

Quick-Look Report: USMC.2017.0005

**Insights from the Marine Corps Organizational Culture
Research Project: Elements and Antidotes for Disillusionment**

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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	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.

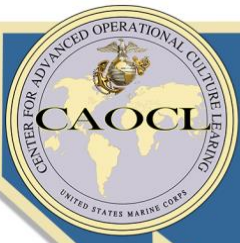
Initial release of this report was scheduled for May 2018. Release was delayed due to leadership questions about the applicability of MCU's academic freedom policy. These questions were resolved in September 2019. The release resulted in **media and Congressional attention**. See **additional information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

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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. Foshier 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

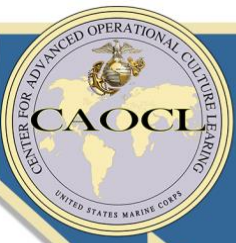
TRG team members presented on aspects of the MCOCR project at numerous academic conferences and in Marine Corps meetings. One scholarly article was published and another is in development as of this date:

- 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?

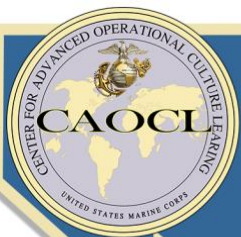
Between August and October 2017, the research team gathered data at the following locations: Pentagon, Marine Corps Base (MCB) Quantico, VA, MCB Camp Lejeune, NC, Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Cherry Point, NC, MCB Camp Pendleton, CA, Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center 29 Palms, CA, MCAS Yuma, AZ,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

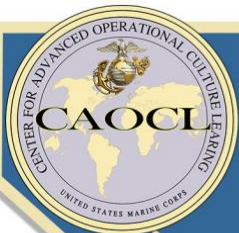
Congressional Hearing

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.

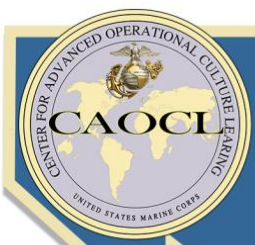
The idea for the group grew out of discussions between the anthropologist who became its director and Marine Corps leaders, one of whom was the Director of CAOCL. They had seen many problems in the Marine Corps' ability to leverage research results and scientific expertise. Many problems seemed to arise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

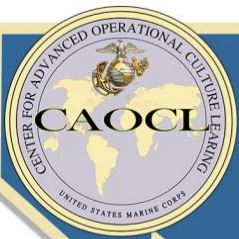
Support to CAOCL

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.



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.

For more information, contact
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MCOCR: Elements and Antidotes for Disillusionment

The purpose of this report is twofold. It is meant not only to convey certain concerns and ideas that were put forward by Marines, but also to illustrate the ways in which qualitative research and analysis can highlight the relationships between multiple seemingly unrelated topics and how those, taken together, impact the daily lives of Marines in the fleet. Talking to Marines about the various social problems the Marine Corps is dealing with and having the Marines discuss them amongst themselves in focus groups revealed detailed issues that the Marines themselves face in their day-to-day lives. These methods also solicited positive or clear-headed solutions to these issues. While the hard points of policy were not often discussed, Marine participants were sometimes exposed to alternative theories and perspectives on issues that they saw as set in stone. This exposure sometimes sparked new discussion on what could be going on, with Marines often eager to find and work toward a solution. This research, in its limited way across multiple reports, has shown that Marines can offer salient critique of the Corps, but amongst these frustrated attitudes, there are many good ideas that Marines have to improve their organization.

When examining an organization as large, complex, and varied as the Marine Corps, it is easy to forget that no topic that one might consider exists in a vacuum. While this research was designed to take a broad look into social issues within the Marine Corps, with a focus on issues of gender, leadership, and cohesion, researchers and Marines discussed countless other topics that are necessarily enmeshed, each topic having bearing on multiple others. Rather than initially looking more closely into one specific topic of choice, the topics in this paper emerged after many repetitive reviews and recursive coding of select interview and focus group transcripts¹. Taken together, these topics – generational misconceptions, differing perceptions of Marine Corps policy, and the idea of “setting Marines up to fail” – contribute to frustration, anger, and disillusionment among Marines. But examination of the problems also showed how other Marines have dealt with these issues and what might be done to mitigate these attitudes.

