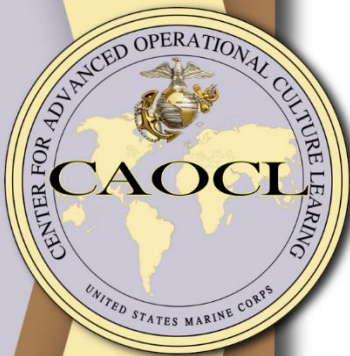


Quick-Look Report: USMC.2017.0005



Insights from the Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Project: Rethinking Mentorship

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Publication Date: 15 April 2020

DISTRIBUTION: Unlimited

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About the Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research (MCOCR) Project

What is MCOCR?

The MCOCR Project is a small, exploratory, qualitative research effort intended to gather 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 under Marine Corps University's academic freedom policy.

How should the information in this report be used?

Because of the non-representative sample, data and analysis from MCOCR are intended to inform discussions in conjunction with other information sources. They should not be used to make broad 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 have implications for internal Marine Corps messaging.

What are the project's limitations?

1. The MCOCR sample was not designed to be representative of the Marine Corps population in terms of sex, race/ethnicity, MOS, or other characteristics. Therefore, the data cannot be used in statistical analysis designed to make claims about all Marines. Sample demographics are included in the March 2018 report from the project, available at <https://apps.dtic.mil/docs/citations/AD1079774>.
2. The project did not include reservists or recently retired/separated Marines due to Marine Corps interpretation of DoD guidance on information collections at the time the research was designed.
3. We did not actively seek volunteers above E-8s and O-5s; therefore, the senior voice is not strong in the sample.

Who funded and sponsored the project?

The project falls within the normal scope of work of CAOCL's Translational Research Group (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 provided assistance with logistics, travel for research team members who were not part of CAOCL, 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, MCB Quantico, MCB Camp Lejeune, MCAS Cherry Point, MCB Camp Pendleton, MCAGCC 29 Palms, MCAS Yuma, and MCB Camp Butler (Okinawa).

What are the qualifications and characteristics of the research team?

The principal investigator is a cultural anthropologist with more than 20 years of experience working with and doing research on national security organizations, including 10 years leading research teams on projects focused on the Marine Corps. The composition of the MCOCR research team has changed between 2017 and 2020, but team members have possessed graduate-level educational backgrounds in the following disciplines: cultural anthropology, sociology, cultural geography, international relations, education, communication, and evaluation science. 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 thus far have been 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 scientists and Marines during design and analysis.

MCOCR Quick Look Report: Rethinking Mentorship

Executive Summary

The Marine Corps and its Marines practice mentorship in a way that is closely aligned with leadership. Specifically, mentorship is often conceptualized, both in organizational publications and by Marines themselves, as an intra-unit endeavor and as something that senior-ranking Marines do to junior-ranking Marines. This “unit-hierarchy” model of mentorship has served many Marines well, but, according to Marines in our study, it has some significant blind spots. This report discusses those blind spots and addresses choice as an important element of the mentor-mentee relationship. We suggest that promoting mentorship choices outside of the unit and chain of command may provide Marines with maximum mentorship potential. We provide examples of how some Marines have cultivated beneficial mentoring relationships outside of their command, highlighting how this choice is particularly vital for women. The main themes of this report are:

1. Many of the problems Marines talk about with leadership can be said of mentorship within the unit-hierarchy mentorship model. While leadership is confined necessarily to the unit, mentorship does not have to be. For Marines with weak or uninterested leaders, finding a mentor outside of the chain of command might alleviate some of the personal and professional ramifications of poor unit leadership.
2. An alignment of values between mentor and mentee is a big factor in mentorship choices. For a Marine to find a mentor within the unit whose values and/or experiences they share may be difficult for certain minority individuals.
3. Bias of any sort within a unit can deprive certain individuals and groups of healthy mentoring relationships. This is a reason why minority populations, such as female Marines, may benefit from seeking mentorship outside of the bounds of the unit.
4. Reverse mentorship (which is when an individual with less status mentors someone with more status) is sanctioned between senior enlisted and junior officers. However, other forms of reverse mentorship seem to be looked down upon, even when an individual has valuable experience to share with those who outrank him or her.
5. Personality is a big factor in finding a mentor. Not all will mesh with those in their units, and so opening the aperture of mentorship beyond the unit will possibly increase successful mentoring relationships.
6. For female Marines, choice of mentor is complex but particularly essential. Women’s challenges in both finding and being mentors illustrate why choice outside the chain of command is important. These challenges include:
 - a. Although there is an expectation within the Corps that women are the best mentors for other women, this is not always the case.
 - i. Shared sex does not equate with shared experience or personality alignment.
 - ii. Some women are hesitant to mentor other women for various reasons, including:
 1. Some women have mixed feelings about encouraging the career of women in the Corps when they themselves have had bad experiences in the organization.

2. Some women do not want to mentor or be mentored by other women for fear that reputation is contagious, i.e., they will get labelled with the negative stereotype of their mentor or mentee.
- b. The assumption that women should mentor other women has organizational and personal impacts when women are extracted from and added to military occupational specialties (MOSs) for the purpose of creating “safe landing zones” for women in certain MOSs.
- c. Some men are hesitant to mentor women. This stems from the fear, rampant in the Corps, that women are likely to falsely accuse men of misconduct and/or somehow get men into trouble. Another factor might be that men do not perceive themselves to be capable of mentoring women, citing biological and personality differences.
- d. Women tend to be more scrutinized across the Marine Corps, and even more so when they become mothers. Female participants appreciated seeing Marine mothers in leadership roles, even if they were not in the same unit.

CAVEAT: This report was produced in response to a leadership request to examine data from the Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Project to identify themes in Marine perspectives related to mentorship. Due to the Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning’s impending closure, the research team did not have time to fully investigate Marine Corps policies and programs related to mentorship or conduct new research focused on the topic in order to contextualize the perspectives Marines provided. The material presented here is, therefore, a quick look at mentorship in the dataset and should be used in combination with other analyses.

Introduction

“You can’t assign a mentor, but that’s what the Marine Corps, in its bureaucracy-minded approach, does!”¹

- Major² at MCAGCC Twentynine Palms

Marines often conflate mentoring with leadership. Because the Marine Corps has a rank- and unit-defined understanding of leadership, this is, by and large, also the model for mentorship – what we will call the “unit -hierarchy” model or paradigm of mentorship in this paper. Many Marines have benefitted from excellent mentorship from within their chain of command, but others struggle to find mentorship therein. This could be due to weak unit leadership, biased leadership, or a combination of factors. It could also be because mentors are expected to play so many roles. As

¹ This major was referring to the Marine Corps Mentoring Program (MCMP). An extended version of his thoughts are as follows: “I know that when I talk about mentorship, the Marine Corps has a mentorship program where you have a folder! And you have forms that you fill out! [in mocking authoritative voice.] The mentor, the mentee, and the things to improve on! And the good things. And every month you’re supposed to sit down and, ‘Okay, I’m your mentor. I’m assigned this.’ You can’t *assign* a mentor, but that’s what the Marine Corps, in its bureaucracy-minded approach does! Uh, ‘This sergeant is the mentor for these Marines, [tapping sound on table] and this corporal is the mentor for these Marines...’” This research took place right after the MCMP was cancelled, but the major did not appear to know about the development.

