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# ***Master of Military Studies Requirements for the Degree***

*United States Marine Corps  
Command and Staff College  
Marine Corps University  
2076 South Street  
Marine Corps Combat Development Command  
Quantico, Virginia 22134-5068*

MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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**TITLE:**  
**LACK OF FEMALE LEADERSHIP AT THE TOP: CONTENT OR CONCERNED?**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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## Executive Summary

**Title:** Lack of Female Leadership at the Top: Concerned or Content?

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**Thesis:** The Marine Corps has an underrepresented segment of women in prominent and influential senior leadership positions. Until it recognizes and addresses its current unconscious gender bias, and misogynistic corporate culture and, additionally, takes action to remove the obstacles to an acceptable work-life balance for its families, this is likely to continue.

**Discussion:** This year marks 100 years that women have been serving in the Marine Corps. Unfortunately, the culture in the Marine Corps is not what is seen on the recruiting posters. The fact that the Marine Corps is publicly coping with the scandal involving nude photos of women, including Marines and other active duty service members, is indicative of the culture some would say has been the norm.

The leadership has made bold statements in the past at congressional hearings that the leadership of the corps will implement the changes to combat this misogynistic culture that has permeated throughout all ranks. As one begins to understand the challenges, one should first understand the quantitative numbers that represent the female Marine officer force. The Marine Corps has only 1589 (7.53%) female officers. The field grade and above are represented by only 235 Majors (6.5%), 81 Lieutenant Colonels (4.5%), and only 16 Colonels (2.6%). General Neller directed Marine Corps Recruiting Command to look at increasing the total number of women in the Marine Corps to ten percent.

The comparison of these numbers by gender shows that attrition rates for female officers are roughly double that of male officers at Captain to Major and Major to Lieutenant Colonel and almost triple from Lieutenant Colonel to Colonel. This means the organization loses a staggering 96% of its female officer population before the rank of Colonel. This exodus of female officers leads to an exceptionally small group of females being considered for selection to both command positions and inevitably general officer ranks.

### **Conclusion:**

Implementing service changes will go a long way toward convincing this diverse group of women that choosing service to their country can be a gratifying career and that it does not mean foregoing having a family. The Marine Corps should be a place where a young woman can fulfill a patriotic calling and have a chance of leading Marines rather than a place where she is discriminated against, undervalued, and made to feel more of a burden than part of the team.

## DISCLAIMER

THE OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF EITHER THE MARINE CORPS COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE OR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY. REFERENCES TO THIS STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOREGOING STATEMENT.

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## *Preface*

The basis for this research originally stemmed from my personal experiences in the Marine Corps. The challenges women face at times can be overwhelming. There is an archaic view point to our calling to serve. As if this is a hobby or pastime – something we could quit and allow for our spouse to be the breadwinner. Women want to be a part of the organization, but there are numerous obstacles in the way to success. Most challenges that women in the Marine Corps endure everyday are things the majority of men never experience during their career. My desire is to convey these challenges, give context for the leaders today that have never experienced these types of challenges, and provide recommendations for the organization to take into consideration.

As the world shines a light on the misogynistic culture and inequality inside different institutions, you can't help but wonder when the military will receive its moment in the sun; or its reckoning, depending on your point of view. The movement has taken hold of the political arena, entertainment industry and journalism; and the military services are not exempt. The organization needs to develop better methods to retain its highly trained, capable women before they walk out of the organization. Stop trying to figure out how to recruit the next generation or how to integrate us in infantry. The focus should be directed on how to retain the talent already present in the force today. Unfortunately, our attrition rate is double, and at some ranks triple, that of our male counterparts.

## *Acknowledgements*

I must first thank my advisor and Dean Charles McKenna. One of the most professional men I have ever met. I am grateful for the guidance, advice and accountability you provided throughout the process. I wish you the very best as you transition into the next chapter of your life.

I also would like to thank the research librarian, Ms. Christi Bayha and Director, Leadership Communication Skills Center, Ms. Linda Di Desidero. Your guidance, input, and encouragement thorough this school year is greatly appreciated. You are both truly gifts to the students of at Marine Corps University.

Last by certainly not least, my husband Matt. You are my sounding board and your input and perspective were vital in ensuring I conveyed the facts for this topic. I appreciate the hours of discussions, and the time you gave to our family, in order for me to complete this this challenging topic. Also, the kids, Erin and John, you were both so patient and understanding as I continued to tell you both, I have homework. I look forward to the summer and catching up on lost weekends.

## THE CURRENT FEMALE FORCE

By a statistically significant measure, women Marines are indeed the "few" within the "proud" who voluntarily serve at a significantly lower percentage than their male counterparts. During a House Armed Service Committee hearing, General Neller stated that he recently directed Marine Corps Recruiting Command to look at increasing the total number of women in the Marine Corps to ten percent.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, every service in the Department of Defense exceeds the Marine Corps female population percentage by at least double. The Marine Corps currently has a female representation of only 7.5% women. The percentage of the female population represented in the other services is as follows: 19% Air Force, 18% Navy, 15% Coast Guard, and 14% Army.<sup>2</sup> Why are young women not as interested in serving in the Marine Corps, but would be willing to serve in another service? Is it the culture that deters young women or the fact that senior female leaders do not have families? Do women have to choose to forgo a family to be successful but men do not? How does that sound when recruiting the next generation of female leaders?

There is no question that the continued effort to recruit highly qualified young men and women for the next generation of Marines is a critical mission, and Marine Corps Recruiting Command has and will continue to meet that mission with the resources they have within their organization.

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<sup>1</sup> *Readiness of Posture of the Department of the Navy: Hearing before the House Armed Service Committee*, 114<sup>th</sup> Cong., 3 (2016) (statement of General Robert B. Neller, Commandant of the Marine Corps).