While there are some “bad apples” that make it through boot camp to become Marines, a larger threat to cohesion in the Marine Corps seems to emanate from otherwise well-intentioned individuals who perceive they are not getting what they were promised. Marine participants were generally optimistic that the problems the Marine Corps is facing can be solved and that many of these problems are “growing pains” associated with a changing Marine Corps. Good Marines are often the ones who catch the ‘bad apples’ in the first place, and there are Marine Corps policies in place that can deal with these problems when they arise. It is the smaller behaviors and attitudes that are not technically against any rules that can cause problems with unit cohesion and leadership. The weight of these attitudes can drag down command climates, leading to issues of “toxic” leadership and environments in which trust is a rare commodity. These factors are further compounded by other issues, such as different experiences with and expectations of the Marine Corps itself that are formed and transformed as new Marines join.

¹ For this project, I started coding using only interviews for which I was present and could best remember. Because of the sensitivity of the subject matter of this project, male researchers did not typically interview female Marines. As a male researcher, this meant that most of the Marines I spoke with were men. Because of this, female voices are not as represented within this piece as they are within other MCOCR analytical products.

“Generational Issues” in the Marine Corps

When discussing an issue as wide and varied as disillusionment, it is important to consider the population in question. While individual issues within a given population may be examined and understood with some success, researchers and anyone developing interventions must be intimately familiar with the nuances of the population in which these interventions are to take place. To understand the disillusionment experienced by some Marines, it is important to note the vast diversity that exists within the population already.

The modern Marine Corps has experienced multiple major paradigm shifts in the past few decades. Following the attacks of 9-11, the Marine Corps moved from the “peacetime” footing of the 80s and 90s into a rapid operational tempo combat force in the first years of Iraq and Afghanistan and then experienced another shift to counterinsurgency operations in those same areas. This shift from peacetime to wartime was not perceived by many who joined the Corps in the buildup following 9-11. The rapid operational tempo and deployment was all they knew, and this forged their idea of what the Marine Corps was supposed to be. Marines who have stayed in the Corps from this time are now senior Marines who in turn have set the expectations and standards for those who have come after them.

There have also been major changes in the lives of the individuals who join the Marine Corps today. Many of the older Marines the research team spoke to joined up during the groundswell of American patriotism following 9-11. Those young men and women joined as a reaction to an attack on their country, and they knew war was on the horizon. A gunnery sergeant at Camp Lejeune articulated this sentiment when asked if he had witnessed any change in what motivates young people to join the Marine Corps:

Absolutely. And I don't like generalizations, but absolutely. I think across the board, you know, you go forward to 2001, 2002, 2003 even into maybe 2004, 2005 when we were in the thick of the fighting in Iraq. People came into the military knowing they were going to deploy, knowing they were going to potentially see combat. At least it was, you know, even if you were joining a non-combat arms MOS, you had pretty good idea that you were going to go forward.²

This contrasts somewhat starkly with the more “logic-based” reasons that attract young people to the Corps today, such as college benefits, adventure, and getting away from situations at home.

I think in the more recent generation that's coming in, you're seeing a desensitization to the world we live in. This is what people have grown up in. This is the global war on terror since 2001. That's the new norm. That's what people know. So they're coming in with that understanding. It's not service. It's not based on a specific instance. They're not driven to fix a wrong because it's been 16 years. I think it's now- I don't want to say stabilized but I feel like that's the best way to describe it. You're not seeing the emotional anymore. It's more of a logical choice for a lot of people whether it's financial, whether it's to get out of the circumstances in which they were raised, whether it's a

² Gunnery Sergeant #046.

steppingstone to get to a future career. I think people are logically joining the military now versus emotionally joining the military immediately post-9-11.³

This does not necessarily mean that one generation is more patriotic or logical than the other. The Marines who joined long after 9-11 never had a large, earth-shattering event to cause them to join in a big wave, and as such, the reasons they expressed for joining are different. This mindset going into the Marine Corps is important, as it sets the initial expectations for the “Marine experience” for which they have just signed up. Whether the Corps meets these expectations sets the tone for the rest of their early experience and development as a Marine. These “generational differences” have less to do with actual generations and more to do with how they experienced the Marine Corps in their first years of service.

