marines
5. Hostile Environments
6. Remaining a Marine: How Enlisted and Officers Deliberate and Decide
7. Cohesion, Leadership, and Difference through the Lens of Humor

With the delivery of the initial report and associated materials to PSO, the Phase 1 of MCOCR was complete. This report is available on DTIC: [AD1079774](#). Links to other project reports from Phase 2 are provided on the next page.

Initial release of this report was scheduled for May 2018. Release was delayed due to leadership questions about the applicability of MCU's academic freedom policy. These questions were resolved in September 2019. The release resulted in **media and Congressional attention. See additional information on page 4 of this document.**

The **second phase** of MCOCR was intended to have three parts:

- Correct errors in the transcripts and removing protected information to develop them into a dataset that TRG could mine on a broad range of issues of interest to the Marine Corps.
- Conducting deeper and more structured analyses on issues of interest to the Marine Corps and topics of scholarly value.
- Continuing to advise Marine Corps organizations based on MCOCR and other datasets as requested.

The Marine Corps' decision to close CAOCL and, consequently, disband TRG in June 2020 altered the plans and timelines for the second phase. Original analysis plans for Phase 2 also were disrupted by TRG's inability to procure necessary analytic software and the delay associated with academic freedom questions. These factors significantly reduced the scope of analysis planned for Phase 2. **See additional information below.**

For more information, contact
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Translational Research Group - CAOCL
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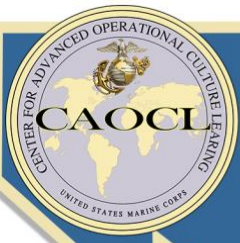
Advising

The TRG team continued to provide advice for problem framing and the development of more structured data gathering efforts to various Marine Corps organizations, including M&RA and TMOD until TRG was disbanded. Dr. Fosher continues to provide advice based on the project.

Dataset Development

Work to correct errors in the transcripts and remove protected information was completed in January 2020. This work ensured the transcripts could be analyzed accurately. It also allowed the transcripts to be placed in a repository for use by other researchers (see below).

Completed Analyses

Due to the limitations imposed by lack of software and impending closure, TRG focused on completing several "quick look" reports on different topics rather than the in-depth analyses originally planned. The following additional reports were completed and posted on DTIC:

- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Implicit and Explicit Perceptions of Fairness (DTIC AD1079415)
- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Pregnancy Loss (DTIC AD1085324)
- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Alcohol (DTIC AD1091445)
- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Rethinking Mentorship (DTIC AD1096699)
- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Trust in the Marine Corps – the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly (DTIC AD1103134)
- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Sexual Assault and Harassment (DTIC AD1103136)
- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Empathy in Leadership (DTIC AD1102322)
- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Generational Differences in the Marine Corps – Exploring Issues and Frictions Between Older and Younger Marines (DTIC AD1102357)
- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Elements and Antidotes for Disillusionment (DTIC AD1102323)

All reports from the project were submitted to the Defense Technical Information Center for posting on the public portal. See also the section on data management below for additional locations and materials.
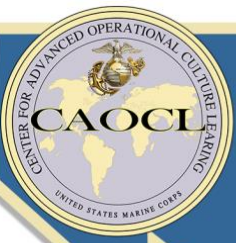
Scholarly Works

TRG team members presented on aspects of the MCOCR project at numerous academic conferences and in Marine Corps meetings. One scholarly article was published and another is in development as of this date:

- Translational Research in a Military Organization: The Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Project. Feb 2020 in *Annals of Anthropological Practice*. https://doi.org/10.1111/napa.12130
- Post-Heroic Leadership in a Heroic Organization: The Secret and Gendered Life of Empathy in the United States Marine Corps. (article in development by team member).

Long-Term Data Management/ Data Availability for Future Research

Protection of the Marines who volunteered for the project and the data they provided was a priority for TRG. However, TRG also felt a responsibility to ensure that the data provided by Marines was used to the maximum extent possible. The principal investigator worked with the Marine Corps' Human Research Protection Program to identify a data repository that balanced internal and external discoverability with necessary security. After reviewing several options, the **Qualitative Data Repository** (QDR) was selected. Versions of transcripts that have been scrubbed of protected information, along with project documentation and reports, were deposited in the QDR when CAOCL closed. They can be accessed at https://doi.org/10.5064/F6K4IVEP. Reports and other documentation are available to the public. Access to the transcripts requires an approved human subjects protection protocol that meets criteria specified in the project documentation. Reports also are being posted to the **Open Anthropology Research Repository** during September of 2022.

Some materials from the project, but not the data, also were included in the CAOCL collection provided to the Archives Branch of the Marine Corps History Division at MCU and reports were posted on DTIC. The original audio recordings, raw transcripts, and any materials that could link participants with the data were destroyed when TRG was closed.

For more information, contact
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What was MCOCR?

The MCOCR Project was a small, exploratory, qualitative research effort intended to gather U.S. Marine perspectives on a range of issues related to Marine Corps culture. The project resulted in 150 semi-structured interviews and 32 semi-structured focus groups with 267 unique participants (nine Marines participated in both an interview and a focus group). All participants were volunteers, and the project was conducted under a protocol approved by the Marine Corps Human Research Protection Program. The project was conducted by the Translational Research Group (TRG) at the Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning (CAOCL) under Marine Corps University's (MCU) academic freedom policy.

How should the information in MCOCR reports be used?

Because of the non-representative sample, data and analysis from MCOCR were intended to inform discussions in conjunction with other information sources. They should not be used to make broad, statistical claims about Marines or Marine Corps programs and policies.

Were Marine statements fact-checked?

No. The intent of the project was to gather Marine perspectives without regard to whether the perspectives were based on full knowledge of current Marine Corps policies and programs. In some cases, it was important to capture misperceptions, as they had implications for internal Marine Corps messaging.

What are the project's limitations?

1. The MCOCR sample was not designed to be representative of the Marine Corps population in terms of sex, race/ethnicity, MOS, or other characteristics. Therefore, the data cannot be used in statistical analysis designed to make claims about all Marines. Sample demographics are included in the March 2018 report from the project, available on DTIC (AD1079774).
2. The project did not include Marines in the reserves or recently retired/separated Marines due to Marine Corps interpretation of DoD policy on information collections at the time the research was designed.
3. The project's designers did not actively seek volunteers above E-8 and O-5; therefore, senior voices are not strong in the sample.

Who funded and sponsored the project?

The project fell within the normal scope of work of TRG and the majority of the project was funded out of CAOCL's existing budget. Manpower and Reserve Affairs (M&RA) requested that the research be done, but the research design, conduct, and analysis were controlled by TRG. M&RA assisted with logistics, travel for research team members who were not part of TRG, and funding to accelerate transcription of audio recordings.
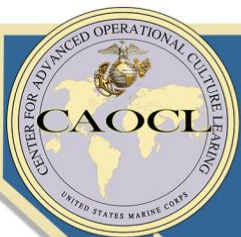
When and where were data gathered?

Between August and October 2017, the research team gathered data at the following locations: Pentagon, Marine Corps Base (MCB) Quantico, VA, MCB Camp Lejeune, NC, Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Cherry Point, NC, MCB Camp Pendleton, CA, Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center 29 Palms, CA, MCAS Yuma, AZ, and MCB Camp Butler, Okinawa, Japan.

Can Marines who participated be identified?

Identification is unlikely. Marines who volunteered for the research went through an informed consent process that warned them of the risks and the steps the research team would take to mitigate them. (A copy of the informed consent information is available in the project documentation through the Archives Branch of the Marine Corps History Division at MCU or the Qualitative Data Repository at Syracuse University.) Names were removed from the dataset and other measures were taken to mask identities, but Marines were cautioned prior to agreeing to participate in an interview or focus group, during the informed consent process, that it might still be possible for some readers to identify them through their habits of speech and/or combinations of characteristics, such as MOS and location.

What were the qualifications and characteristics of the research team?

The principal investigator was a cultural anthropologist with more than 20 years of experience working with and doing research on national security organizations, including 10 years leading research teams on projects focused on the Marine Corps. The composition of the MCOCR research team changed between 2017 and 2020, but team members possessed PhDs or MAs in the following disciplines: cultural anthropology, sociology, cultural geography, international relations, education, communication, and evaluation science. Additionally, the project's design was peer reviewed by a DoD scientist with a PhD in psychology. Data gathering teams included male and female researchers. To the maximum extent possible, participants were allowed to choose the sex of the researcher with whom they interacted. All team members were caucasian. The data gathering team included two members with Marine backgrounds. One was a recently retired field-grade Marine officer, and the other was an active duty, company-grade Marine officer. The research team also consulted with other social and behavioral scientists and Marines during design and analysis.