<sup>2</sup> Statistic Brain Research Institute, *Women in the Military Statistics*. July 27, 2017, <https://www.statisticbrain.com/women-in-the-military-statistics>

As stated within the Commandant's Posture of the United States of the Marine Corps  
Presidential Budget 2017,

“The Marine Corps continues to benefit from a healthy recruiting environment that attracts quality people who can accomplish the mission. Our recruiting force continues to meet our recruiting goals in quantity and quality and is postured to make this year's recruiting mission. We are on track to meet our active duty end strength goal of 182,000 Marines in this fiscal year.”<sup>3</sup>

In short, the Commandant is not concerned that the recruiting effort of Marine Corps is and will continue to be effective. However, the leadership of the Marine Corps must direct their core focus on retaining the cadre of women that have already been trained, educated, and proven their merit during the last decade of war. The emphasis should begin and end at retention. The Marine Corps has an underrepresented segment of women in prominent and influential senior leadership positions. Until it recognizes and addresses its current unconscious gender bias, and misogynistic corporate culture and takes action to remove the obstacles to an acceptable work-life balance for its families, this is likely to continue.

The organization selects commanders and general officers from a cohort of eligible members and, unfortunately, women are departing the service prior to these command and promotion boards and are few or at times non-existent in the eligible groups. This dynamic is a result of a sizable percentage of women officers in a given cohort choosing to separate from the service at key junctures in their careers. As you assess the population during promotion years, you are able to identify a significant drop in the population. Using an average from the data during Fiscal Years (FY) 17, 18 and 19, as depicted in Figure 1, the Marine Corps lost over 55%

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<sup>3</sup> *Readiness of Posture of the Department of the Navy: Hearing before the House Armed Service Committee, 114<sup>th</sup> Cong., 3 (2016) (statement of General Robert B. Neller, Commandant of the Marine Corps).*

of its females before the rank of Major, 43% of those Majors before the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, and then 74% of its Lieutenant Colonels before Colonel.<sup>4</sup> By way of comparison and as depicted in Figure 2, the Marine Corps lost 20% of his males before selection to Major, 25% of those selected for Major before selection to Lieutenant Colonel, and 30% from Lieutenant Colonel to Colonel. Comparison of these numbers by gender shows that attrition rates for female officers are roughly double that of male officers at Captain to Major and Major to Lieutenant Colonel and almost triple from Lieutenant Colonel to Colonel. This means the organization loses a staggering 96% of its female officer population before the rank of Colonel. This exodus of female officers leads to an already exceptionally small group of females being considered for selection to both command positions and inevitably general officer ranks.

Figure 1. Female demographics of promotion boards from fiscal years: 2017, 2018, and 2019.

\* denotes information has not published.

Consider/Selected	Captain	Major	LtCol	Col	General
FY 17	125/120	59/46	32/22	7/5	0/0
FY 18	148/142	58/46	27/15	5/3	3/1
FY19	*	65/55	27/21	3/2	*

Source: Data received from the Fiscal Year 2017, 2018, and 2019 promotion board results.

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<sup>4</sup> United States Marine Corps. *2018 U.S. Marine Corps Concepts and Programs*. (Quantico, Virginia: Futures Directorate, Capabilities Development and Integration, April 2018)

Figure 2. Male demographics of promotion boards from fiscal years: 2017, 2018, and 2019. \* denotes information was not published.

Consider/Selected	Captain	Major	LtCol	Col	General
FY 17	1096/1016	867/645	481/291	200/79	73/7
FY 18	1246/1160	870/629	474/284	205/84	72/5
FY19	*	880/644	480/311	216/93	*

Source: Data received from the Fiscal Year 2017, 2018, and 2019 promotion board results.

To become inclusive and more effective as an organization, the Marine Corps must examine the challenges our female Marines encounter. Has anyone asked why do we have such a low representation of females in the senior ranks or why they leave the service at such an alarming rate? What kind of woman does it take to raise her right hand and commit to a fighting force with a reputation like the Marine Corps? Without hesitation, it is not women with a faint heart - these strong, determined and competent women are transitioning out of the Marine Corps into civilian organizations to pursue careers in a place where they feel accepted, valued, and capable of success in all aspects of their lives.

In America today, women comprise 19.6% of Congress and 14.2% of senior executive roles (CEO's, COO's, etc.) within the S&P 500 executive companies. During the last census in 2010, 50.8% of the population of the United States was made up of women.<sup>5</sup> It is remarkable that we accept such under-representation in a democracy. In effect, we are marginalizing half of our population. As we look examine the importance of education for example, focusing on developing countries, a study by Guiso, Sapienza and Zingales concluded that greater the level of

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<sup>5</sup> United States Census Bureau, accessed December 1, 2017, [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)

education is associated with a large effect the adult's productivity. There is evidence to show that the more educated a woman is, the more consistently she will vocalize disapproval in her government than her less educated female peers. Conversely, the results did not prove the same for educated men and uneducated men. In the end, the evidence concluded that education makes women more aware of the discrepancies between their ideals and the practice of politics. It is perhaps not an accident that women's education in many countries is a cultural obstacle. It is with more educated women that old power of hierarchies are more likely to be confronted.<sup>6</sup> There is evidence to that educated women, in roles where their opinions or suggestions are requested, feel not only inclined, but obligated to provide input. Conversely, their male counterparts most of the time did not voice an opinion, either for or against an issue, when placed in the same situation. Information and research provided by The American Association of University Women (AAUW) partnered with Dr. Catherine Hill, argues that having gender equality at the top benefits everyone. The importance of mixing the genders at a more equal ratio allows the shift in stereotypical ideas around gender roles — just as the status quo is holding women back from leadership roles, it is holding men back from embracing caretaking and support roles. They also state that businesses have reported the importance and improvement of creativity with a diverse staff and recognize the purchasing power of women.<sup>7</sup> The absence of women can negatively affect institutions; whether they are a country's government, a corporate organization, or a military system.

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<sup>6</sup> Luigi Guiso; Paola Sapienza; and Luigi Zingales (2002), *People's Opium? Religion and Economic Attitudes*, Center for Economic Policy Research, Discussion Paper No. 3588

<sup>7</sup> Catherine Hill, *Barriers and Bias: The Status of Women in Leadership* (The American Association of University Women, Leadership, 2016)

Unfortunately, with a male dominated organization, the majority can, at best, sympathize, but truly don't understand the challenges endured by women within their own organization – men sit in every meeting as the majority, and can exude a sense of arrogance and aloofness without judgement. A man with these traits will be viewed as determined, focused, or aggressive and a woman will be viewed as bossy, too forceful, or talks too much. Men sit in conference rooms or lead in an organization where they can speak anytime, interrupt anyone and give an opinion when they feel moved to. Think for a moment if you were sitting in a room of 35 women and you were the only male present. Would you speak up if you held a dissenting view? How do you think we as an organization can get on the right track to correcting our culture? Have you ever sat in a room where you are outnumbered every time, or judged for simply speaking? Have you ever sat in a meeting and hoped your kids made it to school or wondered if they got picked up from practice? Do you think about what you are going to fix for dinner to feed your family? Year after year, we lose brilliant, driven, experienced Marines due to the barriers and bias that we have placed on women, an unacceptable yet ignored culture. Judging from the lack of woman in senior leadership roles – we are losing our female leadership – as senior leaders, are you content or concerned with the number of females we have serving as commanders or generals?