Other Marines were less reflective when talking about generations, rather choosing to blame the “new generation” of millennial Marines for problems within the Marine Corps. This sometimes occurred even when the Marine was a millennial themselves:

So, since I know I'm still what you call a, um millennial? So I guess I'm still in that timeframe. But how do I make this not political? How life's been and things have changed, government-wise, it's a lot of people think they- think the world owes them something. So with that, Marines going through boot camp- yeah, you go through boot camp, and actually boot camps got hit hard with DIs getting in trouble because they're offending them or they're yelling at them. Like that's what you're at the boot camp for! Boot camp's to shape you into a Marine. It's not there to hold your hand through every obstacle.⁴

These generational issues are often brought up as a quick and easy way to categorize and summarily dismiss the concerns of other Marines while not actually addressing the issue at hand, whether it be lack of motivation or feeling as if they are being treated unfairly. This is especially troublesome for young Marines who had recently joined, wanting an experience similar to what they saw on the news growing up during the fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. Marines who expected to go into combat and do “Marine stuff,” often described as kicking down doors and blowing things up, get frustrated when their day-to-day reality in the fleet consists of picking up trash, sitting behind a desk, or waiting for things to happen, or when new Marines are moved into a career field in which they have no interest. This starts Marines off on a sour note, and things often only go downhill from here if the unit in which the Marine lands has poor command climate. For example, when a male junior Marine is told “sorry, there aren’t enough spots in the infantry” but then sees the Marine Corps trying to attract women into the combat MOSs recently opened to them, that does not tend to sit well. While there are, of course, reasons to attract women to combat MOSs, those do not enter the logic of those who have not heard these reasons well-articulated. Marines have always had to put their own desires second after the needs of the Marine Corps, but this attitude wears better in the wartime Marine Corps rather than what Marines described as a “garrison-oriented” force.

Perceived Inconsistency in Policy

³ First Lieutenant #047.

⁴ Sergeant #007.

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Some Marines were specifically bothered by what they thought was the Marine Corps twisting its policies and ideals to suit the desires of an external audience, especially when it came to integrating women into combat arms jobs. One sergeant at Camp Lejeune brought in printed pages from a Training and Education Command (TECOM) PowerPoint and a PFT calculator to make his point on policy discrimination within the Marine Corps:

Well, discrimination is the reason I came here today. I'd like to show you something. So I'm being recorded. Obviously, you can't see this. So this is printed out directly from the equal opportunity [EO] PowerPoint published by TECOM. You can't get more Marine Corps-sanctioned than that. So concept of EO violations – you've got racism, sexism, prejudice, discrimination. The one I'm talking about is sexism, okay? [Sergeant starts reading the excerpted PowerPoint text] "Treatment or consideration based on class or category rather than individual merit. Overt, direct, intentional, hidden, indirect, unintentional. Institution discrimination. Any systematic or functional practices that discriminate or manifest unequal treatment." [Sergeant ends reading excerpted text]

The Sergeant then went on to show how he put in the same number of pull-ups, the same run time, and the same number of crunches in both the male and female PFT calculators, but the female score was higher. He then stated that this increased score plays into promotion and retention of enlisted Marines, giving female Marines a leg up on males, which men resent. He finished off his point with:

If you want a quote [from the sergeant], Artificially inflating Marines' performance will artificially deflate that Marine's value. The Marine Corps has a culture of resentment toward women. Stuff like this is why. It's not just- this is on paper. It's in the system, it's official, but it's not just that. If a female Marine is crying at work, she'll be brought outside and comforted. A male Marine will be "a bitch." So the Marine Corps' gonna have to pick. Either we treat everyone like a Marine or you treat female Marines like female Marines. If you do the latter, you're gonna give them this distinct otherness. That's why they started calling them WMs in the first place – woman Marine. They're seen as separate. They have a different standard. So right here we've got two different systems for scoring PFTs. Tell me, how that does not violate the Marine Corps' own EO policy. It is [reiterating the excerpted PowerPoint text] "treatment or consideration based on the class or category rather than merit." It's "overt, direct, and intentional," and it's a "systematic or functional practice that discriminates or manifests unequal treatment." It's black and white. So this is where the culture of resentment comes from. Why are you treated differently than me? Why are you given extra damn near 50 points on your PFT and you get promoted before I do?⁵

It is important to note that many of the Marines who expressed anger or frustration at certain policies did not themselves actually know the specifics of the policies in place. Instead, they would rage against what they thought the policies were, how they made no sense, and how they were unfair and broken.