² Major (#126), Male, Interview, MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, 091917.

stated in the Marine Corps Mentoring Program³ (MCMP) Guidebook,⁴ “at any one time, a mentor could be a teacher, guide, counselor, motivator, sponsor, coach, advisor, referral agent, or role model” (p. 11). However, someone who excels at career guidance, for instance, might not be adept at counseling over family issues. For these reasons, choice – more specifically, the option to choose a mentor within *or outside of* one’s chain of command – appears to be a factor in successful mentoring relationships, according to Marines interviewed for the Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research (MCOCR) Project.

The data presented here point to limitations of the culturally “prescribed” mentor-mentee dyads inherent within the unit-hierarchy mentorship model (unit leader to unit subordinate, senior to junior, female to female), which appear not to serve some Marines as well as others. Like the Major quoted above expressed, the Marine Corps tends to “assign” mentors. Our data indicate that mentors and mentees are paired up according to rank, unit, and sex. This happens both formally – such as through mentorship programs – and informally – such as through the assumption that a mentor and mentee should be of the same sex. As this report details, women seem to be especially at risk for lacking quality mentorship within the confines of the unity-hierarchy paradigm. Most of the Marine mentees whose mentors were outside of the unit hierarchy described positive relationships, and their examples provide insights into why decoupling the mentorship from leadership and promoting choice more broadly might be advantageous. *Please note, while this report focuses on identity factors pertaining to sex and how they relate to mentorship (a relationship that was clearly present in our data), a more focused and in-depth analysis would be needed to analyze how other identity factors, such as ethnicity, relate to mentorship experiences.*

The Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Project

The Translational Research Group⁵ (TRG) initiated the MCOCR Project⁶ as part of the Marine Corps’ response to the March 2017 Marines United Facebook misconduct.⁷ The research was an exploratory endeavor designed to capture Marines’ perceptions of leadership, cohesion, and

³ The MCMP Guidebook states that the mission of the MCMP is “to provide another leadership tool to guide you on the road to successful leadership and the ‘developing’ of Marines. The mentoring program is formal, in that research, resources and manpower were used to develop and implement the concepts throughout the Marine Corps. The mentorship program is not designed to preclude on-the-spot counseling, immediate corrective action, or formal disciplinary actions when appropriate.” In talking to Marines for this project, there was no evidence that the MCMP was universally applied nor that the MCMP Guidebook and the roadmap it provides for cultivating mentor-mentee relationships were widely known or utilized. The same can be said of the MCMP’s replacement, the Marine Leader Development (MLD) framework.

⁴ The MCMP Guidebook was published in 2006 and can be found here:
<https://www.marines.mil/Portals/1/Publications/NAVMC%20DIR%201500.58.pdf>.

⁵ The Translational Research Group is situated within Marine Corps University’s Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning. TRG is a small interdisciplinary social science research team that, at the time of the MCOCR Project, consisted of academics from the fields of anthropology, sociology, international policy studies, geography, education studies, and evaluation sciences.

⁶ The Office of Manpower and Reserve Affairs requested that TRG conduct this research. For more information on how the project unfolded, please see Foshier, Kerry, Lane, Rebecca, Tarzi, Erika, Post, Kristin, Gauldin, Eric, Edwards, Jennifer, and McLean, Jeremy. (2020). Translational Research in a Military Organization: The Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Project. *Annals of Anthropological Practice*, published online 22 February 2020: volume and issue forthcoming.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/napa.12130>.

⁷ The Marines United Facebook misconduct involved members of a private Facebook page posting nude pictures of female Marines and making disparaging, crude, and violent comments about them. Members of this Facebook page included active-duty Marines and retired Marines as well as members (active-duty and retired) of other services.

gender bias to provide insight into why something like the Marines United misconduct might occur. TRG collected data from August until October of 2017 in the national capital region and at Marine Corps Base (MCB) Camp Lejeune, Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Cherry Point, MCB Camp Pendleton, Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC) Twentynine Palms, MCAS Yuma, and MCB Camp Butler in Okinawa, Japan. In total, TRG conducted 150 interviews and 32 focus groups with 267 unique participants. Interviews and focus groups lasted between half an hour and two hours and were semi-structured in design to allow Marines to introduce topics that had not been apparent at the outset of the project. Mentoring is one such topic that arose in conversations with the participants. In this report we take a very broad view of mentorship. This reflects the views of our participants, who also described mentorship in a diverse manner. Participants referenced mentorship in relation to leadership, counseling, career progression, on-the-job knowledge, problem-solving, giving and seeking advice, role models, and navigating personal affairs.

A Note on Organizational Conceptualizations of Mentorship

This report sometimes refers to conceptualizations of mentorship within organizational programs, orders, and literature; the purpose of this is to situate individual understandings of mentorship within organizational ethos. However, **the main focus of this report is Marines' perspectives and experiences surrounding mentorship as opposed to organizational conceptualizations.** Our data indicate that Marines often have limited knowledge of large scale policies and programs. Further, the bearing that mentorship-related programs and orders has on the everyday lives of Marines cannot be determined from our research, as we did not specifically ask about it.

The Marine Corps Mentoring Program was officially cancelled in July of 2017 and replaced with the Marine Leader Development (MLD) framework.⁸ The research from which this report draws its data was conducted shortly thereafter, in August, September, and October of 2017. The MLD's conceptualization of mentorship⁹ is more in line with what this report recommends, stating, "Mentoring is a voluntary relationship between two individuals and should not be directed or forced." Although the MLD's conceptualization of mentorship is not as rigid as what we as the unit-hierarchy model, the unit-hierarchy model still exists heavily in other organizational publications, including *Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1 – Warfighting* and *Marine Corps Reference Publication 6-11D –Sustaining the Transformation*. This is also the mentorship guidance found in the MCMP Guidebook, which states that the mentoring program "is designed to follow the chain of command relationship, so that each leader is responsible for mentoring his/her subordinates" (p. 12). To the best of our knowledge, the Marine Corps seems to provide mentorship tools and guidance for leaders, but no strict oversight is imposed. Nonetheless, we do refer to organizational understandings of mentorship in order to compare and contrast them with the lived realities of Marines.

⁸ The MLD website states explicitly that MLD is a *framework*: "[MLD] is neither a philosophy nor a program; rather, it is a framework to be used by Marines at all levels for themselves and subordinates."