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**Translational Research Group - CAOCL
Marine Corps University**

Timeline and Background:

The initial MCOCR report was delivered to the Marine Corps on 30 Mar 2018. The Translational Research Group's (TRG) original agreement to conduct the project included public release of all outcomes under Marine Corps University's (MCU) academic freedom policy. However, release of project outcomes was delayed for 17 months due to Marine Corps leadership questions about the applicability of academic freedom policy to the project. After materials were released in September 2019, they received light attention in the media and Congress, examples of which are provided below.

Briefs to Congressional Staff

A team including the MCOCR Project's Principal Investigator, Dr. Kerry Fosher, BGen Daniel Shipley, then Director of Manpower Plans and Policies, and Dr Michael Strobl, then Deputy Director of Manpower Plans and Policies, briefed Military Legislative Assistants from the Senate on 07 February 2020 and from the House on 04 March 2020. BGen Robert Fulford, Legislative Assistant to the Commandant, and staff from the Office of Legislative Affairs also participated in the brief to Senate Military Legislative Assistants. (The brief to House staffers was truncated due to growing concerns over the COVID19 pandemic, which was emerging at that time.)

Media Coverage

To our knowledge, no major news outlets covered the MCOCR project. It received some attention on social media sites such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook in both military- and social science-related channels. It also was covered by some military-focused media outlets. Two examples of coverage are:

- Szoldra, Paul. 2019. An internal investigation spurred by a nude photo scandal shows just how deep sexism runs in the Marine Corps. Task and Purpose. 04 Dec.
- Pawlyk Oriana. 2019. Commandant Responds to Troubling Study on Marine Corps Culture. Military.com. 07 Dec.

Congressional Hearing

To our knowledge, the MCOCR Project was discussed in only one public hearing. In the 10 Dec 2019 hearing, LtGen Michael Rocco, Deputy Commandant for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, the sub-committee chair, Rep Jackie Speier, and Rep Susan Davis, briefly discussed the Marine Corps' handling of the report, challenges with Marine Corps culture, concepts of equity and parity, and the importance of empathy in the professional development of Marines.

- U.S. House Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Military Personnel Hearing, "Diversity in Recruiting and Retention: Increasing Diversity in the Military – What the Military Services are Doing." Dec 10, 2019. The project is discussed or mentioned at:
  - 1:16:40 (LtGen Rocco briefly mentions the MCOCR initial report in his testimony)
  - 1:18:21 (Rep Speier and LtGen Rocco discuss the delayed release of the initial report and some aspects of its contents)
  - 1:31:08 (LtGen Rocco, responding to Rep Susan Davis, raises the report in his remarks on teaching empathy).

Marines United Background

In early March of 2017, The War Horse and Reveal from the Center for Investigative Reporting published a piece on a Facebook group called Marines United (See Thomas James Brennan, 4 Mar 2017). Members of the group had created linked Google Drive folders and posted photographs of women—some naked, some clothed—as well as personally identifying information and hostile comments about women. Some of the women targeted were Marines. At the time of the reporters' investigation, the Facebook group had over 30,000 members, some of whom were later determined to be active duty Marines. The investigations in the year following the initial news coverage identified 97 Marines as possible culprits. There were a range of punishments according to reporting in The Marine Corps Times (See Shawn Snow 21 Mar 2018). A brief overview of the legal actions taken was provided in a 2018 article in Military.com (See Hope Hodge Seck 13 Sep 2018). Although there were other signs of hostile behavior and social media-based misconduct that concerned the Marine Corps, the media attention and congressional scrutiny surrounding Marines United meant that it served as the primary frame for much of the subsequent discussion and action by the Marine Corps. Those actions included the formation of a task force and launching a number of initiatives. These efforts are not well documented in public Marine Corps reports, but news coverage and congressional testimony can be found via internet and library searches.
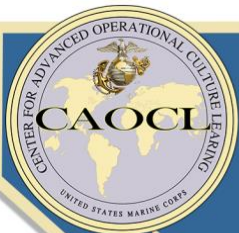
Timeline and Background:

General Background: The Translational Research Group (TRG) was a multi-disciplinary group of social scientists that operated from 2010 to 2020. The group was located within the Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning (CAOCL), which was responsible for providing culture-related, regional, and language education and training to the U.S. Marine Corps. Originally part of the Training and Education Command headquarters, CAOCL was reorganized and became part of Marine Corps University in 2012.

The idea for the group grew out of discussions between the anthropologist who became its director and Marine Corps leaders, one of whom was the Director of CAOCL. They had seen many problems in the Marine Corps' ability to leverage research results and scientific expertise. Many problems seemed to arise from the lack of persistent presence of scientific researchers in the Marine Corps' supporting establishment. Sometimes, researchers lacked sufficient understanding of the military and its context to design effective and useful research. Sometimes military leaders did not have enough experience with scientists to know how to interact with them and how to frame questions to ensure results were usable. Often, the long lag time between completion of a research project and implementation of results meant that researchers were no longer available when the Marine Corps had questions about how to use the knowledge developed through a research effort. Having researchers on site and employed full time, rather than on a project-by-project basis, was intended to help mitigate some of these problems.

In addition to attempting to work on the challenges above, TRG also was an experiment in the interaction of the social sciences with the military. It was formed at a time when tensions were very high between social science professional associations and military organizations. The tension was a renewal of mutual mistrust that emerged during and after past periods of engagement, most notably in World War II and the 1960s and 70s. As a result of these tensions, the resulting lack of familiarity on both sides, and unrelated changes in the civilian personnel system, most military organizations became undesirable employment options for social scientists who wanted to maintain their professional identities. Even setting aside the problems working with the military could cause in academic professional circles, the working conditions were not appropriate for retaining expertise. Job duties as civil servants or contractors did not include time for maintaining and advancing professional knowledge and networks, there was little support for publication, attending conferences, and other normal scientific work, and there were very few career tracks that allowed a scientist to advance while maintaining a scientific identity rather than becoming a rank-and-file manager. These conditions were mitigated to some degree for those working in military colleges and universities, but even in those settings, support for professional development was limited and research involving fieldwork was not easily accommodated. Taking a civil service or contract job supporting a military organization was, too often, a professional death sentence. TRG attempted, with a mix of success and failure, to address these problems by creating an environment that provided military officials with access to social science expertise, but also established more viable working conditions.

TRG drew its name and general orientation from the concept of translational research in medicine and other sciences, which emphasizes the ability to move knowledge from research to application quickly through increased communication between researchers and practitioners and by other means. The translational research concept in TRG differed somewhat from applied research in the military context because it included basic or foundational research. It emphasized continued scientific rigor and researcher control over design and execution with increased attention to the questions, ideas, and needs of potential end users and greater awareness of the implementation context.

People: The director of TRG, Dr. Kerry Fosher, was a civil servant at the GS-14 level whose PhD was in cultural anthropology. Although the original intent was to create government positions for the researchers, it was never possible to accomplish that goal and the group was staffed with full time contractors. Another aspect of the original intent was to focus recruitment on people from the fieldwork-focused social sciences, such as anthropology, geography, sociology, and similar fields at the PhD level. Hiring into civil service or contract positions is never a simple process and at no time was TRG completely staffed as intended. At various points, TRG had researchers with MAs or PhDs in disciplines including cultural anthropology, cultural geography, education, educational psychology, international relations, international studies, biological anthropology, and cognitive psychology. It also developed close collaborative relationships with several other researchers with backgrounds in sociology, social psychology, inter-cultural communication, and other disciplines, as well as collaborative relationships with military personnel from a wide range of backgrounds. Although the range of disciplines was not what was intended, researchers with different degree backgrounds brought other capabilities that turned out to be highly valuable. The number of researchers in the group varied over the years based on CAOCL's funding and the details of contracts, but averaged six researchers, not including the director.

Resources: TRG was funded out of CAOCL's budget rather than on a project-by-project basis, although it did occasionally take supplemental funding to enhance staffing or support requirements for particular projects. This approach to funding ensured that researchers would persist in the context, enabling them to advise on implementation of research results and other aspects of the selection and use of science. Funding the group in this way also had downsides. CAOCL had to focus on its core mission to provide education and training, which sometimes led to
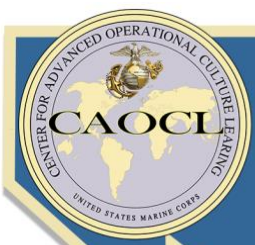
Functions: Although TRG's areas of emphasis changed somewhat over the course of the 10 years it existed, most of its work fell into three categories:

- research, advising, and outreach
- support to CAOCL
- assessment.