However, it is this perceived double standard or "mouth says one thing and hands do another" act on the part of the Marine Corps as an organization that frustrates Marines. This can be counteracted by clear and consistent messaging from Marine Corps leadership. In a focus group discussion, one Marine

⁵ Sergeant #49.

captain recalled a time that a general officer addressed the issue of changing military occupational specialty (MOS) standards and why the Marine Corps did it in the case of the aviation community:

I can offer up an example of how it works. So like females in aviation. So we got a brief from someone who came out to our unit and was talking to us about it. Um, shit, I'm trying to remember- it was a few years back. But it was plainly how like- oh man, I think General Brilakis when he was manpower- came to postgraduate school and talked to us. Uh, and he was explaining how they "primed the pump." He was like, you know, "The reality is they lowered standards initially to get women into aviation." That just was what it was. He was saying it had to do with like, they weren't prepped for it before. You weren't- they weren't actively seeking out- like the women who joined the military weren't offered the opportunity to go to aviation. So you didn't have a whole lot of people who were like, "Oh, I want to be a pilot!" It was just suddenly like, "Hey we're going to allow women in aviation now." Later you get the ones who were like, "I'm gonna be a fucking pilot!" And so they, you know, really crushed it all through you know whatever their training pipeline was up to that point. And so you get rock stars, no issue. Initially you're saying you've lowered standards, now that affected both males and females. They both got in, you know. It's just the lowering across the board and they had to bring them [the standards] back up. And the whole point was to get a certain surge of demographic population to kind of build the [idea of], "Hey, there are female pilots out there." And some of the capability and some of the people who got through arguably would not have gotten through before then and wouldn't get through nowadays. Umm and-and that's something that, he was like, "Look, the fact is it exists here. It's stupid to try to hide from this." So he was like, "This has to be understood. And, yeah, you got to deal with it."

At this point another captain in the focus group pointed out that the lowering of the standards in that case was for both men and women, to which the first captain replied:

Yes, but remember the perception. He was pointing out that, until you acknowledge it, the perception was that it was only for females. And so it's- because it's not talked about, 'cause it's hidden away. He was like, "That's reality." It's a- it's a statistics kind of thing, where it's like, you know, they had to get a certain number and had to- I mean, he called it "priming the pump." But getting the flow going and he didn't have a pool to work with. It just wasn't him. But there wasn't a pool to work with to begin with. So that is- and he was talking to us about it 'cause it was when they were talking about women in infantry and everything.⁶

Marines are very good at "this is how it has to be, even if you don't like it" when the order or directive makes sense to them. They excel at "embracing the suck," but perceived lies and deception are anathema to this population. Marines often pride themselves on seeing things as they are, as depicted in their folksy refrain "right, wrong or indifferent." But when told one thing when they very much feel

⁶ Captain E #105.

that they are seeing another, it does not align with the values that the Marines Corps generally stands for in their minds and breeds disillusionment.

Setting Marines Up to Fail

In some cases policy may change quickly, but the reality that Marines have to work with is often not on par with what the new policy directs. The burden of this disconnect often lands upon the shoulders of junior officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs), who often happily jump to the new task, only to find themselves woefully under-supported in both equipment and knowledge. This problem was highlighted in interviews when Marines spoke of integrating female Marines into their workspaces for the first time. This, of course, had logistical implications. For example, separate restrooms and billeting areas are necessary, but one Marine captain discussed a requirement in the field that was unforeseen by him and his all-male chain of command: the capability for nursing Marine mothers to pump and refrigerate breast milk:

You do- and when you make- I won't call it concessions, but you know, special treatment, uh, you kind of- you can create re-resentment in the unit. So totally anecdotal. Uh, I was the camp commandant for a large exercise last year. And I had to create a lactation tent for all the pregnant Marines that were out there to pump breast milk out there. And I probably spent three hours a day, running around, making sure the lactation tent was climate-controlled, sanitized, had to go find all the proper cleaners for it, we had to get a refrigerator out there for the milk to be stored in. When I was in charge of billeting for twelve hundred Marines, but six of them took up three hours a day, um, and y-you bet I was really, you know, like [chuckles]- I won't call it- my-my anger wasn't justified, you know, t-they have every right to do that out there. But, you know, I was at my wits' end, um, towards the end of that exercise.⁷

The captain in this case recognizes that it was not the women's fault that he had to go about setting up this lactation station and acquire the correct equipment: it was the lack of existing norms and policies around this situation that caused confusion and frustration for those who were told to figure it out or make it work.

