

Quick-Look Report: USMC.2017.0005



Insights from the Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Project: Pregnancy Loss

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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:

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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 Foshier.

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](https://www.dtic.mil/docs/default-source/abstracts/AD1079774.pdf). Links to other project reports from Phase 2 are provided on the next page.

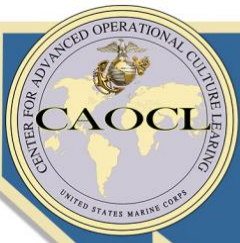
Initial release of this report was scheduled for May 2018. Release was delayed due to leadership questions about the applicability of MCU's academic freedom policy. These questions were resolved in September 2019. The release resulted in **media and Congressional attention. See additional information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

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Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Phase 2

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

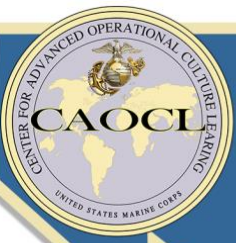
TRG team members presented on aspects of the MCOCR project at numerous academic conferences and in Marine Corps meetings. One scholarly article was published and another is in development as of this date:

- 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.



Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Frequently Asked Questions

What was MCOOCR?

The MCOOCR 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 MCOOCR reports be used?

Because of the non-representative sample, data and analysis from MCOOCR 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 MCOOCR 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?

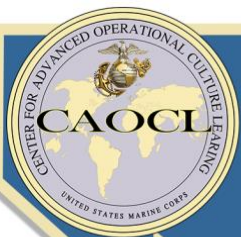
Between August and October 2017, the research team gathered data at the following locations: Pentagon, Marine Corps Base (MCB) Quantico, VA, MCB Camp Lejeune, NC, Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Cherry Point, NC, MCB Camp Pendleton, CA, Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center 29 Palms, CA, MCAS Yuma, AZ,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



Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Media and Congressional Attention and Marines United Background

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.

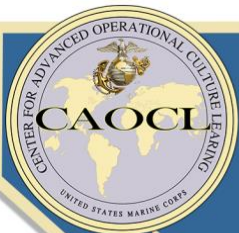
Congressional Hearing

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.



Translational Research Group Background – Page 1 of 3

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.

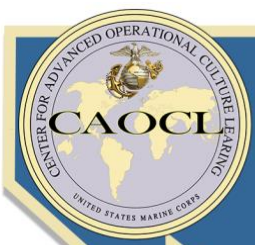
The idea for the group grew out of discussions between the anthropologist who became its director and Marine Corps leaders, one of whom was the Director of CAOCL. They had seen many problems in the Marine Corps' ability to leverage research results and scientific expertise. Many problems seemed to arise 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



Translational Research Group Background – Page 2 of 3

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.

Continued on next page.

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Translational Research Group Background – Page 3 of 3

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* Foshier 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 Foshier 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 Foshier. 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.

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Executive Summary

This report offers a glimpse of what it is like to experience pregnancy loss as an active duty Marine. Dismissed, uncomfortable, awkward, this topic and those experiencing it often face silence, speaking broadly of western culture. In the Marine Corps specifically, this culture of silence is exacerbated by policy and leadership issues as well as cultural ideas of how and what a Marine should be. Using stories of pregnancy loss (pp. 2-4) that arose during data collection for the Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research (MCOCR) Project, this quick look report addresses the following points:

- 1) **Marine Corps policy regarding pregnancy loss is underdeveloped**, dealing largely with leave time post-loss but not, for example, detailing how physical activity and fitness tests are to be handled after the bodily changes experienced by many women who lose a pregnancy. Additionally, existing policy is ambiguous, leaving it up to the Marine's commander to determine convalescent needs. Addressing the gaps and adding clarity, while not a panacea, may address vulnerabilities caused by ignorance and bad leadership. (pp. 4-5)
- 2) **The senior leaders in these women's accounts responded with a lack of empathy** to Marines who had very recently gone through the physically and mentally traumatic event of losing a pregnancy. Such callousness could be representative of a larger cultural orientation emphasizing efficiency, standardization, and numbers. This is contested by another cultural orientation, captured in statements such as "taking care of our own" and "Mission first, Marine always." (pp. 5-7) While both are present, at times, the former is privileged and can inform leadership behavior and policy enactment.
- 3) The lack of shared experience and the taboo nature of the topic present challenges to engendering an empathetic response from others. Normalizing the female reproductive process and reframing how it is discussed may help **shift perspectives** about the female experience and body and how those nest within the Marine identity. (pp.7-8)
- 4) The women in these stories confront the callousness and ignorance with the practiced response of pushing on, for **fear of appearing weak or not fitting in**. At times, this leads to detrimental outcomes for self and others. (pp. 8-9)
- 5) These women's experiences and their seniors' responses signal a need to interrogate **the boundaries of the collective Marine identity**. Marine Corps identity is constructed around the male experience and body. Accommodating experiences outside that limited construct challenges notions of what it means to be a true Marine. These stories of pregnancy loss can help identify areas where **Marine Corps identity is restrictive** and not inclusive of all the possible ways to be a Marine. (p. 10)

Through the lens of an oft-overlooked, socially charged topic, we offer Marine voices to highlight gaps in policy and leadership and examine Marine identity and values to help inform future deliberations on the construction and development of the force.