## **UNCONSCIOUS BIAS**

The frustration with this type of bias is that it can have a very negative connotation. You may only understand this type of discrimination if you have been a recipient. The notion of being judged by others, simply by an aspect of your identity that you cannot change, is disheartening. Unfortunately, unconscious bias is often incompatible with one's conscious views, which would

mean – you don't recognize you have a problem. The effects of this type of discrimination will show up in other, more discrete ways: on a fitness report evaluation, during a selection board for command/promotions, or a selection for key billet. One reason for the lack of women in these highly influential roles results from the patriarchal society we live in and unconscious gender bias. As we examine specifically what unconscious bias is, how it affects the force, and examples of how this presents itself every day, we need to take a moment and acknowledge this is something we can improve on and not continue to perpetuate.

### What is Unconscious Bias?

Dr. Renee Navarro defines unconscious bias as “a social stereotype regarding a specific group of people that forms outside of one's conscious awareness. Unconscious bias is a form of discrimination based on a person's age, gender, gender identity, physical abilities, religion, sexual orientation, or one of many other characteristics.”<sup>8</sup> She notes, bias proves to be more noticeable when a person is working under pressure or controlled in a way that causes stress in their environment. By its very nature, military service can at times be filled with tension and can become a place where unconscious bias is present.

### Forming Unconscious Bias

The brain begins to classify traits that are observable: gender, personal appearance, how someone sounds, their marital status, height, weight and what we know and what we think we know about them – into a cohesive impression that forms this unconscious bias. When superiors,

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<sup>8</sup> Dr. J. Renee Navarro, “*Unconscious Bias*,” Office of Diversity and Outreach, University of California, San Francisco, CA, accessed December 17, 2017, <https://diversity.ucsf.edu/>

peers, and subordinates categorize women this way, the Marine Corps struggles to maintain a cohesive force. People will initially categorize based on the things they visually observe. The psychological term for this is "social categorization." This behavior aids in our perception so that, in dealing with others, we can quickly and automatically recognize patterns and reduce complexity. Unfortunately, it can cause stereotyping and over-generalization with regard to certain characteristics without ever having established a more nuanced observation of them.<sup>9</sup>

### Types of Unconscious Bias

To educate the force, we must understand the different types of bias, how they affect women in the service, and what we can do to change these kinds of behaviors and ensure this perceived discrimination does not corrupt the unit and, inevitably, the service's ability to retain quality female Marines. This type of discussion can generate more advocates for the minority and, in turn, can increase diversity within the organization and result in retention and a more diverse force. The impact that bias can have in the workplace can be detrimental. Understanding the different types of bias will help people recognize a time when they are unknowingly relying on a specific preference to make a decision and, more importantly, unconsciously discriminating against an individual.

### Conformity Bias

Conformity bias forms by group peer pressure and the desire to be accepted or be liked. This type of bias will present itself when a member within a unit feels like the majority is leaning

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<sup>9</sup> Dr. Andreas Hoyndorf and Dr. Olaf Ringelband, "Unconscious Bias in Management Diagnostics", accessed on Feb 20, 2018, [http://www.management-diagnostics.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/unconscious-bias-in-management-diagnostics.pdf](http://www.management-diagnostics.de/fileadmin/user_upload/unconscious-bias-in-management-diagnostics.pdf)

in a particular direction about a specific person. They will tend to go with the group vice their personal opinion. The Marine Corps is 93% male and 7% female; women are outnumbered, no matter to what unit they are assigned. As with any group, women want to be part of the team. Often this will result in women trying to ease tension and fit in a unit by conforming to the majority. Some women not only suppress their femininity, but assimilate masculine values entrenched in Marine Corps culture as a way to conform. Women feel the need to show they have a more dominating and aggressive nature to gain the respect of their male counterparts. To fit in, they will disregard any compassion, sensitivity, and peacemaking instincts, since these traits are perceived to be neither valued nor promoted in the military. Additionally, they will shape their physical appearance to look more masculine, which runs counter to any ideas of gender mainstreaming within our organization.

Captain Lauren Serrano makes a similar point in her article in the *Gazette* when she states,

“While well-intended and with some progress marked...policies fail to address the real concerns of many servicewomen. Current policies to integrate women into combat arms units and strip women of their femininity target a very specific, generally the very young and inexperienced group of women at entry level. In order to fulfill stated goals to retain and promote female service members, the Corps should adopt the following policies: encourage gender equality vice neutrality.

A recent discussion to rid the Corps of female uniforms (and anything that looks feminine) is repressive. Why does making the Corps gender neutral mean requiring women to look, act, dress, and PT like men? Making one uniform for all Marines is intended to make the Corps more equal across the board, but why does the uniform have to be the masculine version?

If all Marines have to wear dress blue trousers from now on, how about all Marines also have to wear skirts and heels with Alphas from now on? For every male uniform item women are required to purchase and wear, men should be required to purchase and wear a female item. That notion is ridiculous, but it's the only fair option; "fairness" seems to have been the

driving force behind recent DOD policies, not common sense. Privileging the male uniform is perhaps more repressive than the separate styles.”<sup>10</sup>

Are these types of decisions supposed to make the organization more inclusive to women by putting them in a male uniform, in a male cover, and performing male physical fitness requirements? Do you think women are under the impression or told when they join the Marine Corps they would be judged and even marginalized because they want to maintain some sort of femininity? Would Marine Corps Recruiting Command allow Recruiters and Officer Selection Officers to inform all female applicants that to be successful and compete with the men you must forgo your feminine individualities?<sup>11</sup> Differences are a way for us to contribute, providing a perspective that only we can bring, and our differences are what will enhance our operational success in the future.