Research, Advising, and Outreach

TRG did not accept tasks in the way many research entities working with or within the military did during this time period. Project ideas might come from researchers, Marines, or other Marine Corps organizations. However, selection of projects was at the discretion of TRG's director, with approval by CAOCL's director. The intent was to ensure that the group conducted projects within its available range of expertise and resources and only on questions that the team found valid rather than having to respond to requests that might not have been a good fit with the group's capabilities or that would have challenged its integrity. This level of autonomy was highly unusual in DoD and frequently challenged, but necessary for the group to function as designed. Most research efforts focused on issues related to Marines and Marine Corps organizations such as stress and resilience, gender bias, humanitarian assistance missions, and cultural patterns in the Marine Corps. Projects leveraged the strengths of the team at any given time, but emphasized field research, including observation, semi-structured interviews, and semi-structured focus groups. A core strength of TRG was to bring Marine voices into discussions largely dominated by survey research and other quantified data.

The group provided a great deal of scientific advising to the Marine Corps and other DoD organizations. Originally envisioned as work that would focus on implementation of results, this line of activity expanded and became one of the most valuable aspects of TRG's work. Rather than focusing exclusively on implementation of its own results, TRG researchers also came to be valued for the advice they could provide based on their existing expertise, helping Marine Corps leaders scope problems, design research approaches, and evaluate research claims from other projects. Advisory conversations did not usually result in artifacts like reports or publications but rather in improved decision-making. However, it was one of the most valuable services TRG researchers provided.

Researchers also engaged in outreach through presenting work to scholarly and practitioner audiences, teaching guest classes and electives within Marine Corps University and elsewhere, publishing, and becoming involved in the professional associations of their disciplines. This outreach helped inform academic audiences about military personnel and served to improve relations between the military, academic social scientists, and scientific professional associations.

Support to CAOCL

TRG supported CAOCL's education, training, and policy sections in a variety of ways. Researchers reviewed and wrote inputs on doctrine and policy, advised on approaches to assessment, and occasionally supported training sessions with instruction. However, the most significant support it provided was in the area of culture general curricula, which provided Marines with the concepts and skills needed to operate effectively when they do not have sufficient/current culture-specific information. Although CAOCL had adopted the 5 dimensions model in 2009 (see *Operational Culture for the Warfighter* by Salmoni and Holmes Eber, 2008 and 2011), it was primarily used as a means of organizing regional or culture-specific material. The generalizable concepts and skills were not an integral part of curricula. For the first 5 years of its existence, TRG led the effort to integrate culture general material, first in CAOCL's distance education program and later in its training program. This work sometimes involved developing curricula or reference materials and at other times focused on advising CAOCL's sections about what should be included. Once the Professor of Military Cross-Cultural Competence (PM3C) was hired to be part of CAOCL and a member of the university's faculty, TRG was able to transition leadership of these efforts to her with TRG researchers supporting her efforts.

Assessment

TRG's director led CAOCL's assessment platform and TRG researchers worked with CAOCL's sections to help them design assessment approaches that would support required reporting and answer the more complex questions asked by CAOCL's director. One TRG researcher was responsible for collating annual information from the sections and using it to support various reporting requirements. TRG researchers also conducted assessment research, several examples of which are available on the Defense Technical Information Center's public portal.

For more information, contact
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Balance of Functions: This arrangement of tasks could be seen as a distraction from the core work of conducting research and advising or as simply "paying rent" to TRG's host organization, CAOCL. At times it was, but it also served a purpose. There was a reciprocal relationship between the work on training and education programs and the group's research. The support to CAOCL's sections and assessment work brought researchers into contact with the active duty and retired Marines in CAOCL and into discussions about Marines and the Marine Corps. In some cases, this work was a researcher's first introduction to the Marine Corps and a useful orientation before engaging in research-related activities. It also kept the researchers tied to the sometimes-frustrating realities of trying to get science integrated in the supporting establishment, something that was an important background for science advising. In turn, the group's research projects not only served their intended purposes, but also helped researchers develop greater knowledge of Marines and their missions, which informed their work on training and education.

Additionally, the arrangement ensured that the Marine Corps got full value from a relatively scarce commodity, fieldwork-focused social scientists. For the reasons noted above, during this time period, it was not easy to get qualified social scientists to work with the military and those employed purely in education and training sometimes struggled to maintain their professional standing or do research. TRG provided a mechanism that allowed social scientists to support education and training without losing their ability to conduct research, publish, and stay connected to their fields.

Closure: In 2019, the Marine Corps began substantial reorganizations and program cuts (referred to as divestment) in an effort to align its funding and personnel with the capabilities it believed would be necessary in future conflicts. These changes were difficult and controversial. For example, the service divested tanks, something that would have been unthinkable previously. Culture and language programs also were divested. CAOCL closed its doors on 30 Jun 2020 and, consequently, TRG was disbanded. Marine Corps University retained TRG's director as the university-level director of research and CAOCL's culture-focused faculty member who continued to teach across the university. Initially, a few of CAOCL's education and training capabilities were retained in the newly formed Center for Regional and Security Studies (CRSS). However, in the two years following CAOCL's closure, the CRSS lost staffing and funding. As of September 2022, CRSS has no dedicated funding and is staffed by one Marine officer who will not be replaced when his assignment changes, making it unlikely that the center will continue unless Marine Corps priorities change.

Of note, the other U.S. services underwent similar reductions or shifts in their culture and language capabilities during the same time period. (See *The Rise and Decline of U.S. Military Culture Programs 2004-20* Fosher and Mackenzie, eds and *The Best-Laid Schemes: A Tale of Social Research and Bureaucracy* Deitchman. Both are available to the public via Marine Corps University Press.) These shifts corresponded with a number of fieldwork-focused social scientists from across the services, including TRG, leaving through retirement or transitioning to work in academia or the private sector.

Archives and Repositories: TRG has archived its materials in a number of places. The specific contents of each collection were tailored to the archive or repository.

Marine Corps History Division Archives Branch: The CAOCL Collection deposited in this archive includes materials from TRG. Materials include reports and publications, project overviews and summaries, assessment reports, and similar artifacts.

Defense Technical Information Center: TRG posted many of its research and assessment reports on DTIC. Most can be located by searching on Fosher or CAOCL.

Qualitative Data Repository: TRG deposited materials and data from four projects in the QDR. Reports, project overviews, IRB-related materials, and some data from the projects are available to the public by searching for Fosher. Access to data from two of the projects requires an IRB-approved protocol.

Marine Corps University Human Subjects Research Archive: All IRB records from TRG's projects are retained in the university's centralized storage. These records are accessible only to IRB-approved personnel.

Open Anthropology Research Repository: Starting in September 2022, a selection of reports from TRG is being deposited in the OARR.

Executive Summary

In this report, four Marines tell their stories of sexual assault and harassment, lending detail and dimension to what is more often only reported in statistical form. These Marines focus on the deliberations that go into whether or not they chose to report their assault or harassment, as well as the personal and social impacts of reporting an assault. I also provide secondhand accounts of assault and perspectives on the topic from other Marines. I draw out the common threads among the stories and perspectives presented here in order to identify areas that need further attention, either in the form of more research or interventions and preventative measures. The **common threads** are:

1) **The potential negative ramifications of reporting are a substantial consideration when deciding whether to report an incident.** Marines sometimes view those who report an assault with suspicion. The Marines whose stories we share here had to decide whether or not reporting was worth the damaged reputation, the loss of friends, the disruption to their own career (and, in one case, the disruption of the career of the attacker was considered), and potential ostracization. Reporting an assault is not a straightforward solution, and in fact often causes more problems.

2) **Space matters.** Spatial issues came out clearly in the data. Some of the Marines in this report were in close proximity to their attacker after an incident, be it at their place of work, their living quarters, or at the gym. Though sometimes a survivor is relocated to avoid such situations, a clear theme was that being moved to a new unit after an attack stigmatized the survivor, not to mention the fact that it can be socially and professionally disruptive. A woman who is moved into another unit is sometimes marked as troublesome – a stigma that is hard to shake.

3) **Leadership failures create barriers to follow-up care.** When leaders lack sensitivity around the need for medical appointments and are ignorant of organizational policies and procedures regarding the medical care and sexual assault response, survivors feel as though they are put in a difficult position of letting down their unit or command in order to receive care. However, not receiving adequate care can needlessly exacerbate survivors' trauma and impact force readiness.

4) **Survivors feel like they are not cared for and lose trust in the organization.** For Marines in this paper, leadership failures in assault response sent the message that survivors do not matter. This has implications for the force. One Marine expressed wanting to leave the Corps after feeling uncared for by leadership. Another expressed that she does not feel she can mentor young female Marines because she would like to tell them to speak out against bad behavior but is not sure if they can handle the repercussions.