Introduction

Losing a pregnancy is a common occurrence, yet one typically experienced silently. According to the Mayo Clinic, about 10-20% of all pregnancies, likely even more, end in miscarriage,¹ and other

¹ "Miscarriage," Mayo Clinic, accessed September 19, 2019, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/pregnancy-loss-miscarriage/symptoms-causes/syc-20354298>.

pregnancies result in stillbirth². Often people do not distinguish between the two and refer to any pregnancy loss as a miscarriage, no matter the gestational age at the time of occurrence. In the United States and the other western countries³, when the topic arises, it creates a discomfort for many, leaving those experiencing or who have experienced a miscarriage or stillbirth often facing a cultural silence⁴ and grappling with its meaning alone. “The tragedy of miscarriage has traditionally been private, an event grieved largely by the mother, on her own.”⁵ Of note, many situate the emotional response solely in the woman, as the above quotation suggests, ignoring the potential emotional impact on male partners.⁶ Working parents face additional ambiguity with work place policies and practices that privilege pregnancy and parenthood and may not accommodate the unique conditions that pregnancy loss present. This quick look report will examine Marines’ accounts of pregnancy loss while serving as active duty Marines to highlight some issues that warrant consideration by Marine Corps leadership.

In 2017, the Translational Research Group at the Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning undertook an in-depth research project to explore Marine perceptions of Marine Corps organizational culture, specifically looking at leadership, cohesion, and gender bias.⁷ We spoke with 267 Marines in 150 interviews and 32 focus groups across the Marine Corps enterprise. As the exploratory nature of the research warranted a semi-structured interview and focus group format, we allowed Marines to approach the broadly presented topics in any way they chose and also to present other topics of importance to them. Pregnancy and parenthood arose in the data quite frequently. Embedded within the conversation surrounding pregnancy, four participants offered personal accounts of pregnancy loss within the Marine Corps context and the challenges they faced because of policy gaps and leadership failings. While depicting experiences of only a subset of Marine parents, these women detail an oft-ignored common life event of Marines that creates bodily changes and impacts Marines in their professional and personal lives. These stories warrant attention as they provide a window into a taboo space and present a lens through which to examine these women’s layered experience as Marines with policy, leaders, and culturally constructed ideas of Marine identity.

Marine Voices

One story comes from a seven-person, all-female officer focus group.⁸ The following exchange occurred in response to a question about the issue of motherhood in the Marine Corps and the challenges women face as mothers.

² A miscarriage is spontaneous loss prior to the pregnancy’s 20th week; loss at or beyond 20 weeks is considered a still birth.

³ Other cultural groups experience pregnancy loss differently. See Susie Kilshaw, “How Culture Shapes Perceptions of Miscarriage,” *SAPIENS* (July 27, 2017). <https://www.sapiens.org/body/miscarriage-united-kingdom-qatar/>.

⁴ Susie Kilshaw, “How Culture Shapes Perceptions of Miscarriage.”

⁵ Elizabeth Leis-Newman, “Miscarriage and loss,” *Monitor on Psychology* 43, no. 6 (June 2012). <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2012/06/miscarriage>.

⁶ See Bernadette Susan McCreight, 2004, “A Grief Ignored: Narratives of Pregnancy Loss from a Male Perspective.” *Sociology of Health & Illness* 26, no. 3 (2004): 326-350. Within the MCOCR data, for example, a male Marine in the MCOCR data (Participant #218) expressed discomfort at baby-killing jokes within his unit because they had lost a baby, and he could not share in the dark humor. It is not clear whether this was before or after birth, so this case was not included in the discussion but is offered here to affirm the shared experience.

⁷ This research was conducted under Human Subjects Protection Protocol USMC.2017.0005 and MCU’s academic freedom policy. The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the individual speakers and researchers and do not necessarily represent the views of the United States Marine Corps or Davis Defense Group.

⁸ Officer Focus Group, MCB Camp Butler, 6 September 2017.