### Beauty Bias

Another type of bias is beauty bias; this is formed by perceived physical traits we believe a successful person should display. A review by Langlois et al. reminds us that people regularly make judgements based on appearance and argue we would not remind children against judging a book by its “cover” if humans were not biased.<sup>12</sup> In an article by Siofra Pratt, 60% of CEO’s in the United States are over six feet tall, only 15% of the population is over six feet tall. More alarming than that, 36% of United States CEO’s are over 6’2”, while only 4% of people in the

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<sup>10</sup> Lauren Serrano, “*To Get Out, or Not to Get Out?*” Marine Corps Gazette Vol 101, no. 7, July 2017

<sup>11</sup> Jim Edwards, a spokesman for Marine Corps Recruiting Command was quoted, “while Marine recruiters advise prospective applicants on programs and opportunities, their focus is more on preparation for recruit training and successful service in the operating forces.”

<sup>12</sup> JH Langlois et al., *Maxims or myths of beauty? A meta-analytic and theoretical review.* Bulletin. 2000;126(3):390

US are this height. Research conducted by the organization, Social Talent, has shown it is common for recruitment panels to fill leadership roles with people who share similar physical attributes of people that have held that role before, based on a preconceived beauty bias.<sup>13</sup> A study conducted at Rice University by Ken Podratz found that physical attractiveness is correlated with perceived femininity in women. He states, “If a highly attractive female applies for a hyper masculine job such as a truck driver or security guard, she is likely to be seen as less capable of meeting the physical demands of the job.”<sup>14</sup> If we look at the previous general officer leadership in the Marine Corps, in its entire history the Marine Corps has had only eight female general officers, promoting the first one as recently as 1978. Beauty bias can impose itself on the women in the Marine Corps, beginning with discrimination based on gender and continuing with more physical attributes, like height, weight, physical stature.

### Affinity Bias

Another bias is affinity bias or someone to have likeness or similarity with themselves. People tend to seek out those who share backgrounds, groups, and experiences. Dr. Helen Turnbull defines affinity bias as showing a bias towards “people who make me comfortable” or “people like me.”<sup>15</sup> During hiring panels or decision-making boards, this bias can be more evident than others. As we examine the boards of directors or "Executive Board Members" for the Marine Corps, they are predominantly made up of men. Currently the Marine Corps "Executive Leadership" board is made up of approximately 35 male General Officers and one

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<sup>13</sup> Soifra Pratt, *9 Types of Unconscious Bias and the Shocking Ways They Affect Your Recruiting Process*, Social Talent Inc., December 19, 2017

<sup>14</sup> Dan Maccarone, *The Beauty Bias.* Psychology Today, June 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Helen Turnbull, “*The Affinity Bias Conundrum*”: The Illusion and Inclusion Part III, Profiles in Diversity Journal, (May 2014)

Female General Officer. This group of General Officers makes decisions on policy and discusses upcoming challenges the service is facing. As an organization, over the last 15 years, are we saying we haven't had more than one competent female Colonel who could be another voice on this panel or did they just not look like the previous leadership?

### Halo Effect and Horn Effect Bias

The next unconscious bias is the halo effect. The halo effect occurs when someone is judged positively on one aspect, and then benefits by being automatically judged positively on several others without much evidence. Originally described by E. L. Thorndike after he discovered that estimates of employee's various traits (intelligence, technical skill, reliability) were highly and evenly correlated to the evaluator's ratings, affected by a tendency to think of the person in general.<sup>16</sup> He noted this after a cross correlation in military officers' ratings of their soldier's physique, intelligence, leadership, and characters. Examples of the halo effect occur when one assumes an applicant or employee is known as intelligent, productive, or competent based on personal appearance, prestigious college, or accomplishing a challenging task. The halo effect is subjective but usually positive. The danger comes when the positive trait outweighs a number of negative traits, and these traits are overlooked or justified because of your one positive attribute. You are more likely to benefit from halo effect, regardless of your technical skills or leadership traits. In the military, this type of bias can certainly be seen by choices made by leadership. The Marine Corps puts an emphasis on physical appearance, stature, military colleges, and performance in combat. Would leaders or past selection board members be able to say retention, promotion or command selection was never tainted by an applicant having an

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<sup>16</sup> S Lachman & A. Bass, "A Direct Study of Halo Effect," *Journal of Psychology*, 119, 535

award for valor or a combat action ribbon. Would these onetime highly regarded attributes lead them to overlook a number of leadership shortcomings?

The converse to this bias is the “horn effect” bias. It can cause someone to be unduly influenced by a single negative trait. Lachman gives the example of horn or devil bias as when a member within an organization is significantly obese may be considered less successful or less self-disciplined when being evaluated.<sup>17</sup> This is a bias that can be detrimental in the Marine Corps. If our first impression is negative, we tend to ignore all the positive characteristics. This bias remains as you interact with the person and you tend to see that person in the negative light and have a higher probability of not liking that person.

### Similarity Bias

Another type of bias is known as similarity bias. In a male-dominated service, women will never prevail based on similarity. This bias exists when someone gravitates naturally toward people who are similar. This bias tends to apply with respect to several different dimensions of similarity, such as similarity of values and habits, similarity of beliefs or with respect to demographic variables and work experience.<sup>18</sup> *The New York Times* stated in an article,

“It is in this area of trust that women and minorities often fail to get the help they need in their careers. When it comes to figuring out whom to sponsor, senior leaders – typically white men – most readily turn to people they feel more comfortable with. Most often, that means other white men. Employers need to work to counteract this natural tendency.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 119

<sup>18</sup> Greenberg, J, *Perception and Learning: Understanding and Adapting to the Work Environment. In Behavior in Organizations*: Prentice Hall. 2001.

<sup>19</sup> Sylvia Ann Hewlett, “*Mentors Are Good. Sponsors Are Better,*” *The New York Times*, April 13, 2013.

Mentorship is essential and allows for someone to ask questions, be a sounding board, and gain advice. Sponsorship, on the other hand, is vital for professional success. Sponsorship occurs when someone champions or advocates for you to gain new opportunities. It can change the course of a career when someone with professional influence supports another member publicly, connecting them with other talented players that allow for them to be more visible. Having a male sponsor would be welcomed by a female within an organization, but stopping to speak with a female regarding career choices does not come without intentional effort. Men often assume that women are being mentored and sponsored by other females within the organization. Sponsors do not need to be the same gender, but due to this bias, women are less likely to have a male superior lean in on their behalf, apprising others of their exceptional performance, and keeping them on the fast track within an organization.