⁹ From page 5 of MCO 1500.61, which can be found here:

https://www.usmcu.edu/Portals/218/MCO%201500_61%20Marine%20Leader%20Development_1.pdf

Issues within the Unit-Hierarchy Model

In our data, Marines frequently described mentorship as paralleling leadership's emphasis on pushing down guidance through a structured chain of command. For instance, a 1st lieutenant¹⁰ in our study said, "You are in charge of your platoons. You need to mentor your squad leaders. Squad leaders, you are in charge of your squad. You must mentor your fire team leaders. Fire team leaders, you're in charge of your fire team." As with this infantry-based example, all Marine units break into smaller groups where the senior ranking Marine is expected to lead and mold the junior ranks. While a good leader may be a good mentor, leadership failures inside the unit can decrease the capacity for good mentorship within the unit-hierarchy model.

Role models: Value alignment in mentorship

Many Marines in our sample equated mentors with role models, typically talking about Marines whose behavior they observed and emulated. However, some also made the distinction between "bad" role models and "good" role models. A gunnery sergeant¹¹ addressed how he actually learns from both:

It's hard to describe mentoring. There are leaders that help me because I observe them doing the right thing. To me that's the way I learn, seeing somebody and saying, pardon my French, but "that guy's a dick, and he's only doing that because he's a gunny and he's a staff sergeant." ... So, yeah, there are people that I observed that were positive influences, and there are people that I observed that were negative influences.

A 1st lieutenant¹² also distinguished positive influences from the negative influences. She articulated how advice was given to her by a mentor who might have been well-meaning but whose values (e.g., "taking care of yourself") did not align with the lieutenant's values ("protecting the institution"):

So, I have some phenomenal senior mentorship, and then I've had mentorship that's literally pulled me to the side and said, "Hey, you're not going to survive if you don't start throwing people under the bus or if you don't start taking care of yourself. You've got to protect yourself at all costs," and that, to me, I'm kind of seen as stubborn or pig-headed sometimes just because I'm the type of person that says, "No, I don't have to agree with you. I think your advice is kind of shitty, and I don't believe that that is what the organization stands for, and if you're protecting yourself, you're not protecting the institution."

Both the sergeant and lieutenant illustrated the importance of value alignment in mentorship. While Marines are ideally instilled with common Marine Corps values during their initial training, the reality of the human experience means that not all who join the fleet will unerringly adhere to those values, or that individuals will express those values in coherent and consistent ways. Many of the Marines to whom we spoke reported having experienced or enacted poor leadership (see "Those who can't lead...also can't mentor" below). The option to go outside of the unit to find a

¹⁰ 1st Lieutenant (#516), Male, Officer Focus Group, MCAS Yuma, 092517.

¹¹ Gunnery Sergeant (#038), Male, Interview, MCB Camp Lejeune, 082317.

¹² 1st Lieutenant (#045), Female, Interview, MCB Camp Lejeune, 082317.

mentor might mitigate experiences in which a Marine gets frustrated because their leadership does not seem to espouse or enact values that align with their own. It might also allow young Marines who are new to the fleet to see and experience various types of mentorship and leadership, as opposed to having just one template to follow. In effect, it might give them a “Plan B” should their unit leadership fail them.

Those who can't lead...also can't mentor

Because leadership and mentorship are so intertwined in the Marine Corps, many of the problems Marine participants associated with leadership also arose in discussions of mentorship. Many Marines learned how to lead through the examples set by their leaders. But how effective is this model if a Marine has never witnessed good leadership? A major¹³ said this was especially a problem for junior enlisted:

So when you're a junior enlisted leader, corporal or whatever, you haven't had intensive leadership type mentoring and training, most of the mentoring part from a quality leader, an actual mentor, you default to what you've always known. And what do we all know? We all know the Drill Instructor yelling. So, um, we end up thinking, especially the guys at MCT¹⁴, SOI¹⁵, and entry level schools, the lance corporals, corporals, and sergeants who are in charge of herding the students along [snaps finger], “Do this thing,” right?

One senior staff non-commissioned officer¹⁶ (SNCO) admitted she had been a poor leader and mentor because she mimicked the outbursts she observed with her drill instructors, which were not getting results.

As a staff sergeant, I think that was my biggest learning curve because I would yell at people for no reason. Just because I was a staff sergeant and I could just yell at people. I could be, you know, yelling, yelling, yelling and absolutely zero [chuckles] effect. So, even though that sounds super hypocritical – and it absolutely is – because those were the things I despised from my drill instructor, I did it. And it's a learned behavior through the culture.

Likewise, a captain¹⁷ described how ineffective yelling can be for junior Marines in need of development, especially when shouting is accompanied by a lack of follow-up for either the Marine or the leader:

You get those guys that kind of get lazy with that and just leave it as a verbal, like, “Hey, fix yourself.” You know, obviously, probably more politically incorrect than that. But they're gonna leave it at that and not do any paperwork. If they've had to correct you five times, they're just gonna yell louder the next time. So, it does take some paperwork. I mean, it's a bureaucracy. So, we've gotta take the bureaucratic steps. So, a lot of times that's where people get themselves in trouble. Since we have so much turn over in leadership, you set the next guy up for failure 'cause it's like, “Yeah, these guys all suck at doing their job. They suck as Marines.”

¹³ Major (#126), Male, Interview, MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, 091917.

¹⁴ Marine Combat Training

¹⁵ School of Infantry

¹⁶ Rank Withheld (#263), Female, Interview, MCB Camp Butler, 101717.

¹⁷ Captain (#016), Male, Interview, MCB Camp Lejeune, 082217.

In the senior SNCO's personal account of bad leadership and the captain's perspective of the wide-ranging impacts of bad leadership, it is evident that a lack of positive role models plays a role, and that bad leadership is infectious. However, unlike infectious disease, the best course of action for bad leadership is to un-quarantine mentorship from the confines of the unit. Marines who have greater exposure to other leaders and mentors will have a smaller risk of passing on bad leadership to others.

Biased leadership and nowhere else to go

It was evident from the data that unit leadership may disregard subordinates because of a specific bias. The following story is emblematic of this phenomenon. It describes how a junior enlisted Marine encountered bias and poor leadership, which negatively affected her ability to do her job as well as her professional reputation.

This lance corporal¹⁸ first entered the fleet six months prior to our interview. Her unit soon came under investigation for hazing that she herself experienced, although she was so new that, "I didn't even know at the time when we got hazed that it was hazing until someone from another building across from us recorded it and posted it on Facebook." She exhibited little emotion when recounting this incident but became visibly and audibly emotional when she described the disrespect she experienced while trying to learn and perform well in her job. She described one incident where she and her roommate were sent on a run to pick up a heavy metal container known as a quadcon.

[A]nd we asked, "Do we need like chains and binds, like do we need anything?" And they said, "No. Just click it in and go. Like it should be fine. It should fit." Well, we got there, and it didn't fit. Like it only- it's supposed to have three-point contact, and there was only two.

As the lance corporal and her roommate realized they needed additional equipment, they received a text from a friend in their unit asking if everything was all right. The friend relayed the conversation he overheard in the office. The lance corporal recounted this, saying:

Well, a lot of people over here are talking about your run right now. And like, somebody asked like, "Who the fuck these girls are?" And then one of your NCOs¹⁹ said, "Those wooks²⁰ are mine." So, we're just wondering like what's going on with you all?