As women are integrated into previously all-male units, unforeseen issues may make themselves known in ways that make life difficult for those on the implementation end of these new policies, including the female Marines themselves. American businessman Daymond John is credited with the quote, "Pioneers get slaughtered, settlers get rich." While he was originally referring to pioneers in the business world, the saying is very apt in the following case provided by a first sergeant in a focus group. He explained:

So I'm in a [sic] amphibious assault battalion right now we have the first ever 1833 full-blown MOS female. She's in my company right now. And she's already kind of been a little bit of a disadvantage because she went through MOS school during the whole testing process, so like two, three years back. And now she has- career path, lat move, and she's a corporal. So, a corporal 1833 is supposed to be a crew chief, right? "Here's your vehicle, here's your crew, we're going out to sea, like we've got business." But she's

⁷ Captain G #112.

been out of school so long. You know, she knows less than the PFC that graduated school last week. You know, so she's supposed to be in a leadership role and we can't put her in one. And, you know, it's a unique situation that I told the guys I would never happen to a normal 1833. "Hey, Devil Dog, you graduated 1833 school. You're going on security forces" – which doesn't happen to us – "for four years. Then you come back and you're a crew chief." So that doesn't happen. So she started kind of at a disadvantage that way. Uh, we haven't had to do any evaluations at this point because she has only been with the unit maybe two or three months, but that's going to weigh in on her proficiency and conduct, because is she really [a] proficient corporal? Like, she's not doing the job of a PFC. I don't know if that's what you're getting at, but I think that's something that-

At this point, the moderator asked how the first sergeant, as a leader, has handled that situation.

So you want to be fair. So right off the bat like, "Oh, well, you're definitely not hitting the long ball. You're not even going to hit the short ball, but you are trying." Uhm, how far does that get? What's the expectation? Right. Like we didn't get any guidance, just, "Hey, you're the first female 1833. Tee it up. Be good." You know, "Make sure we train and we're standard across the board." And that's what we did. And she's in a position where she's learning under a sergeant, a competent sergeant, and I don't know what a good answer is to that. Because you expect the corporal to be able to lead, not just in formation and when marching to chow, but, "Let me show you how to- let me show you how to pre-op this vehicle." But she can't do it. But I don't expect her to do it. I wouldn't expect anyone to do it that hasn't had the job for four years. But I guess the short answer to your question is I don't know how much time that will take, like we- I'm going to have to cross that bridge pretty soon, but I haven't had to across it yet."⁸

The first sergeant then went on to note that when it became known that a female Marine was joining the previously all-male unit, the Marines did not miss a beat, and things were business as usual. There was nowhere near the expected interruptions that the general rumor mill had led the unit's leadership to believe there might be. This highlights the fact that not all of the issues that women face with integration are based on attitudes of Marines around them. These pioneering women are often exposed to precarious and difficult situations simply because they are moving into new career territory and their Marine leadership at the ground level often has little guidance or ability to ease their way.

Difficult Discussions as an Antidote for Disillusionment

While these varying problems came up in the research data, we never would have acquired this insight if Marines had not already been giving these issues critical thought. While some did this far more than others, seeing Marines with opposing opinions interact within and after focus groups was interesting in and of itself. Many Marines who started the conversations off as frustrated came away from the focus groups with a more nuanced idea of what is going on. After the recorder was turned off and participants were leaving the focus group room, several commented on how glad they were to have had the opportunity to air these issues with other Marines and that they had learned a lot. The Marine Corps,

⁸ First Sergeant J #118.

like many large organizations, struggles with certain internal issues. While discontent exists within the ranks, it can often be countered by the arguments advanced by many Marines who often simply lack a productive outlet for their thoughts on what is going on in the Marine Corps and how to make the organization succeed.

For every male Marine who said that female Marines get special treatment was another Marine with stories of women who are doing 20 pull-ups. Many men were able to articulate and appreciate the unique challenges female Marines face in their day-to-day lives. One male staff NCO focus group in Yuma almost turned into a sort of masterclass on leadership, with three staff sergeants all listening intently as a master sergeant with 28 years of experience in the Marine Corps articulated how he deals with the gender issue among his own Marines:

My Marines are-are, you know, they try to tell me that females get different treatment. And I'm like [chuckles]- and right now, I don't have any. But-but they- that's their perception, that they get different treatment. And-and so you ask, how do you- how do you deal with it? You gotta 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 fr- better than you! No! That- she gave birth and then came back, and was still better than you!" [general laughter] "So how the hell- and who- who do you think you are to say that she's getting preferential treatment?!" So you got to- you got to- you know. But I get in- I get in the weeds talking to Marines about stuff like that! And it has be- uh, and it starts as a staff NCO. You got to be like- you got to talk about the things that are uncomfortable. You got to ask the question, "How do you feel about female Marines?" When I check in to a new shop, I put all that crap on the line because I want to know the mindset of my Marines. And I'll ask that question, "How do you feel about female Marines? How do you feel about, you know, all the diversity that we're dealing with now in the Marine Corps, transgender, all these stuff?" I- I ask those questions, and I'm that staff NCO that, "Don't tell me what I want to hear. You tell me what you think!" Once they figure that out about me as a leader, they'll tell me whatever the hell they think. "I think it's bullshit that, you know, 'cause females get pref- preferential treatment." And then when I say, "Hey, dude, you're on the outside looking in. I'm looking at her SRB⁹, and I'm looking at yours. She runs a 285." "Oh, yeah, but she gets to do the dead hang." [snaps finger] "Come on, let's go outside. You do the dead hang." "Well, that's- that's pretty difficult." I said, "Now what do you think?" You know? Or, females doing pull-ups! "She's doing 15! You're doing 12!?" How do you, you know- so you have to, you have to do it- that small unit leadership is really bigger than the Marine Corps. That's big stuff. That small unit leadership, you put it out there. When you have your little interviews, you have your little counseling sessions, you got to put it all out on the line. And if it's a- if it quacks like a duck, walks like a duck, call it a duck! If the female is like kicking butt and taking names, you got to put it out there.¹⁰

⁹ Selective Retention Bonus.

¹⁰ Master Sergeant H #256.

As can be seen with the master sergeant, these perceptions are very real, but the solutions to counter them are also real and in the minds of some Marines already. Those Marines just need to be empowered to share their ideas and opinions with their fellow Marines in an environment that encourages open discussion and the free trade of ideas. Marines love to debate and argue random points, and what better topic for group discussion than the state of the Marine Corps? This type of discussion could not only help to stamp out misinformed ideas and incorrect interpretations of policy, but could also develop and sharpen good ideas to common Marine problems from within the ranks. A captain (captain D, in the excerpt below) in a focus group at Marine Corps Base Quantico shared one clever idea on how to handle the issue of appropriate versus inappropriate behavior in the office:

Captain D: *For- for one, like kind of going back with your question of-- At the place where I'm at now, I think it's a- it's a mixed environment. Umm all ranks from – what's the lowest rank we have? – lance corporal through colonel, all staying in a similar area. Now when you get any people of any rank together, they all seem to turn into lance corporals anyway. [background laughter] Like, with the jokes and stuff. It doesn't matter if they're generals or whatever. But being in that environment that's a lot more- you have to be a lot more politically correct. You can't have the dick and fart jokes and all that kind of stuff going all the time because it's not the right place. It's not appropriate. It's- so, I walked into this. Somebody came up with this idea. It wasn't me, and it has been- it has worked. And at everybody's desks they have football flags. There's a yellow flag and red flag. And as soon as somebody starts saying the wrong thing, you just see flags just start flying up, and the person knows to just-just shut up. And it's-it's-it's cleaned up everything, umm-*

Major A: *It's a great idea. Because, I mean, are they- are they more willing to throw a flag, you know? Like-like-*

Captain D: *Yeah. Nobody wants to, because nobody wants to be that guy to call somebody out, like, "I'm sorry that was inappropriate and you offended me."*

Captain E: *Well, it's a funny way to call them out.*

Captain D: *Exactly.*

Captain E: *It's like it lets them laugh at- it lets everybody laugh at it. It's effective. Probably last longer in the long course.*

Major A: *Because being that guy- I'm the guy that speaks right to it. If I hear something I'll walk straight up to that individual and I correct him. That's the way I've been. But I get- I do that, and there will be times where people are like, "You're peculiar." [laughs] You know what I mean? But to me I don't give a shit because that's-that's-that's the way I address. That's not always, you know, it may not always be the best approach. I really like that. I think that allows people to do it when they may not- otherwise may not have the courage.¹¹*

¹¹ Major A #101, Captain D #104, Captain E #105.

In recent years, the Marine Corps has hosted several technology and physical fitness innovation challenges in which Marines from all over the Corps submit their ideas on how to improve existing processes. This raises the question, what is to stop the Marine Corps from conducting a leadership innovation challenge?

Conclusion

As Marines deal with new challenges in the fleet, they learn lessons on what works and what does not work. Candid, open conversations could cross the generational, regional, and occupational rifts that divide Marines in the first place. They could also foster a sense of shared purpose in problem-solving and critical thinking. Lessons learned from these instances could be extremely useful to other Marines at other duty stations who may be dealing with the same sort of issue. This empowering of Marine voices would also allow the Corps to actively combat disillusionment within the ranks and address some of its most challenging problems. The Marines who participated in this study want to actively improve their Marine Corps. All the Marine Corps needs to do is offer them an outlet to do so.