These common threads are presented as discrete issues, but the reality is much more complex. Not only are these threads interwoven with each other, but they are also enmeshed in intangible cultural beliefs. For the purposes of better understanding the problem of sexual assault and identifying points of intervention, I highlight some of these salient yet intangible beliefs through the lens of two **crosscutting themes:**

1) **The trouble with toughness.** A theme that runs through all these topics is survivors' decision to "suck it up" or speak out after an attack. Both can be considered a form of toughness, and both carry with them the potential for personal, social, and professional ramifications when they are attitudes taken after an assault. **I emphasize this theme to draw attention to this question: Is toughness (either "sucking it up" or speaking out) an effective way to deal with sexual assault or harassment?** Data and analysis related to this crosscutting theme are underlined.

2) **The trope of the troublesome female**. This trope begins in boot camp and haunts the fleet, creating divisiveness between male and female Marines. The trope persists despite many men having positive experiences with female Marines, and it stigmatizes women and the act of speaking out. Though abstract, this trope greatly shapes women's decisions to report and how they are perceived if they do report. **I emphasize this theme to draw attention to this question: Where is the trope of the troublesome woman coming from and what are its effects in the Marine Corps?** Data and analysis related to this crosscutting theme are highlighted.*

*Please note that some information and data relate to both crosscutting themes and are therefore both underlined and highlighted.

MCOCR Quick-Look Report: Sexual Assault and Harassment[1]

Introduction

Let me introduce you to four Marines. Staff Sergeant V[2] joined the Marine Corps expressly "because someone told me I couldn't" (not an uncommon story among Marines). Corporal Q is a first generation American whose dream has always been to serve this country. Sergeant J was drawn to the Corps because "I knew it was going to be hardcore, and I was excited about that." Likewise, Sergeant Z joined because "when I was about eight, I saw *Making of Marines, Parris Island* on the Discovery Channel, and it looked like they were having a fun camping trip with machine guns, and I was like yes, totally sounds like something I want to do [*laughter*]." All four of these Marines share the distinction of being sexual minorities who joined the most male-dominated branch of the armed services: SSgt V, Cpl Q, and Sgt J are female, while Sgt Z is a transgender male. They have something else in common: they have each been either sexually harassed or assaulted by another Marine during their time in the Corps.

Sexual harassment and assault in the military are unfortunately too common. Multiple reports[3] attest to this by providing alarming facts and figures. This report does not focus on the facts and figures, but instead it aims to put a human face on the numbers by focusing on personal experiences of harassment and assault. After detailing the stories of SSgt V, Cpl Q, Sgt J, and Sgt Z, the report highlights **common threads** in order to identify areas that the Marine Corps can examine more thoroughly – and where it can perhaps intervene – to make the organization a safer and more welcoming place for all who serve among its ranks.[4] In discussing the common threads, I also draw on secondhand stories of sexual assault and perspectives on the topic from other Marines, adding both dissonance and resonance to the stories of the four Marines. The common threads I focus on in this report are:

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[1] The Translational Research Group consulted with Marine Corps University's Staff Judge Advocate prior to finalizing this report.

[2] The letters that follow the rank of the research participant discussed in this paper are pseudonyms and have no correspondence to the actual names (which we did not collect) of the participants. Due the highly sensitive topic of this report, we have taken additional measures, not used in other reports from this project, to protect participants' identities. These measures include removing participant codes and, in some cases, removing or changing details, such as location.

[3] See, for example: The Sexual Assault and Prevention Response Office's Annual Report on Sexual Harassment and Violence at the Military Service Academies, 2018-2019. https://www.sapr.mil/reports; Morral, Andrew R., Terry L. Schell, Matthew Cefalu, Jessica Hwang, and Andrew Gelman, Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment in the U.S. Military: Volume 5. Estimates for Installation- and Command-Level Risk of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment from the 2014 RAND Military Workplace Study. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR870z7.html

[4] While this report focuses on sexual minorities, many participants noted that male-on-male harassment and assault is a significant, though underreported, problem in the Corps. Our sample included several second-hand accounts of male-on-male assaults. This topic warrants further investigation.

1) Reporting isn't necessarily a good solution if it causes more problems for the survivor.[5]
2) Spatial issues – be it being having to work with and/or see an attacker or being moved to a different unit in order to be separated from an attacker – can make life hard for a survivor, even well after the attack.
3) Leadership failures create barriers to follow-up care.
4) Survivors feel like they don't matter to the organization, eroding trust and a sense of belonging.

The report also identifies places where intangible, unquestioned beliefs within Marine Corps culture might amplify the negative experiences of those who experience sexual assault or harassment while serving. I look at these beliefs through the lens of two **crosscutting themes**:

1) **The trouble with toughness.** A theme that runs through all these topics is survivors' decision to "suck it up" or speak out after an attack. Both can be considered a form of toughness, and both carry with them the potential for personal, social, and professional ramifications when they are attitudes taken after an assault. **I emphasize this theme to draw attention to this question: Is toughness (either "sucking it up" or speaking out) an effective way to deal with sexual assault or harassment?** Data and analysis related to this crosscutting theme are underlined.

2) **The trope of the troublesome woman**. This trope begins in boot camp and haunts the fleet, creating divisiveness between male and female Marines. The trope persists despite many men having positive experiences with female Marines, and it stigmatizes women and the act of speaking out. Though abstract, this trope greatly shapes women's decisions to report and how they are perceived if they do report. **I emphasize this theme to draw attention to this question: Where is the trope of the troublesome woman coming from and what are its effects in the Marine Corps?** Data and analysis related to this crosscutting theme are highlighted.*

   *Please note that some data and analysis relate to both crosscutting themes and are therefore both underlined and highlighted.

I chose to highlight these crosscutting themes because they are elements of Marine Corps culture that often go unquestioned, but which directly contribute to a culture that makes sexual assault not only common, but also underreported. For instance, a tough, "suck it up" attitude is surely an asset to any Marine. However, it also is part of a culture in which sexual assault persists because it is not reported. In our data, the troublesome female trope is rampant among males, and even espoused by some females, but its validity is rarely called into question. Our data show that fear and distrust of women is something that is actually cultivated by Marine leaders, as early as bootcamp. However, while many of the men in this research spoke generally about how women can cause trouble, not many actually had firsthand experiences

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[5] While in the military the survivor of a sexual assault is usually referred to as "victim," I have chosen to use "survivor" in keeping with modern sexual assault discourse.

with a troublesome female. Many in fact had positive firsthand experiences with women, perhaps indicating that the trope itself is more dangerous to the Corps than actual female Marines. These crosscutting themes will be revisited at the end of the report.

Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Project

The research from which this report draws its data – the Marine Corps Organizational Research (MCOCR) Project – was rooted in years of discussions with uniformed and civilian Marine Corps leaders about changes they perceived in Marine Corps culture. The catalyst for launching the project in 2017 was a well-publicized story of wrongdoing against female Marines. In March of 2017, *War Horse* and *Reveal Center for Investigative Reporting* reported that members of a closed Facebook group called Marines United had posted nude and semi-nude pictures of female Marines and had made copious lewd and degrading comments on pictures and posts about females servicemembers. In response to the revelation, then-Commandant Robert Neller at a hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee[6] said, "[T]he social media things that we've seen…were just indicative of **a problem within our culture** that we did not properly respect or value the contributions of women in our Corps and that's the problem we have to fix."

Before attempting to fix the problem, the Marine Corps decided to examine *what* the "problem within our culture" was. As part of this effort, the Translational Research Group (TRG) at the Marine Corps' Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning was asked by Manpower and Reserve Affairs to conduct an exploratory qualitative study using interviews and focus groups.[7] Three broad topics were chosen to guide the course of questioning: gender bias, leadership, and cohesion – elements of Marine Corps culture that perhaps played a role in fostering an environment where female servicemembers could be disrespected in a manner seen on Marines United. Because the research was exploratory, interviews and focus groups were designed to be semi-structured, allowing for participants to move freely within the study's three topics and bring up themes and experiences related to those topics as they saw fit. The research design also allowed participants to raise additional topics outside the three focus areas. Data collection began in August of 2017 and continued through October of that year. In total the research team conducted interviews and/or[8] focus groups with 267 unique participants at bases across the U.S. and Japan.[9]

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[6] See video of the hearing here: https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/hearings/17-03-14-information-surrounding-the-marines-united-website

[7] For more information on how the project unfolded, please see Fosher, Kerry, Rebecca Lane, Erika Tarzi, Kristin Post, Eric Gauldin, Blago Tashev, Jennifer Edwards, and Jeremy McLean. (2020). Translational Research in a Military Organization: The Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Project. *Annals of Anthropological Practice*, published online 22 February 2020: volume and issue forthcoming. https://doi.org/10.1111/napa.12130.

[8] Nine participants chose to do both an interview and a focus group.