*LtCol E*⁹: I think the first challenge is the Marine Corps policy – before you even get to motherhood – on miscarriage. Let's put the hard stuff out there. ... I sat on a promotion board, literally, I was 20 weeks pregnant, walked in, literally miscarried in the lobby of the hotel that night. Two hours later, after I get out of the ER, I go into the board. The board president looks at me and says, "Well, if you can't handle it, I guess we'll find somebody else or we'll see if we can do without you." Okay. As a Marine, what your answer was really is, "Go F yourself," but without saying, "No, I'm fine. I got this." Really? Is that how we treat our Marines? It's that we have no policy on defining miscarriages. You can have a miscarriage nine months into it. You can even miscarry two days into it, it's still traumatic on you, it's still traumatic on your partner, it's traumatic on your body. Marine Corps doesn't have a policy in writing, so there are many commanders that don't know what to do with it. Did you gain weight during that? What if you are eight months into it and you miscarry? What's the policy on when you have to take a PFT? What's the policy on when you have to make weight? Across the board, there's so- it's like one of those areas they just don't want to touch.

*Maj H*¹⁰: I think the policy says that it's up to the commander.

LtCol E: Yeah. That's what it says. Which makes it even worse, right?

Another story comes from an interview with a master gunnery sergeant¹¹. She was a staff sergeant at the time in a predeployment work-up. She starts her story with, "So I miscarried as a staff sergeant right before I was supposed to deploy to Iraq I didn't even know I was pregnant, and I miscarried because of all of the shots they gave us." She expressed some confusion as to the order of events and settled on her receiving the required inoculations, becoming ill, and ending up at the clinic being told she had been pregnant, but lost the baby.

MGySgt: Teaching – 'cause I was an MCMAP instructor – teaching a grey belt course. And all the time, I can feel the baby.

Interviewer: Oh, no.

MGySgt: I can feel it coming out of me.

Interviewer: Oh, no.

MGySgt: And I'm like, I'm testing out and I can't do anything 'cause I'm like, "ahhh." And I get a master sergeant going, "Come on. What's wrong with you, staff sergeant? Let's go. Let's go." And I'm like, "I just need a minute." [*ironic chuckle*] You know? So I went into the bathroom, got cleaned up. There is stuff all over the place. I told another girl. I was like, "Look, I gotta to go home, okay? I've gotta clean up." And then the lady at the naval hospital, she's like, "Oh, yeah, you're losing the baby." Just straight, you know. So when we talk about standards, none of that's measured. And psychologically, women put up

⁹ Participant #901.

¹⁰ Participant #205.

¹¹ Participant #263, Master Gunnery Sergeant, Interview, 17 October 2017.

with more atrocities because we're groomed to understand that we are- if we don't put on a front, then we're perceived to be weak. So if at that time I said, "Look, I'm miscarrying. I got to go." You know what? Two weeks after I miscarried, everything was fine. I was deployed. I'm in Iraq, still going through the whole process. You know what I mean? And, uh, medical didn't know what to do with me. Nobody knew what to do with me. So I suffered on my own, just sort of trying to clean up and move forward.

Interviewer: That's traumatic to go through a miscarriage, but you didn't feel like you could say like, "Oh, I went through this, and I can't do this because of it."

MGySgt: You can't. Yeah, it's an excuse. "Hey, look. I miscarried so." "Oh, so you can't do a CFT?" "Uuuh, yeah, so I'll get to that next week." And so that's our mindset. "Oh, I can't say that." That's my mindset. "Uh, okay, I have to get through this." But on the psychological side of that, somebody shoulda' been like, "Whoa. [chuckles] This is big. You know, this is big. Give her a time out." But it never went that way. It was always just you're on or you're off.

Part of the taboo nature of miscarriage is that it often involves a visceral and bloody act happening uncontrollably in place that is far from convenient. Depending on the stage the pregnancy was in, miscarriage entails physical discomfort at the very least and, at the other end of the spectrum, excruciating pain on par with that of childbirth. Regardless of at what stage of pregnancy the loss occurs, the mental anguish can be immense. In these two cases, these women found themselves at work, needing accommodation at a moment of physical and emotional distress. The women managed the hardened leadership they faced with a practiced response of "sucking it up," feeling the need to continually prove themselves and their strength and hold themselves to the internalized male standards of value and ability pervasive in the Marine Corps. This echoes many female participants' concerns with appearing weak, discussed in more depth below. For example, this corporal is aware of the perception that asking for help can create:

Like if [I] need help if- like if something is too heavy, I would- I'd just do it. I'd just do it, and I'd pray that box don't fall on me or something like that. Because I don't want to ask, and I don't want to make it seem like they're like, "Well, you guys are weak." Like, you know? I don't want us to look like that because that's not true.¹²

Policy Gaps

The focus group example above notes the lack of clarity or presence of policy to guide Marines through the leadership and individual performance expectations when a pregnancy loss occurs. A scan of Marine Corps orders and naval policies reveals scant attention is paid to this common yet veiled life experience. The documents focus on qualifying leave and command notification procedures, when they mention it. The 2004 Marine Corps Order on Pregnancy and Parenthood (MCO 5000.12E) does not mention miscarriage, pregnancy loss, fetal demise, stillbirths, etc. It is in MARADMIN 331/18 Changes to Parental Leave Policy (2018) where pregnancy loss appears. It reads, "4.e. In cases of a miscarriage or stillborn baby, convalescent leave other than MCL¹³ may be granted. The Marine's commander and HCP¹⁴ will

¹² Participant #233, Corporal, Sergeant and Below Focus Group, MCAS Yuma, 26 September 2017.

¹³ Maternity convalescent leave.

¹⁴ Health care provider.

coordinate to determine the best course of action.” In the October 2018 update (MARADMIN 570/18), the guidance changed a little to read, “In cases of miscarriage or stillbirth, convalescent leave other than Maternity Convalescent Leave will be granted according to the recommendation of the health care provider and in coordination with the command.” This shifts more responsibility onto the health care provider, a potential vulnerability if the health care providers are not well-versed in Marine Corps policy and in navigating command environments.¹⁵ The Navy’s OPNAV Instruction 6000.1D, Navy Guidelines Concerning Pregnancy and Parenthood, recognizes pregnancy loss. “(2) Pregnancy Loss. The Service member’s CO or OIC must be notified as soon as possible following miscarriage, stillborn birth (loss of a fetus after 20 weeks gestational age), or neonatal demise (infant death 0 to 28 days following birth). Due to the sensitive nature of these events, the utmost discretion must be exercised to ensure Service member’s privacy.” The Navy Personnel Manual (NAVPERS 15560D) informs that maternity leave cannot be used for miscarriage or stillbirths and that they “fall under regular convalescent leave as prescribed by the primary care physician or medical provider.” The Family Servicemembers’ Group Life Insurance recognizes stillborn children and offers a death benefit in that event.

The existing policy lacks substantive direction on how to accommodate the inherent physical changes that can occur during a pregnancy when that pregnancy does not go full term. The lieutenant colonel spoke to this policy gap when she questioned, “Did you gain weight during that? What if you are eight months into it and you miscarry? What’s the policy on when you have to take a PFT? What’s the policy on when you have to make weight?” Major H pointed out it is up to the command to decide. MARADMIN 331/18 and its update do afford the commander and the health care provider coordinated opportunity to determine convalescent leave but do not speak to how to bring that Marine back into individual readiness. The lieutenant colonel saw commander discretion as exacerbating the problem, which is understandable given her experience. Leadership ignorance of or discomfort with managing such situations without clear policy guidelines leaves it up to the women to navigate the social discomfort and procedural confusion while experiencing the emotional and physical impacts of pregnancy loss.

Senior Response

Both the lieutenant colonel and the master gunnery sergeant brought their situation to their immediate seniors and were met with callousness. These callous responses indicate a weakness with the existing policy: allowing the discretion of a Marine’s leadership to be the arbiter of miscarriage response leaves much room for mishandling the situation. It would be easy to dismiss these responses as “one-offs,” as there are only two stories. However, another Marine – Major J¹⁶ in the abovementioned focus group – noted, when she miscarried¹⁷, no one reached out to her. “I had a miscarriage in my unit. I was a MECEP at the time and so I was in school, and it was kind of a different dynamic. But no one called. No one did anything. I just went back to class.” This behavior extended to her subsequent pregnancy. She explained, I got pregnant again, and I had the baby, and no one called. The first phone call I had was my sixth week on the day. It was a combat arms guy, so he called me and said at six weeks I should

¹⁵ Personal conversation with a major on 10 October 2019, in which she explained that military health care providers were not well-informed or well-connected to the Marine Corps command structure, leaving the Marine to self-advocate and seek other options when needing further or different accommodation.

¹⁶ Participant #202.