The use of the word "girls" and "wooks" perhaps indicates that their perceived ineptitude was in some way tied to their sex. The lance corporal admitted that she was "clueless" about her job, as many junior Marines are when they first hit the fleet, but that she was eager to learn more. The quadcon assignment was her first chance to prove herself and, according to her, was also her last. The lance corporal continued with frustration in her voice, "No matter how hard I tried- all I did was I try to work. And they [NCOs in her unit] don't really see my accomplishments. They see all my little mistakes. And it's just like- I just get like mad anxiety now." With three more years ahead of her, and few positive experiences thus far in her career, this junior Marine's helplessness about who could be trusted in her unit and how to learn her job was palpable.

¹⁸ Lance Corporal (#624), Female, Interview, MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, 091917.

¹⁹ Non-Commissioned Officer

²⁰ "Wooks," short for Wookie, a fictional species in *Star Wars*. It is a derogatory term used for female Marines.

Although bad leadership was a big topic of conversation in our interviews and focus groups, because of the exploratory nature of this research, we make no claims to how frequent this type of leadership is in the Marine Corps. It is obvious, though, that if a pattern of poor or biased leadership does exist, it is possible that Marines in that unit, especially those who are new to the fleet, will struggle to succeed in their professional roles. Biased leadership is a substantial problem that is beyond the scope of this paper, but its impact on mentorship might be alleviated if Marines did not perceive their units as the only place where they can seek mentorship relationships. Granted, in the case of the lance corporal above, her unit was the prime spot to find the career mentorship that she needed. However, had she had any other type of support or mentorship outside of her unit, she might not be so disenchanted with the Corps only six months into her enlistment. Although the lance corporal did not talk about whether or not she would reenlist, it is not likely too far a stretch to say that good mentorship is conducive to force retention, while a lack of mentorship is not.

Who mentors the officers?

Officers stood out in our data as a subset of the population desiring more mentoring. As a subset of a subset, this more heavily applied to senior officers. Early-career officers may receive some informal guidance, possibly in the form of an informal “rudder steer,” as this major²¹ said in reference to lieutenants, “We’re all juggling metaphorical balls, right? Some of them are glass. Some of them are rubber. We allow the lieutenants to drop the rubber balls. We make sure that we’re there to catch the glass ones.”

Informal guidance aside, some officers in this sample stated that they received less formal mentoring from senior leaders than appears to occur among enlisted Marines. Formal mentoring was often viewed as synonymous with counseling, which officers in this sample said is rare. In an officer focus group conducted aboard MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, a major, captain, and 2nd lieutenant all agreed that they had received little to no career guidance in the form of counseling or reviews²². The 2nd lieutenant²³ summed up his struggle, “I had to pull teeth to get my initial counseling. Like I literally had to actually pull teeth to get my initial counseling. And then I switched RSs²⁴. And I’m still like, ‘Hey! I would like refinement!’” A colonel²⁵ agreed, offering he had received relatively little formal guidance over the course of his career. “I probably had six counseling sessions total, from those two officers [*a reviewing officer and a general officer*] that equated to about three hours of time. And that would have been in about twenty-two years of service.”

The MCMP Guidebook states, “This mentoring program is intended to replace the counseling program. *The counseling program focused on duty performance and was primarily structured for the junior Marine.* The mentoring program is intended to encompass all aspects of every Marine’s life” (p. 6, emphasis added by authors). This quote suggests that counseling was intended to be directed toward the development of junior Marines’ job skills, which might explain why these officers have lacked counseling in their careers. However, the quote also

²¹ Major (#126), Male, Interview, MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, 091917.

²² Mixed Sex Officer Focus Group, MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, 091817.

²³ 2nd Lieutenant (#620), Male, Mixed Sex Officer Focus Group, MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, 091817.

²⁴ Reporting Senior

²⁵ Colonel (#617), Interview, Male, MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, 091817.

suggests that the Corps has made moves to expand mentorship and guidance beyond junior job development and to include those who are not junior within the fleet. In the case of these officers, however, these changes have borne no substantial fruit.

Rethinking Mentorship – Challenges and Successes

The Marines thus far have described how they were disappointed by leaders who were incapable or incompetent as mentors within their units (to be sure, many had good experiences cultivating mentor-mentee relationships within their units, but this report highlights the negative experiences to show the potential blind spots of the unit-hierarchy model of mentorship). On the other hand, Marines in our sample also described positive experiences with choosing – and in some cases *being* – unlikely mentors. The following stories illustrate how the rigid leadership hierarchy that otherwise defines the military does not necessarily define who is a good mentor.

The bias against certain forms of “reverse mentorship”

Reverse mentorship is the mentoring of an individual with more experience or status by a junior member of an organization²⁶. In the Marine Corps, it is not uncommon for someone of higher rank – namely, new officers – to have less experience than senior enlisted Marines. Officers, no matter what their experience, are higher ranking than enlisted, but it is common knowledge that the gunnery sergeant is the backbone of the Marine Corps because of their experience and advisory capacity.

For example, a Marine officer²⁷ described her mentor: a female gunnery sergeant who taught at Officer Candidate School. The officer admired the enlisted Marines’ command presence and her ability to keep everyone in line. According to the 2nd lieutenant, her mentor was known for “coming up with the worst burns. Like she made me feel terrible! [*chuckles*] Like, she could just tear you up!” But in addition to being demanding, the gunnery sergeant could be empathetic. The 2nd lieutenant recalled what the gunnery sergeant did during one of their runs where another officer candidate was falling behind:

And so, there are people turning on [the officer candidate]. And we were out for a particular run, and this girl was falling back, you know. This was like third run this week, and she's falling back, falling back, falling back. And instead of just laying into her, like all the other gunnery sergeants and our officer were doing, this gunnery sergeant turned around, slowed down the whole squad, turned around, and started looping, like looped back, and got her, and had her lead, and like kept getting her. Every time she'd fall back, she'd make all of us run with her and make all of us get her to go. It was the first time I'd ever heard a sergeant instructor say anything positive to anyone and was like, “Come on. You played basketball in college. This is all mental. You can do this.” And started motivating her. And to me that was really awesome.

But while young officers are meant to learn and be mentored by experienced enlisted Marines, other types of reverse mentorship, such as if junior enlisted were to mentor more senior

²⁶ Gurchiek, Kathy. “Considering Reverse Mentoring? Check out These Tips.” Society for Human Resources Management, 10 November 2017. Available online at <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/organizational-and-employee-development/pages/considering-reverse-mentoring-check-out-these-tips.aspx>

²⁷ 2nd Lieutenant (#125), Female, Interview, MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, 091817.

enlisted or officers, are viewed as out of place or as fraternization. Contrast the 2nd lieutenant's story with this "unsanctioned" form of reverse mentorship. This lance corporal²⁸ described how he was helping higher ranking Marines learn their jobs when others in his unit told him that a lower ranking Marine could not do that:

I had been in my job for a year, and I had corporals and a sergeant who had come, and they've only been there for three months. So, like I was still kind of teaching them how to do their job and everything like that. Then they said, "Hey, we're picking mentors." There was three Marines who were like, "Hey, we want Lance Corporal [name removed] to be our mentor for the job." And they – the NCOs – told them, they're like, "You cannot have a lance corporal as a mentor." And I kind of talked to them, and I was like, "Isn't the idea of mentoring supposed to be like person-to-person, not Marine-to-Marine?" And they- my whole entire opinion was shut down. I was kind of like, "All right, whatever." And I, off the book, taught them how to do everything they need to do to be a successful Marine.