[9] For a preliminary analysis of the key insights from this data, please see: Lane, Rebecca, Erika Tarzi, Kristin Post, Eric Gauldin. (2018) Marines' Perspectives on Various Aspects of Marine Corps Organizational Culture. Available at: https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/1079774.pdf

The researchers never asked about sexual assault and harassment directly, but the subject came up. While some participants hinted at being the target of sexual misconduct, others discussed their experiences more explicitly. Because of the sensitive nature of the subject, interviewers used discretion on whether to press on a subject. We chose the four stories in this report because they clearly depicted broader themes we saw in experiences of and perspectives on assault in the Marine Corps, both inside and outside of the dataset. They are not the only stories of sexual wrongdoing in the data. There were more first-person accounts as well as second-person accounts where Marines told the story of their peers, providing a different standpoint in one case, while echoing many of the issues in the first person accounts in others; several "secondhand stories" are provided in call-out boxes throughout this report. Using four first-person stories, this report strives to put a human face on the lived experience of sexual trauma in the Marine Corps, while also working within the bounds of human subjects protections. Due the highly sensitive topic of this report, we have taken additional measures, not used in other reports, to protect participants' identities. These measures include removing participant codes and, in some cases, removing or changing details, such as location.

Four Marines

Staff Sergeant V's Story

SSgt V recounted several incidents of sexual harassment[10], all occurring at different points throughout her career. The first is when she had first entered the fleet. As a lance corporal,

> *I was like about to start crying. I'm like, "I'm not trying to let it get to me." Like, "This shit happens all the time."*
> *– SSgt V*

she was working as a gate guard with several other Marines. One night, a sergeant came to the gate and told V that the platoon sergeant needed to see her. She dutifully got into the car with him. The sergeant drove her to a "dark, deserted, wooded area" and said, "'I want a blow job.'" V got out of the car, in the middle of nowhere, and started walking away. The sergeant drove up to her and insisted that he was just joking, telling her to get back into the car. She obliged. She never reported the incident, nor did she tell her peers about it, fearing retribution and stigma at the time. Her "suck it up" attitude[11] prevailed for several more years. The next incident she recounted was as a sergeant deployed to Afghanistan; this time she was more

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[10] The USMC's Sexual Assault Response and Prevention (SAPR) Program defines sexual assault as "a crime defined as intentional sexual contact, characterized by use of force, threats intimidation, abuse of authority or when the victim does not or can not consent. Sexual assault includes rape, nonconsensual sodomy (oral or anal sex), indecent assault (unwanted, inappropriate sexual contact or fondling), or attempts to commit these acts. Sexual assault can occur without regard to gender or spousal relationship or age of victim." SAPR defines sexual harassment as "a form of discrimination that involves unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature." For more information, see:
https://www.29palms.marines.mil/Staff/MC-Community-Services/SAPR/Definitions/

[11] The MCOCR data indicates that female Marines often cultivate a "suck it up" attitude as a way to endure in an environment that does not always prioritize safety from assault.

vocal. A staff sergeant she had been working on a project with came into her room one evening and tried to make advances, couching it in the need to complete the work project:

> [H]e came over my berthing later that night and he was, like, trying to come at me. And I'm like, "You need to go. One, you're married. Two, we're in Afghanistan. Three, I'm not interested. Get out of my room. You need to go." And he tried to use his rank and, "It's not a big deal, and you need to get this [detail of work project removed] done," and da-da-da. I was like, "Yeah, I'll just ask someone else. You should probably just go." And he left, and it was fine. But I was really pissed later! Like, "Don't use [detail of work project removed] as an excuse to try and hit on me and ask me on a date to the frickin' chow hall. You. Suck."

She later told her boyfriend, who was also a Marine, about the incident. "I was like about to start crying. I'm like, 'I'm not trying to let it get to me.' Like, 'This shit happens all the time.' And I was like, 'But it's building up and I'm just really, really irritated today. … I'm just mad.'" Her boyfriend, a corporal at the time, confronted the staff sergeant and threatened to report him. She experienced another incident involving unwanted sexual advances as a staff sergeant, telling a drunk lance corporal to stop making inappropriate passes at her when she was on shore duty while deployed more recently. The next day, she told the lance corporal's chain of command and was disappointed with their initial response: "At first, it was like a joke. They were like, 'That's so funny.'… 'PFC So-and-So, like he's a quiet guy.' Like, 'Good for him, having the fortitude to like be trying to like hit on you.'" After encouraging them to shift their perspective ("I'm like, 'If somebody was talking to your wife like that and hitting on her and she was like, 'Hey, no, I'm not interested,' and he did it again, I promise you within five or ten minutes, you'd be like taking him out back and fighting him. Would you not?' And they were, like, 'Yeah, that's true…'"), the lance corporal was made to apologize.

Corporal Q's Story

Cpl Q did not want to go into the details of her sexual assault, which happened only three months before her interview for the MCOCR Project took place. She reported the assault but was told by the Naval Criminal Investigative Service that there was not enough information to go ahead with prosecution. Her assailant had since been sent to school and would receive no formal punishment. Cpl Q, however, described reprisals against her in the form of social shunning by people who supported her assaulter. She brought up the assault as "backstory" to explain why she was triggered when she was taken aside and told by senior leaders that she should take two new female arrivals to the unit under her wing, as she had been doing with male Marines. This incited Cpl Q's anger because she interpreted the

> *I'm not sure that they're [new female arrivals to her unit] as strong as I am and they're going to be able to handle the reprisals and the repercussions and the consequences that are going to come from them acting like me.*
> *– Cpl Q*

leaders' (who knew about her experience reporting an assault) message as "even if things don't go your way, make sure that the Marines stay classy like you and don't make a big fuss about it." She revealed that she wanted to make the female Marines strong like her and not afraid of speaking out but also that she had reservations about that because "I'm not sure that they're as strong as I am and they're going to be able to handle the reprisals and the repercussions and the consequences that are going to come from them acting like me."

Sergeant J's Story

Sgt J explicitly stated that she was raped. She launched into the account after talking about how she is not happy at her current position because she does not feel seen or heard. "I'm just tired of being treated like I don't matter." She revealed nothing about the assault itself but instead focuses on how her chain of command handled the situation after she reported the rape. She perceived the command's handling of the response to be thoughtless and rote, which made her feel unsafe and uncared for. She specified by describing how, even after the rape was reported, her attacker still lived down the hall from her for a month, meaning that she had to see him on a regular basis, something that can be traumatic for sexual assault survivors. J eventually had to speak up in order to get the situation amended. She also described an incident in which her attacker was brought into her place of work before he was sent elsewhere, noting the insensitivity of this action. Again, J spoke up and the attacker was removed. After that, she ran into him at another duty station and suffered flashbacks. Thankfully at that point, she had obtained a mentor – outside of her chain of command and at a different duty station – and was able to reach out to him in the moment of panic provoked by the unexpected encounter. She keenly described the lasting psychological effects sexual assault can have and the need for continuing care and also illustrated how there are many social and pragmatic barriers to this type of care in the Marine Corps.

> *I'm just tired of being treated like I don't matter.*
> *– Sgt J*

Sergeant Z's Story

Sergeant Z gave minimal detail about his sexual assault. The assault happened before he transitioned, when he was "the only girl in my platoon." He talked matter-of-factly about his decision to report it to the SAPR via a restricted report as opposed to an unrestricted report, which would have offered less protection when it came to who would know about the assault. In a restricted report, the chain of command does not get involved, but at the sacrifice of certain amount of recourse on the part of the survivor. Sergeant Z was concerned that, should he have reported via the

> *I still went to work with [the attacker] every day.*
> *– Sgt Z*

unrestricted route, he would have caused a rift in his unit. If word got out that there had been an assault in the unit and Z had been moved to another unit, that would have almost automatically pinpointed him (then her) as the victim, being the only female in the unit. He did not want that stigma. He also expressed fear that it would ruin the life of his attacker. These repercussions were not the only thing Z feared. Because both he and his assailant had been drinking at the time of the assault, he worried that he would have no evidence to make his case. He surmised, "I just knew that it was not going to go well and just wanted to leave it alone." Z's careful deliberation eventual and decision meant that, after the attack, he "still went to work with [the attacker] every day."

Secondhand Stories: Men's Suspicion of Women and Fixation on False Accusations

In searching the data for mentions of rape and assault, a clear pattern began to emerge. While both men and women brought up sexual assault, men's mention of sexual assault (whether attached to a secondhand account or just talking about assault in general) was sometimes paired with an insistence or suspicion that women often lied about or exaggerated stories of sexual assault.[12] For instance, this master gunnery sergeant[13] stated:

> [N]owadays a lot of the sexual assaults, I think, just from like- because obviously we work at PMO[14] so we get all the facts and everything like that. And it just seems like they kind of like embellish stuff, you know. Like I mean I'm not saying they're not victims, because actually like my own daughter was sexually assaulted when she went to [name of military institution removed], and she was actually, no shit, she was sexually assaulted, and she had a lot of problems like for like almost like a whole year of her time there.