¹⁷ It is important to note that in a group of seven women, two reported miscarriages, reinforcing the pervasiveness of this experience. This, in conjunction with the fact that so few discussed it throughout the data, also supports the notion of a cultural silence surrounding the issue.

come in and run an inventory PFT. [*disapproving exhales from participants*] And then I was sergeant then, and I'm in this very much naive world. So I'm like, "I don't really think I can do that." And he's like, "We just want to see where you are." And I'm like, "Well, my husband was gone, and so I'm by myself," and I am like, "Well, okay, but I'll have the baby." And he's like, "Well, just bring him in." So I brought in my kid in his carrier and left him in his office and went and ran a PFT and then had to call to say I needed a hospital because I- that didn't go well. And no one called. I just mentioned, "Hey, I am not going to be in class on Monday because I had to go to the hospital." And so I will say there's something to like really focusing on whatever that is. I don't know what it is. But empathy is lacking, and there is nobody that understands there are challenges that go with all that. So I'll say that motherhood, just from the very beginning, has been a disaster, a nightmare.

The senior Marines' actions conflict with such mantras as "taking care of our own" and "mission first, Marines always." It could be that these women just had bad leaders. As we detailed in the March 2018 MCOCR Report, bad leaders do find their way into senior ranks.¹⁸ But it also could be revelatory of a deeper social process. Sociologist George Ritzer coined a phrase, the McDonaldization of society.¹⁹ McDonaldization is a popularization of the broader literature on audit culture²⁰. The concept, built on the four core principles of efficiency, calculability, predictability/standardization, and control,²¹ represents the rationalization of social process and institutions and how these are transformed through the application of accountancy measures. According to McDonaldization.com, "One of the fundamental aspects of McDonaldization is that almost any task can (and should) be rationalized,"²² measured, and counted. The Marine Corps, through policy, process, and practice, displays characteristic adherence to this concept. Karl Marlantes, in his work, *What It Is Like to Go to War*, raises concern about the military's reliance on numbers and accountancy²³ and states "total rationality is an unbalanced and unhealthy state. Logic, devoid of empathy."²⁴ The rationalized, mechanized response of these leaders offers credence to Marlantes' concern. Enacted in human relationship and leadership, this mechanized approach fails when confronted with the human lived experience and injures the people involved. It provides opportunities for callousness and, potentially, cruelty to surface, and not just with this sub-population. It can manifest in, for example, subordinate relations.²⁵ Within the promotion process, the

¹⁸ Rebecca Lane et al., *Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Project Report to Personnel Studies and Oversight Office: Marines' Perspectives on Various Aspects of Marine Corps Organizational Culture* (Quantico, VA: Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning, March 2018). See Part II, the section on "Why are there bad leaders?", starting on page 20.

¹⁹ See George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society* (London: Pine Forge Press, 1993). This book is now in its 9th edition, released in 2018.

²⁰ For more on audit culture, see, for example, Cris Shore and Susan Wright, "Audit Culture Revisited," *Current Anthropology* 56, no. 3 (2015): 421-444. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/681534>.

²¹ Ashley Crossman, "McDonaldization: Definition and Overview of the Concept," ThoughtCo.com, 12 January 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/mcdonaldization-of-society-3026751>.

²² "What Is McDonaldization?" <https://www.mcdonaldization.com/whatisit.shtml>, accessed 2 October 2019.

²³ Karl Marlantes, *What It Is Like to Go to War* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2011), 242.

²⁴ Marlantes, 99.

²⁵ See, for example, Participant #221, Corporal, Interview, MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, 18 September 2017: Somewhere along the line the training and the leadership has kinda faded in favor of just messing with dudes because it's fun. ... And I've seen that from, you know, from my peers as NCOs. You know, we can teach them this, or we can just take them on a six-mile flak run and just mess with them. ... Or, you know, rather than teach them a class right now, let's just make them do tourniquet drills all day. And granted, tourniquet drills are very important. ... They're very uncomfortable because you're actually putting a tourniquet on. And, uh, and it sucks to be doing tourniquet drills out in the sun in 110 degrees in Twentynine Palms. So when the-the junior Marines weren't up to

propensity to value numbers, checklists, and quantification, a manifestation of Ritzer's concept, challenges those individual intangible strengths, such as humility and empathy, to receive equal attention. For example, a staff sergeant explained,

[T]he way the junior Marines get promoted, it's like a points scale. So from the privates up to when you become a sergeant, it's different than sergeants and above. So for them, you get what's called a composite score, where basically they calculate your proficiency and conduct marks, your PFT, your rifle, how long you've been in, things like that, and they literally give you a number, and then whoever has the highest score gets promoted. But we've seen it time and time again where these people, they're lousy Marines. They have bad attitudes. They don't know their job, but they can run fast, and they can shoot good.²⁶

Revisiting the promotion process, with specific attention to how people enact the policies and use the tools, may balance the bureaucratic pressure for efficiency, standardization, and quantification and the need for the unquantifiable leadership qualities to share prominence in the process.