Although higher ranking Marines wanted the lance corporal as their mentor, they were told this was unacceptable. Since rank does not automatically signify experience, mentoring relationships across ranks is consistent with an experience-based approach to mentoring. Promoting mentor-mentee choice beyond the unit-hierarchy paradigm might encourage and normalize reverse mentoring and maximize the potential for younger Marines to disseminate experience-based knowledge to Marines of all ranks. Of course, this must be done with caution, so as not to impair the "good order and discipline" ideally instilled in young Marines through watching their leaders direct and mentor their subordinates. Moreover, it must not impinge on the operational necessity of leaders being able to command their subordinates without being questioned.

Finding someone "like you" or someone you like

As seen in the 2nd lieutenant's OCS story above, command presence and leadership skills can be just as important as job-related knowledge for some Marines when choosing a mentor. Relatedly, personality is an important factor when choosing a mentor. In the case below, an NCO²⁹ chose a master gunnery sergeant outside of her MOS as her mentor, in part because of their shared values and similar personalities. This sergeant, who felt overlooked by her male counterparts and lacked trust with the leaders in her unit, recounted:

Interviewer: Okay. When you said one of them is actually your mentor, is that because you chose that person? Or is that a-

Sgt: Yes, I chose him. He actually- he sits in the back [of the office suite]. So, he's actually a part of the band. So, he's not one of those people that falls into a like little clique, I guess.

Interviewer: Okay. Why- is *that* why? Because he's an outsider?

Sgt: A little bit, but we also have very similar personalities. So, if I were to walk down the hall and somebody was jacked up [in their uniform appearance], I would immediately correct it. He's kind of that same character type. So, we just- we vibe really well.

²⁸ Lance Corporal (#137), Male, Focus Group, MCAS Yuma, 092617.

²⁹ Sergeant (#601), Female, Interview, Pentagon, 090617.

Another case in which personality was a factor was when young Marines sought advice from their recruiters, even after entering the fleet. Given that Marine recruiters are screened and trained to “own our mission by taking care of our people,”³⁰ they may personify qualities that attracted young individuals to the Marine Corps in the first place. In the case of this lance corporal³¹ who, like the sergeant above, also distrusted the leadership inside his unit, his recruiter, a “chill guy,” seemed like a viable option when he needed advice:

Interviewer: So, is that something that you feel like you have a relationship just like– is he somebody that you trust and feel comfortable talking to?

LCpl: Actually, I don't know him that much. Like I said, I was in the recruiting phase for not even a month before I went out to recruit training. So, I honestly don't know him that much. All I know is that he is a cooler guy. I don't know, I guess [*chuckles*]. I've talked to him before, but he's just a more of a chill guy. And obviously, he's a staff sergeant, so he knows more. So that's why I called him. And he kind of helped me.

These two enlisted Marines exhibited initiative by asking for mentorship directly rather than relying on the unit-based model of senior leader mentors. Promoting a broad approach to mentorship that permits Marines to define what they want and from whom is likely to rely on and simultaneously reinforce Marine initiative.

Flawed Role Models

Role models are not necessarily perfect. First-hand cautionary tales from early mistakes can also be useful. In fact, these types of “lesson learned” stories are easy to find among prominent Marine leaders. For instance, in his Passage of Command speech, former Marine Commandant Robert B. Neller expressed regret at setting fire to range two at Camp Hansen as a young lieutenant,³² and on his book tour, retired General Mattis has recounted mistakes he made with the media when he was the commanding officer in Iraq. Implicit in these stories is that certain mistakes determine neither the character nor the career of a Marine. Weak, biased, or uninterested leadership, however, can shape both, especially for Marines who are new to the fleet. There is no formula for a perfect leader, and the same goes for a perfect mentor. Many of the Marines we interviewed reported that a good leader is one who is human and does not purport to be flawless. However, there seems to be a line between endearing fallibility and behavior that undermines Marines’ trust and confidence in a leader.

³⁰ Marine Corps Recruiters School website. Retrieved from <https://www.mcrc.marines.mil/Unit-Home/Recruiters-School/> on 21 February 2020.

³¹ Lance Corporal (#019), Male, Interview, MCB Camp Lejeune, 082217.

³² Video recorded on 11 July 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.dvidshub.net/video/696028/commandant-marine-corps-passage-command> on 21 February 2020.

Same Sex Mentors or Not?

In the case of women³³ in our sample, biological sex was a limiting factor in choosing mentors, sometimes with negative results. This was especially the case when women were expected to mentor or be mentored by other women in their unit, which is commonly the case. Female participants who had the opportunity to choose mentors inside or outside their unit were often satisfied with their choice. In a few cases, it appeared that men also benefitted from female mentors (see “Should women be empathy coaches?” below). While women in this sample were comfortable with male mentors, a few men were not as comfortable mentoring females. That said, female Marines considering or experiencing motherhood received some benefit from merely seeing other mothers who were advanced in their careers, regardless of whether they were advised by them. Same-sex mentorships may work out well for men who, by virtue of sheer numbers, have more mentoring choices within their unit. However, for women, due to the very limited numbers, the relationships may be more forced, and in those cases, the outcome can be damaging.

Should women be empathy coaches?

Some men enjoyed mentoring women because they perceived them to be different from men. One chief warrant officer 2³⁴ believed that women “feel emotion better,” which he believed to be critical to good leadership. He also touched on a more subtle dynamic: whether men feel comfortable speaking to women about personal matters. In this case, he welcomed communication that was emotional, whether or not it was from a man or woman: “Ladies allow themselves to feel emotion better. So, I find that I have to dig a little deeper in the fellas. One, let them understand it's OK for them have emotions, especially when bad stuff happens, like when family dies.”

In a focus group, a major³⁵ said she was dubious of the assumption that she has more empathy, but nonetheless she was grateful that one of her leaders valued empathy:

[O]ne of the better leaders I worked for, and he was really upfront. ... [H]e's like, “I don't really work with a lot of women.” He's like, “I struggle with empathy.” He's like, “Maybe you can help me balance that.” Like, he saw the value that, I guess, maybe my gender brought. I don't know, but apparently, I am supposed to have a whole bunch of empathy that would solve it. But that's what he saw when he looked at me, and, you know, he was really- I appreciate his honesty about it. Well, he's trying, you know. You just don't get that. You don't even get the impression that people are trying with that at all.

Regardless of whether all women are inherently better at empathy, the assumption that they are might be the grounds for unlikely, diverse, and fruitful mentorship relationships.