For the Marine Corps, the idea that the 98 senior field grade (Colonels and Lieutenant Colonels) and general officers are to mentor 1,589 female officers is an absurd proposition. This would equate to each Lieutenant Colonel, Colonel, and General Officer mentoring more than 16 junior officers each. With only 235 Majors, 81 female Lieutenant Colonels, 16 female Colonels and one General Officer on active duty, this would be an impossible feat.<sup>20</sup> Nor does this take into consideration the geographic reach and operational tempo of the service. As depicted in Figure 3, achieving a target of 7% of the Majors, Lieutenant Colonels, and Colonels being comprised of females would go a long way to addressing this shortfall of senior mentors in the Service. Achieving the Commandant's stated goal of 10% would more than double the number currently available. Achieving either goal would profoundly change the character of the Marine

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<sup>20</sup> United States Marine Corps. *2018 U.S. Marine Corps Concepts and Programs*. (Quantico, Virginia: Futures Directorate, Capabilities Development and Integration, April 2018)

Corps in a positive way. However, even if the personnel and cultural changes required to keep our female leaders in the Corps were made today, it would likely take a decade or more to achieve the 7% goal, let alone the 10% goal.

Table 3. Data set based on the total number of females and the percentage based on the current force, what we would need to have a representation of seven percent, and how many we would need to meet the CMC goal of ten percent

	Current On Hand/ Percentage	7 %	10 %
Major	235 / 6.5%	270	385
LtCol	81 / 4.5%	132	189
Col	16 / 2.6%	45	64

Source: Data received by the 2018 U.S. Marine Corps Concepts and Programs, Almanac

Until the void of female officer leadership is addressed, women in the Marine Corps will not only depend on male leadership to step up and assist them in their career goals, but require it. Based on the minuscule number of senior women leaders, it is apparent that mentorship and more importantly, sponsorship is currently a rare occurrence.

## **CULTURE IN THE MARINE CORPS**

The facts are shocking. Since the birth of the Corps there have only been eight active duty female General Officers; since women were not eligible for the first 143 years, we can focus on the last 100 years that female Marines were eligible.<sup>21</sup> It took 60 years for our first female General Officer to be promoted and the Marine Corps has continued at a less than stellar pace to select our most recent female general in 2017.<sup>22</sup> The Marine Corps culture does not encourage women to stay and serve into these senior ranks. In fact, one could argue that the Marine Corps culture discourages women to stay. Sexual assault, harassment, blatant disregard of mistreatment, and overall lack of voice in this organization, coupled with reprisal when you stand up for yourself - like many other male dominated organizations, all play a factor in the early departure of women. Women feel like the only way to continue up the ladder of authority is make as few waves as possible, even if that means they endure the personal burdens that come with this culture.

In order to retain and promote women in the organization, we must be willing to address the misogynistic and negative aspects of culture. People, no matter their sex, want to be involved in the decision-making process, committees, task force, and constant improvement teams in order to make their organization something they are proud to be a part of. These types of groups can result in a more inclusive work performance, lower turnover, higher morale and commitment to the organization.

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<sup>21</sup> Petula Dvorak, *The First Woman Marine: In 1918, She Couldn't Vote but Rushed to Serve*," Washington Post, Sept 22, 2017

<sup>22</sup> Secretary of the Navy, ALNAV 014/17 "FY-18 U.S Marine Corps Brigadier General Selections," 23 March 2017

## What is Culture?

Culture can be defined as the customary beliefs, set of shared attitudes, values, goals and practices that characterize an institution or organization. It is the social practices associated with a particular field. It is the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations.<sup>23</sup> The Marine Corps' culture is built on shared attitudes and practices and depends on the ability to pass these practices on to succeeding generations.

## Sexual Assault, Harassment and Reprisal

Women who choose to work in a male-dominated field, understand early on in their careers that coming forward with a complaint of sexual harassment or to report unethical, illegal actions does not always result in the most appropriate or expected outcome. Women are left to feel intimidated, or not believed and likely will suffer consequences in their professional careers due to the inappropriate actions of others. Women who are singled out, receive little support or mentorship inside the unit, are left with “no right answer” and no one to ask – reporting for this type violation and receiving the “negative” attention is not worth the backlash that would result from reporting. She will most likely conclude that no action is the path of the least resistance. The words “zero tolerance” mean nothing to women in a culture where misogyny continues to be perpetuated. Reports from the Fiscal Year 2016, *Department of Defense Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military*, show that a staggering 68% of victims of sexual assault did not report the violations. How can an organization accept such terrible numbers and justify that

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<sup>23</sup> “Culture” Meriam-Webster.com Accessed December 27, 2017. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture>.

almost 7 of 10 of their employees do not feel comfortable reporting this type of criminal behavior? Fewer than half (44%) of DoD women who experienced sexual assault indicated they decided to move forward with their report of sexual assault, after indicating they perceived professional reprisal associated with their report.”<sup>24</sup> These are statistics from inside an organization that claims it stands on the bedrock of honor, courage, commitment, and valor – committed to excellence and the fair treatment of all. “The majority of DoD women who experienced sexual assault and perceived reprisal indicated that the behaviors taken by their leadership yielded some level of harm to their career (90 percent)”, The Director of Department of Defense’s Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, stated at a Pentagon briefing on 1 May 2017.

“The bond is broken when there’s sexual violence or harassment; even worse when this behavior is condoned or ignored. Sexual assault violates the core values of our military and must never be tolerated.