Empathy and Perspective-Taking

These stories point to a potential need to broaden the conversation around empathetic leadership. As noted in the 2018 MCOCR Report, the theme of empathy was positioned prominently in the data.²⁷ Marines recounted stories of good leaders, highlighting their care and attention to individualized concerns, as well as noted a need for more compassion in leadership. The Marine Corps' cultural orientations, manifested in "We take care of our own," "Know your Marines," "Brotherhood," contest the mechanized, hardened leadership demonstrated in these examples and require leaders to display empathy. "Empathy is a thing that allows you to see things from other people's perspectives."²⁸ Calling for more empathetic leadership and to fully and consistently enact the Marine Corps value constructs of care and attention to subordinates, to the Marines to the right and left, and to all Marines that wear the uniform presents a pathway to combat the infiltration of "McDonaldization" into interpersonal relationships.

This is challenging, however, especially when individuals do not share a common experience. A lieutenant colonel discussed her own inability to understand individual struggles until living through the same situation and experiencing firsthand the calloused process and its inherent unfairness.

I will tell you that I was part of the problem. And I own that I was part of the problem. Up until the fact- up until the time that I became a mother as a lieutenant colonel, with 16 years of service, I had no idea what the challenges were for, uh, for pregnant service women and also for new mothers. And I'm ashamed to admit that I was part of the problem because I completely accepted the Marine Corps cultural norm on face value and did what I thought was appropriate as a supervisor, which was to [*self-mockingly*] hold my females accountable the same way I'd hold men accountable! And so no, I was not inclined to give any sort of accommodation. I wanted a doctor's note for everything. I was awful. I was absolutely awful. And after I became a

par, they would just take them out and do tourniquet drills for hours until they fixed their attitude or whatever. And that's not leadership. ... It's kind of a gray area. Like tourniquet drills can very quickly become hazing. But if there is still training value in it, it's not really hazing. Like, if the dude can't do a tourniquet, obviously, he needs to keep doing it. But, when they can all do tourniquets and they can all pick their buddy up and get them off-off and where they need to be in time, you still- you don't need to do it for another two hours.

²⁶ Participant #61, Staff Sergeant, Interview, MCAS Cherry Point, 24 August 2017.

²⁷ See Rebecca Lane et al., *MCOCR Project Report*, Part II, the section on "The Benefits and Challenges of Being an Empathetic Leader," starting on page 30.

²⁸ Participant #126, Major, Interview, MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, 19 September 2017.

mother, where I could find them, I sent e-mails to the women who I had been a supervisor of, and I apologized to them. Because it was-it was- I was perpetuating a system that is not very accommodating. ... When I was a major at Headquarters Marine Corps, did I have to give the captain with a new baby a hard time because she was having problems being able to support the Marine Corps Marathon on a Saturday? Did I have to do that? No. But did I do it? Yes, because I felt it was expected. And I towed this line of, "Well, everybody has got to show up at Butler Stadium at 3 o'clock in the morning to be counted until 5 o'clock, to get on the bus, to stir the Gatorade." And I- and now I look back, and I- I'm horrified that I put that female Marine through that level of crap over it. But I did! Because that's what was expected. And in fact, you know, my bosses—men—expected me to do that! And I didn't see anything wrong with it. And now, yeah, maybe- no, no maybes about it! Becoming a parent did change me.²⁹

Empathy is not always extended when the would-be empathizer does not fully understand the situation, making it hard to put themselves in another's shoes. If this is the case, then pregnancy loss has several things working against it. For one, pregnancy loss is a taboo subject whose mental and physical gravity is not commonly discussed – by men or women. And two, in an organization dominated by men, de facto standards of what is acceptable and what is not acceptable are more likely to be tacitly informed by the male experience than by the female experience. Those whose experiences do not conform to these internalized male standards of value and ability can face a calloused, mechanized response when displaying normal human conditions, such as those particular to the female form. Offering empathy in these cases might look like "special treatment" to some. Further, as apparent in the "suck it up" attitude of the women in the two pregnancy loss stories and the initial by-the-book approach of the lieutenant colonel above, women police themselves to adhere to these internalized de facto standards and to avoid the perception that they are receiving special treatment. This likely is related to the fear of appearing weak. Even if the female experience is understood, women are often construed as deficient and weak because of realities such as childbirth, breastfeeding, and pregnancy loss. This bias, which manifests intentionally and unintentionally, can be mitigated by an alternate perspective, already latent within the Corps, which portrays women's reproduction as a strength. When perspectives shift or the situation is reframed, leaders are able to take on a more compassionate response to human experience. One master sergeant³⁰ explained,

My Marines tried to tell me that females get different treatment. But that's their perception, that they get different treatment. And so you ask, how do you deal with it? You got to deal with it on your level and just like I said, when I explained to them like, "Man, this chick is out here doing everything you do. She's better than you. Don't try to say she's getting preferential treatment 'cause she's better than you. No, she gave birth and then came back and was still better than you."