The duality that the master gunnery sergeant expresses – the fact that women really do get sexually assaulted in the military, his daughter in this example, but also that they embellish stories of sexual assault – was prevalent in the data. The suspicion of female Marines pervaded even good experiences with women. For example, after telling the story of a pleasant work experience with a female Marine, this corporal[15] went on to explain:

> The problem I have with, you know, working with females also is that, you know, there's been a lot of cases where they'll falsely report things. And there is this perception that if a woman accuses a man of something, no matter what, the man is automatically guilty. And that's one- that's my biggest- possibly, one of the biggest problem [*sic*] with having women come to a company. 'Cause they have, you know, self-righteous, uh, social justice order thing. You know, "if you even look at me the

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[12] MCOCR data reveal that this fear is instilled as early as bootcamp, where male recruits are sometimes told to stay away from women.
[13] Male master gunnery sergeant
[14] Provost Marshall Office
[15] Male corporal

wrong way, you're raping me," you know, type of thing. And I've seen stuff like that happen before. And I don't want it to happen, you know? I don't. No. … I mean, I love-I like working with women, I'll work with them. But they gotta pull their weight, you know They got to do their job as well.

Many of the men who expressed this type of opinion did not reveal whether they had accusations ever levied at them. Several, like this corporal, in fact had good experiences with women but mention hearing about or seeing cases where a man is falsely accused and his career ruined. Founded or not, this fear impacts how men interact with women in the Corps. For instance, this sergeant[16] talked about why he hesitates to correct women.

[W]hen I was a corporal, it was like- I would be worried about correcting females in their uniform 'cause like they could just be like, "He's fucking harassing me." Or like, "He like grabbed my ass," or something. They could say something like that and fuck me over just because I tore their ass because they looked like shit in their uniform. Their hair was out of regulations. Leaders are afraid of female Marines 'cause they are afraid for their careers.

The prevalence of actual false accusations aside, the perception that women falsely report sexual assault goes hand-in-hand with some women's reluctance to report because of the "difficult" reputation it might attach to them, as discussed more below.

Common Threads

The Ramifications of Reporting

As evidenced by the stories of these four Marines, choosing to speak up or not about sexual misconduct is a fraught and complex decision. Although several participants in our study pointed out that there were processes and resources for handing

> *Even though there's not supposed to be consequences when you're a victim, there's consequences. … And I'm not gonna be a victim. I'm gonna be the culprit.*
> – SSgt V

sexual misconduct and implied that victims should not feel as though they had no recourse, the stories of these four Marines reveals that the reality of reporting is not so cut and dried. SSgt V was younger when her incident occurred and had not yet found her voice. When I asked if she had reported the incident, her tone implied that speaking up would have been not only pointless, but also damaging to her reputation. This was commonly echoed in the voices of young female Marines, especially when they were taken advantage of by someone of a higher

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[16] Male sergeant

rank or by someone who was well-liked and had a good reputation. After I asked her if she had reported the incident, SSgt V said:

> [*"duh" tone*] No. Because if you report it, then you're that female that nobody can talk to because you can't take a joke. Then you get sent back to your shop or whatever. Like, the repercussions, the consequences. Even though there's not supposed to be consequences when you're a victim, there's consequences. Even if it's not official and on paper. Like, I'm not gonna lose my ability to get promoted to the next rank because of this, but my interaction with every other person who ever hears about this scenario, it's gonna be different, it's gonna be altered. And I'm not gonna be a victim. I'm gonna be the culprit. I'm the reason X, Y, and Z happened. I'm the reason Sergeant So-and-So got in trouble. I'm the reason, blah blah blah.

SSgt V's story accentuates the role that fear can play in the decision to speak up or not. She feared the social repercussions of not being able to "take a joke,"[17] including altered interactions and perceptions of her within her unit as well as being viewed as the culprit because she got the sergeant in trouble. Weighing these social ramifications, V chose to keep quiet. Likewise, Sergeant Z feared that if he (then she) had filed an unrestricted report and gone through with a hearing, "they would have assumed that that was a false report and would have sided with the other guy because he's, one, a guy."

> *"[T]hey would have assumed that that was a false report and would have sided with the other guy because he's, one, a guy."*
> *– Sgt Z*

Secondhand Stories: Reporting and the Rumor Mill

This secondhand story comes from Sgt Z. After sharing his firsthand experience with reporting an assault through the restricted route, he shared a cautionary tale about a fellow Marine who decided to report an assault through the unrestricted route and the upheaval it caused:

> I actually did have another situation where someone else was assaulted in my next unit when I went back to my original unit. Uh, and I was the outcry witness. So she first told me and I was like, "Look, there's different ways you can go about this and I want to make sure you're very clear about it all, because if anyone finds out that I was the first person you told instead of a UVA, it automatically makes this an unrestricted report and I want to make sure that you have the choice that you want. So you're gonna have to make a decision soon. I'm going to give you some time, but you need

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[17] The MCOCR report, "Marines' Perspectives on Various Aspects of Marine Corps Organizational Culture" (cited in footnote 7 above), includes a detailed section on humor in the Marine Corps (pp. 76-88). Though analysis on humor from the MCOCR data is, so far, only preliminary, initial insights indicate that certain forms of humor perhaps contribute to a culture that permits and enables sexual misconduct.

to make a decision soon as to which way you want to go with this." Um, so she eventually did make an unrestricted report and unfortunately, our UVA was also our platoon staff sergeant. And so he decided it was his job in life to then make it known to our entire platoon that someone in the platoon had been assaulted and that's not supposed to happen. UVA is only supposed to tell the commanding officer that there has been an assault in the battalion, not name names, and then that's it. And then report to the SARC. So he told the platoon that there had been something in our platoon. There's only so many females in our platoon.

As in Z's own personal story of assault, a factor here is that there were so few women in the platoon. In this scenario, unrestricted reporting becomes a game of chance, with the degree of social backlash or upheaval dependent on how the command handles the report. Though the staff sergeant in this story may have been well-intentioned in his crack down on sexual assault in the platoon, Sgt Z implies that what the staff sergeant did was not part of the normal protocol. Further, the staff sergeant clearly did not take into account how announcing that there had been an assault would potentially arouse suspicion and affect the lives of the women in the platoon.

In her frustration with being asked to mentor two junior female Marines after feeling devalued by the Marine Corps' response to her rape, Cpl Q also addressed the double-edged sword of speaking-out-while-female. She was unsure if the two young women would be able to handle the "reprisals and the repercussions and the consequences" if they took on the more assertive attitude that she presently possessed. Cpl Q reported her assault, only to be told that there was not enough evidence to be able to go ahead with the case. This in and of itself is a frustrating reality of the justice system as it applies to an act – sexual assault – in which there is commonly little to no evidence to go off of (this was also a concern of Sgt Z's). Even though her sexual assault case never got off the ground, Cpl Q still suffered acute social ramifications.

Interviewer: Were there reprisals and repercussions for you reporting?

Cpl Q: Absolutely.

Interviewer: What happened?

Cpl Q: [T]he Marines that were friends with that sergeant still won't speak to me. We've come a long way because he's left now, so now the Marines are coming around more. The junior Marines didn't understand what was going on.

Marines who experience sexual assault, therefore, take a chance in choosing to report the assault, knowing that, regardless of whether or not the attacker is found guilty, social ramifications will likely ensue.

Secondhand Stories: Reputations and Reporting

In our data, there were many instances when participants described how reputations – both of the survivor and the attacker – could shape the decision to report and the aftermath of a reported assault. There seems to always be doubt cast on women's stories because of the shared institutional reputation that women unfortunately encounter in the Marine Corps: women are sometimes seen as dangerous, manipulative, and dishonest – concertedly trying to get men in trouble[18]. Additionally, the reputation of the attacker also appears to impact the believability of the woman's story. In a focus group with two enlisted females, each described a peer who was assaulted and who was consequently harassed by friends of the assailant.

Cpl B[19]:   There was this one girl in our unit who- which we're not sure, you know, this whole thing was kind of kept private, but she had claimed rape. Uhm, I'm not going to say whether people believe or not. Personally, I do not believe it, only because the male who is involved. But males, even if she was incorrect, they would go up to her and be like, "You're a slut." Like, "Why the fuck you tellin'…" you know, stuff like that. Like, "That's my boy." I don't believe that was true, but if it was true, then why are people going up and saying that to her? Like why? I don't know.

LCpl C[20]:   A very close friend of mine was assaulted, and she was almost raped, but not quite there. Like he just did some very, very inappropriate things to her, and it stopped before it went too like traumatic. Uhm, she had- because he was an NCO, she had men come up to her who were sergeants on duty and stop her and pull her into the other room and be like, "That is my best friend." Like, "That is a sergeant. Who do you think you are as a lance corporal to report him? I've been with him for eight to nine years. I know him way better than you ever could imagine. … So why are you lying?"