We have more work to do to advance dignity and respect for each and every person. It is essential to military readiness. The hard truth is still far too many of our people find their lives changed by this crime and there are far too many who suffer in silence,”

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand stated that

“The truth is that a scourge of sexual assault in the military remains status quo and that the reports in 2017 show that six out of 10 service members report retaliation after reporting sexual assaults in the military.<sup>25</sup> It is twelve times more likely that a sexual assault survivor in the military will be retaliated against that it is likely their attacker will be prosecuted for a sex offense.<sup>26</sup>”

The climate in which these women work is set at all levels and has a profound effect on how a woman is treated on a daily basis. Experts on workplace ethics indicate that the response

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<sup>24</sup> Department of Defense, 2016 Annual Report on Sexual Assault, Washington, DC: 2016

<sup>25</sup> Reuters, “*Sexual Assault Reports in U.S. Military Reach Record High*,” May 1, 2017, [www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-military-sexualassault/](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-military-sexualassault/)

<sup>26</sup> Meghan Rhoad, *Embattled: Retaliation against Sexual Assault Survivors in the US Military*, May 18, 2015

to retaliation is “a leading indicator of the health and well-being of an organization culture going forward. When you have high levels of retaliation, it’s not long before you start to have an erosion of culture and an erosion of trust within the organization.”<sup>27</sup> In an all-volunteer force where people join to serve their country, should there be a time in women’s careers that they ask themselves, “Do I report a criminal violation of my rights and risk my career and reputation I worked so hard for? Or do I remain silent and exit the organization sooner than originally planned with the dignity I have left?” No one deserves to work in place where they don’t feel safe or feel like they are being treated unfairly due to their sex. Unfortunately, in an organization that is dominated by men, there are women that feel like this on a daily basis, enduring this type of behavior and remaining silent for decades.

#### Disregard of Mistreatment and Reprisal

Women hesitate to report violations because there is an idea that they have to produce some type of proof and that their word is not enough. Presenting a case possibly about your direct supervisor to his supervisor is historically not going to produce the results you want. You will be sent back to work in the same office with the perpetrator, but with a target on your back. A typical solution is to either ignore the problem or remove the person who believes they are being wronged. This type of action is known to be even more detrimental to the organization than the crime itself– these women don’t feel safe reporting to their leaders and choose to leave the organization on their own terms. They choose to leave vice having their name and reputation tarnished and subjected to ridicule. Unfortunately, as we discuss this, women are being told

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<sup>27</sup> Dr. Patricia Harned, the Ninth Public Meeting of the Judicial Proceedings of the Judicial Proceeding Panel, Washington, DC, April 10, 2015.

what a great opportunity they will have ahead of them, but they too will quickly learn there is another side that is not on the recruiting posters, videos, recruiter tags or commercials.

### Interruptions and Lack of Voice

Another culture problem in a male dominated career is the countless times that women are interrupted, talked over, shut down or penalized for speaking in general. It is a common experience for women when they are outnumbered by men. According to a gender expert, Deborah Tannen, men speak to determine and achieve power and women speak to determine and achieve a connection.<sup>28</sup> In American society, speaking is considered the power position. In the context of the military – power is at the end of the conference room table, and only the people at the table speak – if you are sitting against the wall, you don't speak nor do you have any power.

A study by Starkey Duncan analyzed 31 two party conversations that had been recorded in public places such as cafes, drug stores and on a college campus. Of the 31 conversations, ten were between two men, ten between two women, and 11 between a man and a woman. In the two same sex groups combined, the authors found seven instances of interruption. In the male/female group, however, they found 48 interruptions, 46 of which were instances of a man interrupting a woman.<sup>29</sup> Take this study and picture a dynamic not as comfortable as a café, but in an executive off-site where 38 Generals sit in at U shape table in precedence order (just in case someone forgot where they fall in the pecking order) and there is currently one General Officer that is a woman in that room. Deborah Tannen notes men tend to be very sensitive to power dynamics of interaction. Men tend to speak in ways that position themselves as one up and

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<sup>28</sup> Deborah Tannen, "The Power of Talk: Who Gets Heard and Why," *Harvard Business Review*, (September –October 1995)

<sup>29</sup> Starkey Duncan, "Some Signals and Rules for Taking Speaking Turns In Conversations," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 23, 283-92.

resisting being put in a one down position.<sup>30</sup> If a man interrupts he can be viewed as the boss, vice women who will be labeled with words like, bossy, unpleasant, or pushy. Women are more likely to face negative consequences for being perceived as pushy, aggressive, or assertive in the workplace, when the same behaviors are more encouraged for men.

The female population in the Marine Corps lack a voice in leadership discussions. We are not heard equally, and, when we do speak with passion, are typically viewed as emotional, irrational, or sensitive. The mistreatment or violation does not have to be sexual in nature for a woman to feel a sense of hesitation when considering reporting this inappropriate behavior. Unfortunately, women understand that reporting such violations can incur a level of uncertainty and reprisal on their part of being “disloyal” or causing undue problems within the section or workplace.

The lack of female influence is apparent when there is a single female in a significantly outnumbered ratio of male to female. The best developed theoretical work on the group composition question is Rosebeth Kanter’s theory of proportional representation.

Kanter suggests

“That variations in sex composition within the mixed-sex category are important. In particular minority group members (sex in this case) are under special interaction pressures in groups with a skewed distribution. Such token members may adopt conservative behavior patterns, avoid conflict, and become a relatively passive audience for the boundary heightening behavior of the majority.”<sup>31</sup>

By looking at the male dominated board room or an executive steering committee like the Marine Corps uses, there is only one woman in this group. This theory would suggest even if

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<sup>30</sup> Deborah Tannen, “The Power of Talk: Who Gets Heard and Why,” *Harvard Business Review*, (September –October 1995)

<sup>31</sup> Rosebeth Kanter et al., *Token Achievement: An Examination of Proportional Representation and Performance Outcomes*, *American Journal of Sociology*, 1985, 64

she were not interrupted when she did speak up, she would instantly adopt a more conservative behavior based on merely being outnumbered at the table. The success rate of topics initiated by men is much greater than that by women. Women tend to elaborate on the topics initiated by men. While women are discussing a topic, men tend to adopt non-cooperative strategies to undermine the current speaker and reinforce their dominance by using uncooperative feedback signals such as delayed minimal responses or even silence to show a lack of interest, indifference, and impatience and tend to interrupt to change topics to their favor. Women tend not to dominate as men do even when they are well informed on the topic and can be called an expert in the field under discussion.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Pamela Fishman (1983) *Interactions: "The Work Women Do. Language", Gender and Society*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House

## **WORK-LIFE BALANCE**

Last but certainly not least, is the need for a more intentional focus on work-life balance. There is an imbalance of understanding and empathy in an organization where the preponderance of the population has someone at home assisting them with their individual and family needs. Continuous household requirements and caregiving are not daily concerns for most of the successful leaders within this organization. How do you have them stop and recognize the inequalities of this situation, if you want to keep women in the ranks? There must be some type of balance. The idea of working 12-15 hour days, with someone else raising your children, is not an attractive proposition. What things need to be done for women to serve effectively, while still maintaining a healthy lifestyle and nurturing children?