Need to Prove Yourself Worthy or Fear of Appearing Weak

The Marines in these accounts were left to feel insufficient because they were not ready and able to perform due to a normal biological process. Both Marines reveal this mindset in the words they chose in response to their seniors' behavior. The lieutenant colonel wanted to express indignation but did not, and the master gunnery sergeant pushed on and suffered alone "atrocities because we're groomed to understand that we are- if we don't put on a front, then we're perceived to be weak." Another Marine's experience speaks to this same pressure, again, with a miscarriage as part of the story. The following is

²⁹ Participant #603, Lieutenant Colonel, Interview, Pentagon, 6 September 2017.

³⁰ Participant #236, Master Sergeant, Focus Group, MCAS Yuma, 26 September 2017.

an exchange during an all-female sergeants-and-below focus group in Yuma. Focus on the words of Corporal K³¹.

Interviewer: Yeah. Which do you think is better? The woman- I mean not that there is one. Like so the woman staying there is sticking it out and not speaking up about maybe like she does need to leave if she's, you know, at the end of her pregnancy and she's uncomfortable. Do you think that that's a good thing that makes women look like hard workers?

Cpl K: No. That makes us look stupid. Because you need to take care of yourself first. If you can't take care of yourself, there's no point in you staying and doing all this, and then what? Something's wrong with your baby? You're still going to have to be out of work for whatever amount of time, you know?

Interviewer: Okay.

Sgt E³²: That's like when female Marines that still PT to prove a point.

Cpl K: Right.

Sgt E: And I'm just like, "You better take your ass home right now." [*laughs*] Like- I know some people in the Marines like they're, yeah. They're intense like that. Man, I see some chicks, she'd be [*makes noise to emulate someone going very fast*] I was like, "You got a baby in you!"

Cpl K: I know what you're talking about.

Interviewer: That sounds like you're like that, right? That you're- you just like do it.

LCpl D: I just have a lot of pride. But if I was carrying a child, I would not, you know, strain myself.

Cpl K: See my first pregnancy, I still PT'd, I had a miscarriage. So like this pregnancy, I'm like, "Nah. You good. I'll catch you all at 8 o'clock." [*laughter*] Yeah, I don't know.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. Yeah.

Cpl K: There's that time that you feel like you want to do this because you want to- you still want to show them, "Hey, I'm a female, but I'm still a Marine," whatever. But then you got to take into account other situations, like I'm not about to put myself in danger or my baby in danger because I want us to look good. You need to respect those values, 'cause we're doing the same thing you're doing.

To count, to be worthy, Marines will push themselves at times to the detriment of themselves and others. This feeling of inferiority, of not being good enough, goes to the core of Marine identity, to the

³¹ Participant #233.

³² Participant #234, Sergeant, Sergeant and Below Focus Group, MCAS Yuma, 26 September 2017.

question of who qualifies as a Marine in the minds of individual Marines and the organization as a whole. During one focus group, when asked if a pregnant Marine can be considered an ideal Marine, a pregnant Marine with frustration responded, “probably not.”³³ This conversation around pregnancy loss points to the tension women who are Marines face in identity construction as Marines and the challenges they confront in trying to conform the female body and experience to male-oriented constructs of value and ability.

What can pregnancy loss tell us about Marine Corps identity?

This tension signals a need to interrogate the boundaries of the shared Marine identity that inform individual and organizational understanding of who falls within those boundaries. The behavior of the leaders in these stories and the women’s need to continually prove themselves to fit in raise several questions about the collective Marine identity and Marine Corps values. Can women be Marines (not Marines with an * or a qualifier like “female”)? What are the boundaries of the collective Marine identity? Does the female biological process of reproduction, all facets of it, fall within or outside that boundary? Do the cultural mantras of care and attention extend to the female form or only to the female form when acting as the male form? These stories suggest that the female experience and form fall outside, which alienates these Marines and could complicate integration efforts and the diversification of the force. Responding to a question about what message she has received about what the ideal Marine is, a corporal at Camp Pendleton provided, “white and Christian male from Kansas or Ohio or Texas.”³⁴ A warrior is not inherently white or Christian or male, obviously. There is nothing except tradition and cultural norms that dictates a male-constructed national security response. When standards of value and ability and processes carry an internalized male construct as they do in the Marine Corps, it is more challenging for those outside of that sexed reality to be perceived as valued and to count, and their unique strengths and experiences are deemed inferior and constructed as weak. To succeed in the 21st century battlespace, the Marine Corps is calling for a diversified force, which will require the Corps to tackle some of these implicit biases defining Marine identity and standards of value and ability and informing Marine and leadership behavior.