Complexities with female-female mentorship pairs

In a hyper-masculine organization (the Marine Corps was only 7% female at the time of this study³⁶) same-sex mentorship for women comes with challenges that same-sex mentorship for men

³³ We also realize that choice in mentorship is important for men. However, we focus on women in this paper because our data show that women's choice is more frequently limited by bias and assumptions.

³⁴ Chief Warrant Officer 2 (#616), Male, Interview, MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, 091817.

³⁵ Major (#201), Female, Focus Group, MCB Quantico, 090617.

³⁶ Headquarters Marine Corps. (2017) The Marine Corps Demographics Update as of June 2017. Headquarters Marine Corps, Arlington, VA.

does not. The assumption that women are the best mentors for other women leaves female Marines with limited options for mentors and even fewer (and perhaps none at all) when looking only within their unit.

As discussed above, value alignment is an important part of mentorship, and shared sex does not automatically equate to shared values and life experience. Many women reported choosing mentors on the basis of shared values as opposed to shared sex. In fact, the lance corporal³⁷ whose NCOs sidelined her based on her failed quadcon run did not seek advice from a female NCO in her unit precisely because of the NCO's private behavior, which she felt conflicted with Marine Corps values.

[Y]ou're supposed to have a higher standard for yourself. Because you're entrusted to protect like everyone around you. And so, I don't go out and like go to raves and like wear a bra and underwear around, covered in glow-in-the-dark paint. Like, that's just not what I do. Like I know who I am as a Marine. Like, I don't know. I think that's where the stigma comes from! Because I think I do it too. Where like you see a female who wants to have some fun, and then they try to go back to work, and you're like, "You just did this over the weekend."

The lance corporal had already concluded, perhaps hastily, that she and the NCO did not share the same leadership values. Likewise, in the case of the following lieutenant³⁸, she and her mentee did not have shared values, and this was a problem:

[T]he schoolhouse said, "This female sergeant has had behavioral issues in the past. She needs a positive female role model. We'll put them on the same team." And I, after the fact, was like, "Okay, but this female sergeant is tatted up, dips, vapes, and drives a monster truck." And there's no way that she's going to be like, "Oh, yay! A liberal [*name of university removed to protect participant*] graduate female!" Just because we're the same gender doesn't mean that I can mentor her.

In the 1st lieutenant's experience, leadership assumed she would be an effective mentor because she was mentoring another woman. This is a common error, according to a staff sergeant³⁹ who stated, "and that's what a lot of leaders overall don't understand. Like, just because I'm a staff sergeant doesn't necessarily mean that I'm gonna make the right choices for these female Marines." What unites these and other women is that they do not see their sex as a determining factor in a successful mentorship, even though their leaders may. Many women also expressed a hesitancy to associate with other women, as the stereotyping that women in the Corps inevitably face⁴⁰ might make it a risk to associate with other women.

Further, many women have had negative experiences related to their sex and, thus, do not always feel as though they can sincerely encourage the career of other women in an organization where they themselves do not always feel seen or protected. This was the case with a corporal,⁴¹ who reported being sexually assaulted by a Marine in her unit but was reportedly told by the

³⁷ Lance Corporal (#624), Female, Interview, MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, 091917.

³⁸ 1st Lieutenant (#326), Female, Interview, MCB Camp Butler, 101917.

³⁹ Staff Sergeant (#043), Female SCNO Focus Group, MCB Camp Lejeune, 082317.

⁴⁰ Archer, Emerald. (2012) The Power of Gendered Stereotypes in the US Marine Corps. *Armed Forces & Society* 39(2): 359-391.

⁴¹ Corporal (#309), Female, Interview, MCB Camp Pendleton, 091417.

prosecutor, “We know that it happened. ... We just can’t prove it.” With her alleged assaulter off to recruiting school, she remained at the unit where her faith in her senior leadership had been shaken by the way the assault had been handled. Her leaders, in turn, were asking her to mentor women who were checking into the unit, reportedly saying, “This is the time for you to really like take them under your wing like you’ve been doing with the other [male] Marines, but maybe like with the females some more.” The corporal continued:

I don’t know what that means. I kind of feel like it means, “Even if things don’t go your way, make sure that the Marines stay classy like you and don’t make a big fuss about it.” And I wanted to scream and tell them to go fuck themselves! But I’m [laughs] classier than that. And so, I nodded my head, and I said, “Yes, sir.” And I don’t know what I’m going to do about those female Marines, and I want to empower them and make them feel like they need to be like me, and they need to stick up for what they think is right. But at the same time, I’m not sure that they’re as strong as I am and they’re going to be able to handle the reprisals and the repercussions and the consequences that are going to come from them acting like me.

We cannot know exactly what her leadership was asking or thinking. It is possible that this corporal’s senior leadership views sexual assault as a problem women need to avoid rather than one that men need to prevent and that this is why they asked her to mentor the incoming women. Another possibility is that her leadership is simply under the impression that women are automatically better mentors for women. For several reasons, one of which is discussed in more detail below, men are often hesitant to mentor women. Whatever the case, this corporal was hesitant to mentor these women – even though her leadership thought it would be a good idea – because, in her estimation, telling them to “stick up for what they think is right” might put them at risk for negative consequences and reprisals.

Organizational impacts of the “women mentor women” mentality

Women being encouraged to mentor other women can be frustrating on a personal scale, but now that they are entering previously restricted MOSs and MOSs that have not typically had many women, some women’s careers are being impacted based on the assumption that women are needed to “build a landing zone”⁴² for other women. The intention to build a landing zone is well-meaning, according to this captain⁴³ who heard General Brilakis give a brief about “priming the pump” for women in the aviation community. The captain also perceived the effort to be highly effective:

I can offer up an example of how it works. So like females in aviation. So we got a brief from General Brilakis when he was manpower, came [to the] postgraduate school to talk to us. He was explaining how they “primed the pump.” He was like, “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. 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

⁴² Corporal (#221), Female, Interview, MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, 091817.

⁴³ Captain (#105), Male, Captain, Officer Focus Group, MCB Quantico, 090617.

pilot.” And so they really crushed it all through whatever their training pipeline was up to that point. And so you get rock stars, no issue.

Others, like these officers in one focus group⁴⁴, saw shuffling women among MOSs as a hollow gesture rather than an empowering and effective strategy:

Lt A:⁴⁵ What is the minimum threshold that we think is a good appropriate number [of women] to have? You know, do you want to send one captain to be the first female in a battalion by herself with a staff sergeant who doesn't even work in her section, so they can't develop a good working relationship in preparation for SOI to drop off, you know, six girls?

LtCol B:⁴⁶ And, oh, by the way, that captain is not going to be their company commander.

Lt A: Exactly! She's in a completely different-

LtCol B: It doesn't matter. She just happens to be in the battalion.

Lt A: Yeah. She is a literal check in the box. Like, the way we're doing it, it doesn't make sense.