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[18] See, for example, "What is it like to be both a woman and a Marine?" from the preliminary MCOCR report (pp. 46-52): Lane, Rebecca, Erika Tarzi, Kristin Post, Eric Gauldin. (2018) Marines' Perspectives on Various Aspects of Marine Corps Organizational Culture. Available at: https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/1079774.pdf
[19] Female corporal
[20] Female lance corporal

Space Matters

> **I was in the gym one day on the treadmill, and my assaulter like walks through the gym because he had evidently gotten stationed out there, and I had no idea that he'd changed units, and I about fell off the fucking treadmill ….**
> – Sgt Z

In the relatively small world of the Marine Corps, space and distance become a factor in the aftermath of an assault. If a sexual assault is reported within the same unit, one party is typically moved to another unit in order to separate the survivor from the attacker. This mitigative effort is a double-edged sword. While having to see an attacker on a regular basis can be psychologically detrimental to an assault survivor, getting moved can also be detrimental. Many survivors described not wanting to report a sexual wrongdoing because they feared they would be moved to a different unit or location and face stigma and social repercussions, on top of losing their friends and network of support in their old unit and facing career impacts. SSgt V hinted at this when she described what she envisioned the hypothetical response would have been if she had reported her incident:

> If [location removed] was like, "Okay, that's a really bad situation. Send her back to her shop." Now I'm back in my shop, and my shop's like, "Why couldn't she hang at [location removed]?" Like, "What happened? What did you do? Why you got sent away?" You know what I mean?

Likewise, Sgt Z described how he [then she] viewed reporting as potentially damaging to her reputation, as she would be removed from her unit and, therefore, "marked" – not necessarily as someone who had been assaulted, but as someone who had caused trouble by getting a male peer in trouble. As mentioned, the world of the Corps is small, and it's a place where "perception is reality," a common adage in the Corps and one that came up several times in our data. Reporting becomes a catch-22 decision between being labeled as troublesome and getting the help/justice that many seek after a sexual assault.

For a sexual assault survivor, running into their assailant can be a traumatic experience. However, whether through mishandling or because the incident was reported via the restricted route, or simply the relative smallness of the Marine Corps, some Marines, including Sgt J and Sgt Z, have to endure seeing their assailants after the assault. Sgt J discussed how her command fumbled the handling of her assault when she continued to live in close quarters with her attacker, and how she was forced to be vocal about it.

> But if they would have read the report, they would have realized that he lived down the hall. And he was there for almost a month after he signed the MPO[21]. So it's just like nobody was taking care of me. … I would go talk to my VA, the victim advocate, and tell

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[21] Military protective order

her, "Look! He still lives down the hall!" And so she would call him [Sgt J's Sexual Assault Response Coordinator, an officer in her unit], "Oh, okay. We'll get it taken care of. I'll talk to the first sergeant right away!" Nothing happened. He stayed there for almost a month. And then it was just- we continued to have incidents like that.

She went on to describe one of these incidents:

I was sitting there working, and they literally brought him in. And so I went to the command deck and the sergeant major. I had worked closely with him on a lot of projects and stuff, so it's just like, "He's out there! Like, what the heck?!" And so they had me leave the building. And then, when he was finally done, which at that point, I was already in a meltdown. So by time they had him taken care of, or whatever, and he left, and I came back, and they were like, "We're sorry. We had a new first sergeant. Like, it isn't excuse it, but you can have the rest of the day off." And it's just like, "Okay. When do I start to matter?"

After a permanent change of assignment (PCA), Sgt J reported that things got better. However, years later, she ran into her attacker at another duty station – an incidental run-in but one that none the less is common in the small world of the Marine Corps:

And then, eventually I PCA'd, and stuff got better. I was dealing with it, and then I PCS'd[22] here. Well, when I came here, I actually got sent down to [location removed], for the intermediate[descriptor removed] course, which was exciting. I love my job, whatever. But I actually met *him* down in [location removed]. So when I got there, I started having nightmares and flashbacks, and it was really terrible.

Although we do not have the full details of her case, the details that Sgt J did give indicate that her case was dealt with via the unrestricted route and that action was taken against her attacker. Regardless, Sgt J had to see her attacker, first directly after her assault as her case was being handled, and then later on at a different duty station. Sgt Z experienced a similar situation in which she ran into her attacker at a different duty station:

I was in the gym one day on the treadmill, and my assaulter like walks through the gym because he had evidently gotten stationed out there, and I had no idea that he'd changed units. And I about fell off the fucking treadmill, just totally not expecting to see him out there. Like I'm in the middle of the [location removed]. Like, who expects it? Small world. But yeah, the Marine Corps is very, very small.

These experiences speak to the need to take space and place into account in sexual assault responses – not just in the mitigative action of separating the survivor and attacker by moving one party to a different location, but also in recognition of the reality that a survivor might see her or his attacker again one day. Although off-duty run-ins might be difficult to completely

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[22] Permanent change of station

prevent, ensuring that survivors receive adequate follow-up care and have a network of support might offset the potential trauma of these run-ins.

Secondhand Stories: The Stigma that Follows You

This exchange from a focus group illustrates how stigma can be a specter that survivors must grapple with when deciding to report or not. Cpl E provided her views on what happens when an investigation is dropped because there is not enough evidence and a survivor must continue to work in her unit – potentially with her attacker and now with a stigma attached to her. She then brought up the fact that there was a woman who had recently been assigned to her unit who already had a stigma that she couldn't escape, despite having being moved.

Sgt A[23]:   Yes. I personally knew of someone that reported a sexual assault, and everyone in the barracks, all the guys, would say, "Oh, stay away from her. She's gonna get you in trouble."

Cpl E[24]:   And sometimes there is things that they can do to protect the victim. Like she could get orders elsewhere or something like that. But still, if she shared an MOS with that guy, the MOS is all gonna know about it. People talk. But that's only if the case got settled a certain way. If they didn't have enough evidence to accuse the guy, then they'd be like, "Oh, well, it didn't happen," and then she would still be stuck there.

[Short exchange between Cpl E and moderator omitted]

Moderator: But even that, that kind of skylines the female, right? Like you don't get moved out of your unit, I assume, for an average problem, right?

Cpl E: And then when she comes – 'cause we just had a female come from a different unit – and everybody already knows. They're like, "Oh, she's here because she got sexually assaulted at her last unit." Just like that. Because we all share the same MOS in the building I work with, so everybody knows.

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[23] Female sergeant
[24] Female corporal

Leadership Failures Impede Follow-up Care and Support

> **I was going to NCIS and to medical appointments. The other people, my peers, started to take notice and were just like, "Oh, she's always gone." Like, "She's gone all the time," you know, whatever. Making comments, making it awful.**
> *– Sgt J*

Sexual assault can have resounding personal effects on survivors' lives, driving many of them to seek follow-up care. However, in the Marine Corps, as with in other organizations, survivors may encounter multiple barriers to receiving this follow-up care. Sometimes, the survivor chooses, for various reasons, to avoid follow-up care, especially if the assault was not reported or s/he has not told anyone. The culture of shame surrounding sexual assault survivors is intermingled with the pragmatic and cultural barriers to follow-up care in the Marine Corps. For example, if you leave work for an hour to go to a counseling appointment, are you letting your unit down? Will others notice and give you a hard time? Cpl Q experienced such pressure in her unit, noting that her leadership was "making calls" about who is allowed to attend medical appointments without knowing details about her appointments:

> So I came back here [after her assault], and then I started seeing somebody here at [location removed]. I think the biggest thing is my section has issues with me leaving for medical appointments. Or when stuff would get really bad, "Oh, okay. Well, I have to have two appointments this week." And so, I think it was two weeks ago. They made a big deal about us leaving for medical appointments. "Well, we need to know, and if there's not two people at the front desk, you may have to cancel a medical appointment." It's just like, "That's not happening." And a lot of them don't know anything about it. So they're just like sitting there making these calls, and they don't know [*voice breaking, starts to cry*] what's going on. So. I'm sorry. [*embarrassed laugh*]

Cpl Q's leadership appeared to be oblivious as to the nature and necessity of her medical appointments, and what seems to be left unsaid is whether it is effective, worthwhile, or appropriate to reveal this to her leadership – or if it would be well-received. Sgt J experienced harassment within her unit when she tried to seek follow-up care after her incident. The harassment was allowed by her gunny:

> I was going to NCIS and to medical appointments. The other people, my peers, started to take notice and were just like, "Oh, she's always gone." Like, "She's gone all the time." You know, whatever. Making comments, making it awful. And the gunny at that time was kind of incompetent. And so he allowed it. And he didn't say anything, and they'd be making these jokes, and- eventually, he got fired. It wasn't specifically for that stuff, but he got fired.