Conclusion

Pregnancy loss is a common, but potentially difficult life event that can create an awkward social space of avoidance, and it affects the human body. Marines – both male and female – experience pregnancy loss, and for the women, it is both a physical and emotional experience. Because the Marine Corps has physical requirements and standards, it is incumbent on the Corps to have policies in place that address the physical aspects of the range of life experiences Marines encounter, including pregnancy loss. The lack of recognition of and instruction about the physical condition within policy creates the opportunity for women to face ignorance, avoidance, and injuring physical requirements. Having policy that speaks frankly to the experience could also help facilitate the deconstruction of some of the taboo and cultural silence as could broadening the conversation surrounding pregnancy and parenthood to include the topic of pregnancy loss.

³³ Participant #011, Major, Officer Focus Group, MCB Quantico, 16 August 2017.

³⁴ Participant #309, Lance Corporal, Interview, MCB Camp Pendleton, 14 September 2017.

However, policy direction is not a panacea, as we found ignorance of policies about women's issues like hair regulations, uniform standards, pregnancy, and breastfeeding³⁵ and blind adherence absent contextual adaptation, as in the case of Major J above. And there are instances where policy is perceived as bad³⁶ or can be misguided when developed in the absence of those it represents or impacts. Its presence, however, would afford those experiencing a pregnancy loss a place to start in addressing the physical aspects.

Women have been Marines for over a century.³⁷ Pregnancy loss is part of the female experience, and so careful thought should be put into how Marines who experience this life event are treated and perceived. While the organization has made great strides in creating inclusive policy, it still falls short when it comes to the full scope of female reproductive experiences. However, this discussion around pregnancy loss elucidates broader cultural issues than just the need for biological acceptance. As the Marine Corps forges ahead defining and designing the force of the future, it may want to consider how the McDonaldization of the human experience impacts cohesion and the quality of leadership. Additionally, it may want to examine the structures, policies, and practices that shape Marine identity formation and expression and impede the inclusion of the "other" into that shared space and make transparent these and other underlying biases in standard construction and value orientation in its deliberations about the future force.

³⁵ For example, see Corporal E's remarks from a sergeant-and-below focus group at Camp Lejeune on 23 August 2017. *Corporal E* (Participant #040): I'd say that one's easy: a male getting promoted to like corporal or sergeant and they have to perform a uniform inspection with a female and, obviously, something other than cammies, and they don't know the female uniform regulations when it comes to uniforms, hair. Or a female comes in and they have bright purple lipstick that doesn't match their skin tone and actually follow the order; then they, one, don't know the order and then, two, they go up to another female and they say, "Hey, correct your Marine," because she's officially your Marine because she's a female. Like, no, you should know the order and be able to correct your Marine without, "Oh, she's gonna say that I singled her out because she's a female." No, she's wrong. Correct her as a Marine, not as a female Marine.

³⁶ A company commander in Yuma on 26 September 2017 (Participant #235, Captain) described her experience with Marine Corps Ball uniform regulations for pregnant Marines: I have hoped and wished and prayed that the Marine Corps would change the [exhales] maternity uniform specifically for the Marine Corps Ball because right now we wear this [knocks] God awful tunic that looks like it belongs in like the scarlet letter [interviewer chuckles], and it was designed by a man in the 1800s [interviewer chuckles], specifically to chastise Marines for daring to get pregnant in the service of their country. And it is just such an ugly piece of material. And I feel like I have a very simple solution for the Marine Corps. Just get rid of the tunic. ..., which looks like a green trash bag that is just draped on your body. ... I put that thing on for the first time, and I started crying on the day of the ball. I was like this is so terrible. ... Why should I be forced to wear this?

³⁷ Opha May Johnson enlisted on 13 August 1918, becoming the first enlisted female Marine. James Ackermann, "The first woman Marine," Marine Corps Base Quantico, 10 March 2016, <https://www.quantico.marines.mil/News/News-Article-Display/Article/690019/the-first-woman-marine/>. Of course, before that, women had long participated in wars both clandestinely and in support capacities.

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