Furthermore, an insistence that women must be in the same unit to mentor one another will decrease female leadership in other MOSs where they once excelled. This captain⁴⁷ explained:

Right now there's like this mass exodus not just out of the service for other reasons, but of uniquely talented, qualified, leadership-heavy women who are never going to make it to that higher rank, or, you know, it's just not going to- because of the way that we work as a Marine Corps, and the way that we stovepipe our communities to have excellence. It's just the third order effect of that is that, you know, where my community used to be kind of the center of excellence for female leadership, it doesn't exist anymore. Because they're being [*inaudible*] to go out to these other places. So, that hurts my heart.

However, the other side of the same coin is that the MOSs that have a relatively significant number of women may in fact offer supportive environments for women; perhaps this is what the “landing zone” mentality is trying to facilitate. A major⁴⁸ described how the female leadership in her communications MOS created a system of support:

And our community does, for what it's worth, we do a good job of having kind of a network and support in our community. Which so many other communities don't. Because we have the leadership, you know? We've got colonels and lieutenant colonels in our community that are prevalent. ... And so, there's some level of mentorship you just get by being in the MOS.

As women are increasingly spread out among MOSs, being thinned out in certain MOSs and bulked up in others, the ability for them to choose among male and female mentors inside and outside their unit would be an asset to the Corps. As evidenced by these participants, the assumptions that women are better mentors to one another and that they must be in the same unit

⁴⁴ Mixed Sex Officer Focus Group, MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, 091817.

⁴⁵ 2nd Lieutenant (#620), Mixed Sex Officer Focus Group, MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, 091817.

⁴⁶ Lieutenant Colonel (#618) Mixed Sex Officer Focus Group, MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, 091817.

⁴⁷ Captain (#606), Female, Interview, Pentagon, 060917.

⁴⁸ Major (#322), Female Officer Focus Group, MCB Camp Butler, 101817.

to have a mentor-mentee relationship are effective in some cases, but potentially disruptive in others.

Men's reluctance to mentor women

Some male Marines are wary of mentoring women due to fears of false rumors about a non-existent relationship and/or the concern that they will be falsely accused of sexual misconduct (a fear that may be endemic to the organization, according to our data). This can deter men from cultivating professional relationships with female Marines. Men and women alike noted this. A researcher asked a male corporal⁴⁹ about the impact of false sexual assault accusations in the workplace:

You know, men have become so afraid of women in the work sector that they don't want to interact with them for fear of what could happen, you know? So, on top of that, you know, the women aren't getting the proper training that they need. They aren't getting "men-mentored" properly.

This "fear of women" was prevalent in our data, inside and outside of discussions of mentorship. It likely contributes to women's sense of isolation in the Corps, a theme that appeared heavily in our data.

Relatedly, women who have male mentors discussed the need to be cognizant of the fact that others might perceive their relationship to be inappropriate. A sergeant,⁵⁰ for example, talked about how, when she was a private first class (PFC), the NCOs of her unit were unsupportive, with some even telling her that she did not belong because she was female. She often went to her OIC⁵¹ for work advice, seeing him as the only one who was competent. While her SNCO did not say disparaging things to her, he gave her bad pros and cons scores because of her relationship with her OIC. She recalled:

He didn't say those things, but he would say certain things to me that – like pros and cons, for example. In my shop I would always go talk to my OIC about work stuff because no one else in my shop knew how to do it, and I was a PFC. So, my staff NCO tried to lower my pros and cons and said that my work relationship with my OIC was unprofessional. And once my pros and cons got to my OIC, he raised them 'cause he's like, "I don't understand why your pros and cons are so low. You do such a good job and you're a well-rounded Marine." But I mean after comments like that, I just never felt comfortable going to him. My OIC, I would have felt comfortable going to him, but at the same time I didn't feel comfortable passing all the ranks and going straight to an officer.

The sergeant viewed her SNCO's perception of her to have been tainted, "Just because we [she and her OIC] talked a lot, but it was all work related. I'd go to his office a lot, but that – his office was right outside our office. But I had to because nobody else knew how to do the work I was doing." Thus, even within a unit, women have to be careful about who they choose as a mentor, as the adage that "perception is reality" might mean that a woman with male mentors is perceived to be currying special favor. Having a mentor outside of one's unit might curb this perception. However, it is a catch-22 when a woman wants to have a mentor within her unit because she seeks to get

⁴⁹ Corporal (#135), Male, Interview, MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, 092017.

⁵⁰ Sergeant (#041), Female, Female Sergeants and Below Focus Group, MCB Camp Lejeune, 090617.

⁵¹ Officer in Charge

MOS- and unit-related knowledge from him. This points to a need, detailed in other reports⁵² on the Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Project, to ease the institutional stigma that women are dangerous, promiscuous, and to be avoided.

The Case for Male Advocates

Male advocates (also called allies) are men who stand up for women and help foster an environment in which women are seen as equals. Arguments about how women should be respected *simply because they are human* aside, a “stamp of approval” from a well-liked man can shift male perspectives on women. Male mentors can also be protectors against biased men, as was the case for this female major⁵³:

Because there weren't women to do it, and so these are men who saw me, saw that I had some sort of quality that they wanted to have stick around the Marine Corps, and very much advocated for me [*tapping table for emphasis*] over and over and over again because there were other men who really didn't want me there.

Male advocates are important for both quantitative and qualitative reasons. Men vastly outnumber women in the Marine Corps, and so men are essentially required for there to be any substantial numerical presence on the female empowerment front. Qualitatively, men can be particularly effective in combatting bias against a female minority because, unlike women, they do not constantly face biases that undermine their opinions and perspectives.⁵⁴

Mothers as mentors

Another possible reason some male Marines in our sample were uninterested in mentoring women is because they do not share certain experiences that are exclusive to the female body. None of the women in this sample mentioned this as an issue for them in having male mentors. However, they did express a desire to talk to, or even see, more mothers who were Marines. Marines who are mothers face a negative stigma in the Marine Corps, including from other women, as one corporal⁵⁵ who had a c-section explained:

I had another female be like, “Oh, I beat her in the run today.” I’m like, “Okay, what's your excuse? Because you didn't stick out a kid! Like, you should be physically fit! You had nothing to like hinder your ability.” So, it's like “Why wouldn't you have my back? And, you know, help me? Versus be like, ‘Ha! I beat her.’” And we're the same rank. Like, what the heck? That's why I think we fall through too. We don't have anyone's support.

Even though this corporal did not feel any support from within her unit, she was inspired when she attended a Women's Leadership Symposium⁵⁶ a few days prior to our interview and saw that there were senior enlisted women with several kids.

⁵² See, for example, Lane, Rebecca, Tarzi, Erika, Post, Kristin, Gauldin, Eric. (2018) “Marines’ Perspectives on Various Aspects of Marine Corps Organizational Culture.” Available at: <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/1079774.pdf>

⁵³ Major (#207), Female, Interview, Pentagon, 090717.

⁵⁴ For more on male advocates and male-female mentorship dyads, see: Johnson, W. Brad and David Smith. (2016) *Athena Rising: Why Men Should Mentor Women*. Bibliomotion, Inc.: New York, NY.

⁵⁵ Corporal (#634), Female, Interview, MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, 092017.