After her gunny was fired and a master sergeant was brought in, Sgt J reported that things got better for her because the master sergeant was "an actual leader":

And so then they brought in the master sergeant who significantly changed everything, and the quality of life was significantly better. He was an actual leader. And I learned so much. And so, that's another reason why the master guns [her mentor] here- so, they have very similar personalities, too. So I got along well with him. And then I came here, and he's very similar to that master sergeant that I had that provided the really good leadership.

When asked how the master sergeant's leadership differed from that of the gunny, she replied:

Sgt J: Well, they weren't allowed to sit there and obviously make fun of me for being gone for appointments and stuff and um-

Interviewer: He just- what did he do?

Sgt J: Shut it down.

Interviewer: "Shut it, Marine."

Sgt J: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Sgt J: [*short laugh*] Complete environment change. He realized that, "Hey, she's going and doing all this stuff, and then she's coming back, and she's still working on top of that." I would come in late or come in early, leave late, like whatever I had to do. And so it was just like it was actual good leadership. And I wasn't treated differently because I was going through that or because I was a woman. His wife was actually a first sergeant at one of the other companies, so it's just like I think that also he was able to give me that guidance from that perspective as well.

Cpl Q's and Sgt J's experiences indicate a need for leadership to be more sensitive to the follow-up care needs of their Marines, in conjunction with being more mindful of Marine Corps processes and procedures surrounding sexual assault. Sgt J's master sergeant chose to view J's attending medical appointments not as an impediment to the unit but as a testament to J's work ethic and fortitude. Ultimately, a Marine taking care of him or herself will contribute to the readiness of the Corps, even if it does present some challenges in the daily work environment. It must also be noted that, in general, our data show that women in the Marine Corps are lonely and isolated. Even if they have access to the appropriate follow-up care after an assault, the lack of a supportive and caring network of peers might make this follow-up care

seem rote and hollow.[25] Sgt J's positive experience with two supportive master sergeants seems to be just as important as receiving follow-up care.

Lack of Trust and Feelings of Powerlessness

The fact that some young Marines choose not to speak out about their sexual harassment or assault points towards a lack of trust in the organization. For example, as a junior Marine SSgt V assumed that she would not be taken seriously and so chose not to report incidents. The stories of Sgt J and Cpl Q illustrate

> **The Marine Corps doesn't value me. The Marine Corps values the sergeant that sexually assaulted me.**
> *– Cpl Q*

that even using the proper reporting routes does not guarantee a good outcome, nor does it always provide relief or a sense of justice. Further, it eats away at faith in the organization and its leadership. As discussed above, Sgt J reported her rape but was strongly disappointed with how her command handled it, lamenting, "When do I start to matter? Similarly, one participant perceived the handling and dismissal of her case to send a clear message about what the Marine Corps values and revealed it as a motivator to separate from the Corps:

> Yeah, I don't want to do it anymore. I love the Marine Corps. Thank you for introducing me to my husband and giving me the experience and allowing me to live in [location removed] but I'm not doing this anymore, neither is my husband. I'm taking my ball and my bat and I'm going home [*both laugh*]. The Marine Corps doesn't value me. The Marine Corps values the sergeant that sexually assaulted me, that will bring more recruits and poolees into the Marine Corps. Why? Because he has a great PFT and a great CFT, and he looks like that white kid from Kansas.

SSgt V and Cpl Q reported cultivating a tough attitude after the incidents they experienced. After the incident where her husband confronted a staff sergeant who came into her room at night, the staff sergeant apologized to SSgt V. SSgt V, however, made this cogent observation about how her voice alone did not matter in the situation:

> So, like the staff sergeant later came and apologized like, "I'm sorry if I made you feel uncomfortable." I was like, "I told you were making me feel uncomfortable." Like, "Why did it take someone else to come in? Why did it take a corporal to come in and tell you that you were completely inappropriate? … Because you realized that I'm going to speak up and say that something bad happened? You're an idiot. Don't talk to me like that again. And don't treat other people like that either. Don't take the next lance corporal that you see walking by and do the same shit with her. It's not okay."

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[25] Female mentorship is severely lacking in the Marine Corps. Please see this MCOCR report for further details: Lane, Rebecca and Kristin Post. (2020) "Insights from the Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Project: Rethinking Mentorship."

From SSgt V's perspective, the offending staff sergeant only apologized when he realized there might be consequences. Throughout all of SSgt V's harassment incidents, a predominant theme was that male Marines did not take a woman seriously when she asked the offender to stop or sought help. In an ideal world her voice would be enough and SSgt V would not have had to invoke the "what if that was your wife or daughter?" argument or rely on her boyfriend to be taken seriously. This ideal is not always met in the Marine Corps. A woman standing up for herself is not always taken seriously, and at times she is chastised or ridiculed for doing so. Additionally, recall that Cpl Q was not sure if every woman would be able to deal with the consequences of cultivating such an attitude. It should go without saying here that women should not have to work in an environment that is suspicious and hostile towards women. The tough attitudes of these Marines are, therefore, not a solution, but a Band-Aid and coping mechanism. This Band-Aid will not hold for long. The onus should not be only on women to change, but also on the men.

Conclusion and a Possible Point of Intervention

This report does not examine possible factors as to why sexual assault and harassment happen in the Marine Corps and instead looks at commonalities among the aftermath of assault and harassment, both reported and unreported. However, I would like to emphasize here how the act is indelibly intertwined with the aftermath. That is, a culture's response to sexual assault can feed into the prevalence of sexual assault within that culture. In the case of the Marine Corps, the individuals whose stories I have shared in this report do not feel as though 1) reporting a sexual assault is a safe or effective thing to do, and/or 2) that, if reported, the outcome of

> *Why would you tell the recruits to stay away from women? Why? That gets in their minds that women are bad, they're "red," they're "stay away," they're "don't go near."*
> *– a first sergeant*

will necessarily involve justice, security, and support. In fact, in the experiences of SSgt V, Cpl Q, Sgt J, and Sgt Z, a sexual assault or harassment incident, reported or not, ended up increasing feelings of insecurity and a lack of belonging. Although this is of course also a reality in environments outside of the military, the stakes for speaking out appear to be uniquely high in the Marine Corps, where Marines sometimes live and work in close quarters with the person who assaulted them. Sexual assault in any environment is a traumatic experience. However, the specific environment and the people who inhabit it can contribute to an alleviation or amplification of this trauma. According to the Marines who shared their experiences of sexual harassment or assault here, the Marine Corps' response exacerbated negative feelings and contributed to a lack of belonging.

The data strongly suggest that suspicion is a main ingredient in creating an environment where reporting an assault is a dangerous double-edged sword. The suspicion that individuals face

when they report – or even when they do not report – feeds back into an environment in which they are deterred from reporting for fear of the fallout and stigmatization they may experience. For women particularly, a point of intervention would, therefore, be to challenge the suspicion of women by confronting the formal and informal messaging that portrays women as troublesome, manipulative, dangerous, and unstable. This trope is abundant in our data, but, interestingly, it mostly appears as a specter – a vague but doggedly-held notion or fuzzy second- and thirdhand experiences. More prevalent were men who reported working with amazing women. So why does the specter of the dangerous female persist? And what can be done to get rid of it? The fact that many men also feel suspicion towards women and yet also talk about having good experiences with women perhaps indicates that the secondhand, one-off stories about dangerous women are stories that serve as pressure releases/scapegoats for men as opposed to realities that pose actual threats.

Many Marines noted that this messaging starts in bootcamp. For instance, a female first sergeant brought up a discussion she had with her Marine husband when they were both drill instructors. They were talking about how male drill instructors warned their recruits to stay away from female Marines, and she asked, "Why would you tell the recruits to stay away from women? Why? That gets in their minds that women are bad, they're 'red,' they're 'stay away,' they're 'don't go near.'" She continued by offering her perspective on the impact this message might have on recruits, "They don't even know why. They just know somebody who they admire, their drill instructor, somebody who they aspire to be like, those individuals are telling them 'stay away, don't go near, bad-bad-bad.'"[26] With women as distant and dangerous objects, it is no wonder that men can treat them with disrespect and cast doubts on reports of sexual misconduct. Certainly, experiences like those experienced by the four Marines highlighted in this report are not conducive to the retention of women or other sexual minorities in the Corps, nor are they in line with the ethos of "taking care of your own" that the Corps espouses. Making the Marine Corps environment more welcoming of women and facilitating of their belonging – versus casting them as outsiders and as dangerous and manipulative – would perhaps contribute to male Marines seeing them as peers and equals and as human being deserving of respect.

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[26] Female first sergeant