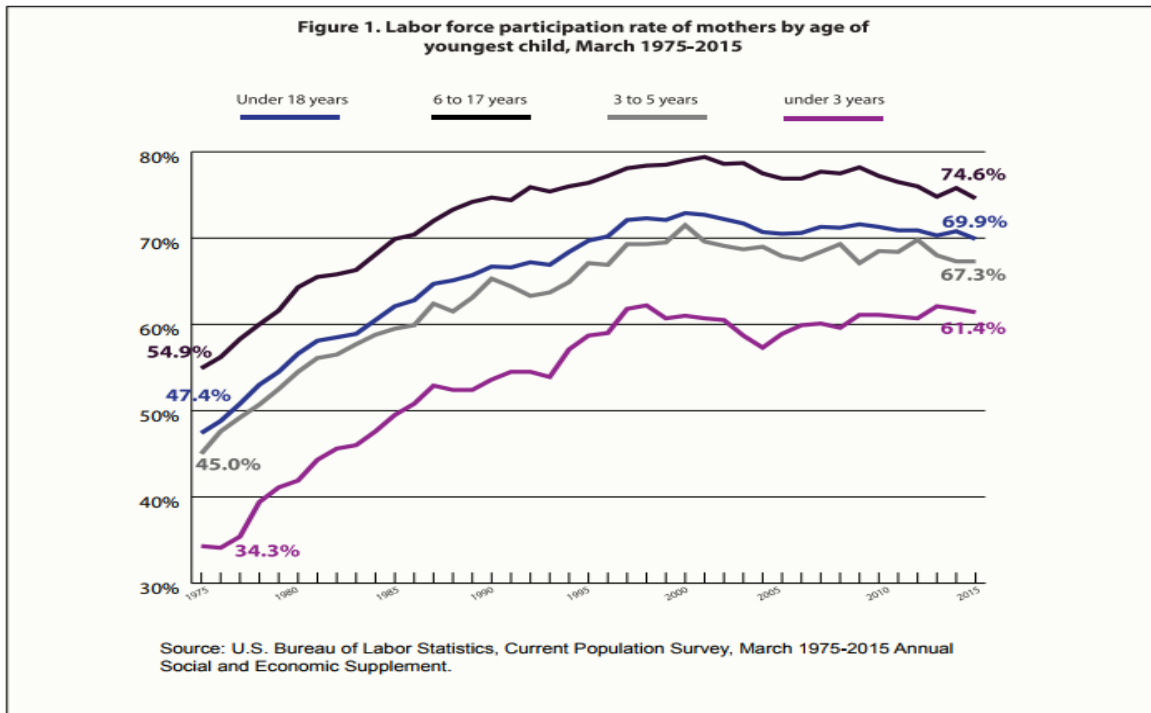
### **What is Work-Life Balance**

Work-life balance must be defined to better understand what an organization is trying to do, and more importantly why. Work and Family Researcher Network have defined Work-Life Balance as: “The extent in which individuals are equally involved in-and equally satisfied with their work role and their family role”<sup>33</sup> Why should an organization help their employees with this new concern? Over the past 15-20 years, women continued to join the work force, not only to supplement a spouse’s income but to work full time and support themselves and their children.

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<sup>33</sup> Greenhaus, J. & Singh, R. (2003, February 25). Work-Family Linkages, A Sloan Work and Family Encyclopedia Entry. Chestnut Hill, MA: Boston College.

Figure 1. Labor Force Participation Rate of Mothers



**Mothers' labor force participation rates vary with the age of their youngest child and with their marital status.** Mothers with children age 6 to 17 are more likely to be in the labor force than those with younger children. The labor force participation rate for fathers sees very little variation, with over 9 in 10 fathers participating in the labor force regardless of the age of their youngest child (see Figure 2).<sup>v</sup> Among mothers with children under age 18, unmarried mothers<sup>2</sup> were more likely to be in the labor force (75.1 percent) compared to married mothers with a spouse present (67.6 percent).<sup>vi</sup>

Source: Data received from the Women's Bureau – U.S. Department of Labor

### Single Mothers

As an organization, and more specifically, as leaders of small units, we should understand how the information depicted in figure 4 effects our service. The variation increases for mothers who are not married – unmarried mothers are more than 12% more likely to be working than married mothers. Another important data point that should be noted for our organization is that

there is a drop in participation in the workforce with working mothers (75%) when their child is under age six (67%) and even more if the child is under three (61%) Ironically, there is little variation of father's participation in the workforce, regardless of age of their child at a rate of 90%.<sup>34</sup> In March, 2015, Women's Bureau, Labor Department surveys showed that 1:4 families are mother only families. The role of mothers as family economic providers has changed in recent decades; more are in the paid labor force, and mother only one-parent families have doubled in the last 15-20 years. In addition to their economic responsibilities, mothers continue to bear an unequal share of unpaid caregiving and household responsibilities. With women having children at a later age, combined with the longer life-span of their own parents, many of today's women are also providing some eldercare and have children under the age of 18. This phenomenon is significant for the Marine Corps as the Department of Labor data correlates closely with the periods of increased attrition that the Marine Corps is experiencing with its female officers.

#### Dual Active Duty/ Working Parents

These challenges are compounded for Marines that are either married to an active duty spouse or both work. This can create numerous challenges for the command, and without proper education and understanding by the leadership, these women will struggle to meet the standards, work time, physical fitness, and demands a single or married Marine with a non-working spouse do not have to contend with. According to the 2018 U.S. Marine Corps Concepts and Programs Manual, there are 1,005 dual active duty couples.<sup>35</sup> This is a startling statistic as it means that

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<sup>34</sup> Bureau Of Labor Statistics, "*Labor Force Participation Rates Among Mothers,*" May 7, 2015

<sup>35</sup> United States Marine Corps. *2018 U.S. Marine Corps Concepts And Programs.* (Quantico, Virginia: Futures Directorate, Capabilities Development And Integration, April 2018)

two-thirds of female Marine Officers are married to other Marine Officers. This is not to say that the dual active duty female Marine is not as capable or more so, but she/they will need an understanding leader to ensure she can meet the demands set by the unit while fulfilling their family duties as well. In the misogynic culture of the Marine Corps, women historically bear the burden of child rearing (stay home with a sick child, medical appointments, and school activities) and thereby risk the perception of not being as committed to their careers as their male counterparts. The average age in the U.S. for a woman to become a mother is 26, which is also the time that women are transitioning in company grade ranks – by the time the children are 2-3 years old and the Marine is eligible for field grade responsibilities and promotion. Without the understanding and support of the command and her leadership a female Marine Officer is placed in the untenable situation of having to choose between a family or a career. As the Marine Corps' current demographics illustrate, most are not choosing the Marine Corps.