⁵⁶ This symposium took place at MCAGCC Twentynine Palms on September 15, 2017. Both authors attended.

I mean, I'm sure, in the past twenty years or so, that they must have been through like all the wars and everything. I know they've definitely gotten crap for having kids. But they're still making it.

This ability to see a higher-ranking mother who has been able to progress in her career appears to be important to Marines of various ranks. One lieutenant colonel⁵⁷ who was up for promotion decided to retire instead because she had no examples of higher-ranking women who were mothers:

I don't want it anymore. I have a family now. And I'm well-aware that the Marine Corps doesn't value families. They don't. And especially not female officers who have families. I mean, look at what we have! We have two female general officers. Both unmarried, no children. Both that carry themselves and act in ways that are not stereotypically feminine. And one of them I worked for! I worked for General [name removed] before! I know her! I love her. But you know what? I don't resemble her in any way. My life doesn't resemble her. I [laughs under breath] physically don't resemble her.

As one lieutenant colonel⁵⁸ succinctly put it, "I just want one general officer to stand up and say, 'It's okay to be a mom.'" In our prior reports,⁵⁹ we have discussed additional prejudice and stigma that women face. But a common theme, and one that the corporal and the lieutenant colonel referred to, is the impact a baby has on a female's body and, therefore, her career as a Marine. As one 2nd lieutenant⁶⁰ explained:

[R]ight now, it's like the time where I should be thinking about getting married, having children, and that piece. But I don't know how it's gonna affect my career. Just 'cause we have all these physical tests we have to take. And like to feed and raise a baby.

This is a topic she would like to discuss, but at her current duty station in Okinawa, it is difficult for her to find a mother to ask inside or outside her unit. This is one area of mentorship that is highly sex-related, though it is not necessarily solved by same-sex mentoring, as all female Marines do not have children, and not all mothers are automatically adept at mentoring others mothers. However, it is evident that merely seeing other Marine mothers as role models, whether or not they are in the same unit, has an impact on women's sense of belonging and validates their experiences in the Corps.

Conclusion and a Humble Suggestion

When Marines in this sample described a mentor or potential mentor, they tended to describe an individual whom they wanted to emulate. This applies to mothers who saw other

⁵⁷ Lieutenant Colonel (#603), Female, Interview, Pentagon, 090617.

⁵⁸ Lieutenant Colonel (#901), Female Officer Focus Group, MCB Quantico, 090617.

⁵⁹ Tarzi, Erika and Lane, Rebecca. (2019) "Pregnancy Loss: Insights from the Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Project." Available at (CAC required): <https://discover.dtic.mil/>

Lane, Rebecca. (2019) "Implicit and Explicit Perceptions of Fairness: Insights from the Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Project." Available at (CAC required): <https://discover.dtic.mil/>

Lane, Rebecca, Tarzi, Erika, Post, Kristin, Gauldin, Eric. (2018) "Marines' Perspectives on Various Aspects of Marine Corps Organizational Culture." Available at: <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/1079774.pdf>

⁶⁰ 2nd Lieutenant (#271), Female, Interview, MCB Camp Butler, 101917.

Marine mothers making it, a male sergeant⁶¹ who looked up to a female peer because “she’s a really, really great person,” a captain⁶² who admired “a badass Marine” colonel, and a major⁶³ whose enlisted Marines “were always hysterical – they always made the best out of a bad situation” on deployment. While a single mentoring formula, let alone definition, is not possible, those Marines who found positive mentorship relationships had success in finding them both within the traditional unit-hierarchy and by reaching outside of that structure. The latter was especially true for Marines whose identity factors (permanent or temporary) set them apart from the majority of the unit, including mothers and other women. It should also be noted here that while issues of ethnicity and mentorship did not immediately stand out in our data, a more in-depth analysis might reveal connections between participants’ self-reported ethnicities and their relation to their experiences with mentorship. Because identity does play a factor in mentorship, it is likely that non-white Marines also benefit when they find mentors outside of their unit, especially when units are not ethnically diverse.

In our interviews, we found that the impact of no or poor leadership within the unit often meant a lack of mentorship. While not surprising, it does give weight to the idea that mentorship decoupled from unit leadership allows Marines access to a wider pool of potential role models. When given that freedom, Marines did not choose their own leaders, their own sex, their own rank, or any other commonality by default. They instead defined categories that were important to them: shared values, shared experiences, career knowledge, or respect and admiration. Similarly, Marines do not seek just one type of mentor; some want career advice, others inspiration, and still others refinement (physical, occupational, leadership, or otherwise). Nor do they necessarily seek just one mentor for all things. Marines are already defining what kind of information is important and who is best able to mentor them. The Marine Corps as an institution can facilitate that by encouraging their initiative and rethinking messaging that, overtly or not, defines mentors by their location (the unit) rather than their function (the benefit to the Marine). While, of course, we do not suggest doing away intra-unit mentorship, we do suggest that increased promotion and facilitation of mentorship choice beyond unit will greatly benefit Marines and the organization as a whole.

A Humble Suggestion

So how can choice-beyond-unit be facilitated? Although firm recommendations are beyond this report’s purview, we believe that holding more events in which Marines with similar and dissimilar backgrounds and experiences can learn, listen, socialize, and even just *see* each other might expand the mentorship aperture for Marines. For women, this is particularly important. The nature of Marine demographics means that women are rarely in a group with several other women, except for their time in boot camp, OCS, and one-off organized events and within some MOSs. These experiences can be empowering, particularly when “exceptional leaders” are present.

We were able to attend the previously mentioned Women’s Leadership Symposium while conducting fieldwork at MCAGCC Twentynine Palms. The symposium brought together the majority of the women on that base in one place for a day of working groups and panel discussions. Many of the attendees were surprised there were so many women aboard the installation, as they do not see

⁶¹ Sergeant (#042), Male, Interview, MCB Camp Lejeune, 082317.

⁶² Captain (#610), Female, Interview, MCB Camp Pendleton, 091217.

⁶³ Major (#126), Male, Interview, MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, 091917.

each other on a day-to-day basis. Further, some noted that it was inspiring to see not only peers but also more senior Marines who had made their way through the ranks while also having families. It dawned on one lance corporal,⁶⁴ after seeing women who had successfully advanced in the ranks, that it was possible to find a mentor outside of her unit, “if you need higher-ups that are females to trust.” Another lance corporal⁶⁵ also attended this symposium and described the experience as a “breath of fresh air” that made her “wish that we had a staff NCO that we can like look up to. And to see what to do in our line of work. Like a role model on who to become or how to present ourselves.” As we stated earlier in this report, women are not necessarily better mentors to women. However, in some cases and for some women they are, and in an organization that consists mainly of men, finding that female mentor can be difficult. In addition to seeking male mentors inside and outside of their units, events such as the Women’s Leadership Symposium might provide some “sight” where the unit-hierarchy model of mentorship has left many in a blind spot.

⁶⁴ Lance Corporal (#223), Interview, MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, 091917.

⁶⁵ Lance Corporal (#624), Interview, MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, 092017.