#### Challenges of Work Life Balance

We currently only have one active duty and one reserve female general officer in the service and neither of them have children. Certainly, this is a personal decision, but it sends a message to younger female Marine Officers that in order to become a senior leader in the Marine Corps, a woman must choose between having a family and a career; a choice that male officers do not face. In order to stay relevant, avoid any downtime before, during or after pregnancy, and more importantly, maintain a reputation where you are “dedicated,” how could having

children be a feasible option? No organization in any sphere of American society makes the same demands of its females.

### Effects of Poor Work-Life Balance

As we learn how work-life balance is affecting the women within the Marine Corps we must take notice of the fact that it not only affects women but all military families. Examples of outcomes associated with negative work-to-family spillover from the peer-reviewed academic literature include withdrawal from family interaction, increased conflict in marriage, less knowledge of children's experiences, less involvement in housework, greater likelihood to misuse alcohol, and overall decrease in the quality of life.<sup>36</sup> Every one of these negative impacts looks very familiar as the Marine Corps has created programs to address nearly all of them. Are we being proactive or reactive to a problem we are creating? Why don't we evaluate the cause for all of these requirements? What kind of paradigm shift would have to occur in order to adjust for a more appropriate work-life balance? The problems that we incur could be because of an unrealistic expectation of work-life balance. Couldn't the entire force benefit from some of these changes? Mr. Jeffrey Hill argued,

“If visionary business leaders and empowered individuals adopt greater flexibility, we may see the end to the "zero-sum game" and set up a "virtuous cycle" in which work-family balance programs leverage on each other to promote individual well-being, family solidarity, and organizational success.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> E. Jeffrey Hill, A. J. Hawkins, M. Ferris, Michelle Weitzman, *Finding an Extra Day a Week: The Positive Influence of Perceived Job Flexibility on Work and Family Life Balance*, Vol. 50, No.1 (Jan.,2001) pp 49-58

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.,

## CONCLUSION

In the words of the current Commandant of the Marine Corps, “It is through actively seeking the best and brightest young people from all communities in our Nation that we achieve diversity of intellect, talent, culture, and demographic representation - all of which raise the total capability of our Corps.” The leadership of the Marine Corps must focus further attention on addressing the obstacles to retaining its talented and highly trained females to serve as commanders and, subsequently, general officers in the Corps. To reach the Commandant’s goal of having female Marines compose ten percent of the service’s population, it will take a concerted effort from the top leadership of the institution, coupled with a dedicated task force, to implement training, change service culture, and create an inclusive environment.

### Changes and Considerations

The Marine Corp leadership, in joint effort with the different organizations that are chartered to focus on these diverse challenges faced by women, need to encourage inclusion and neutrality across the force. The aspects of manpower, culture, sexual assault/harassment, and retention are places where you can ease the tension, create a more conducive workforce that enables the Marine Corps to be more successful in the retention of women for the future fight. The following are recommended changes to policy/procedures/culture that may remedy many of the factors/challenges to retaining our female Marine Officers:

## Recommendations to Combat Unconscious Bias

- Educating the force on what unconscious bias looks like and the importance for a more inclusive organization. A group discussion can generate more advocates for the minority, in turn, increasing inclusiveness within the organization.
- Remove all pronouns/markings/sex identifiers on fitness reports. Use only “Said Named Officer/Marine” (SNO/SNM) Identified for board purpose by Electronic Data Interchange Personal Identifier (EDIPI)
- Remove pictures from initial review during selection process. Have an indicator that the Marine is within height/weight, and picture is current. Upon completion of the selection board, review pictures for compliance (if deemed necessary).
- Reporting/Tracking procedures for transfers that results in an investigation. This could be coupled with the duties of the Equality Opportunity Advocate. There is already a tracking system that the Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC) maintains.

## Recommendations to Change the Culture

- Accountability/documentation on personal evaluations of command climate of all Battalion and Regimental commanders to the first General Officer.
- Accountability/Reporting procedures for the retention rate of females. This is a “middle management” problem; society and congress want to see more women in the ranks, but how often do Battalion Commanders/ Regimental Commanders view this as their problem. If their success depended on retention, it would be important.

- Accountability/documentation of personnel that display consistent inappropriate behavior that is not in accordance with our values. (This should include our civilian-Marine population)
- Reporting requirements to first General Officer in the chain of command if someone is being transferred by request of Marine or by someone else. This could be put under the supervision of the Equal Opportunity Advocate.

#### Recommendations for an Acceptable Work-Life Balance

- Leadership must set the example by leaving work an established time. Further, the senior leadership of the Marine Corps must message that the goal to get the mission done as quickly but efficiently as possible.
- Institute a system similar to the Standard Labor Data Collection and Distribution Application (SLDCADA) to document how much time Marines are spending at work and establish institutional standards for average time on duty. Make these standards an inspect-able item on IGMC inspection checklists as well as part of command climate surveys.
- Allow Marines the option of a "flex" schedule whereby they may elect to work longer days but be able to take one day a week off every other week.

Implementing these changes will go a long way toward convincing this diverse group of women that choosing service to their country can be a gratifying career that does not mean foregoing having a family. This should be a place where a young woman wants to fulfill a patriotic calling and have a chance of leading Marines rather than a place where she is discriminated against, undervalued, and made to feel more of a burden than part of the team.

While we cannot force the Corps' male senior leaders to sponsor our female officers, put them in high visibility jobs, or encourage intentional actions across the force in order to champion some of our best talent, taking these steps will change the culture of an organization that is hemorrhaging its best female leaders. When women feel like they are part of the solution and not part of the problem, you will have more than 7% women in your force.

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