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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

**MIXED MESSAGING:
USMC MARKETING, CULTURE, AND THE FUTURE FORCE**

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

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Executive Summary

Title: Marine Corps Marketing and Organizational Culture: Past, Present, and Future

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Thesis: This paper analyzes how the Marine Corps brand of tough and elite warriors conveyed in advertising campaigns from 1970 to 2017 perpetuated a culture of intolerance which is not conducive to recruiting and retaining Marines with the cognitive capabilities outlined in the Marine Operating Concept.

Discussion: The 2013 Executive Diversity Task Force examined why the Marine Corps has failed to recruit, retain, and promote diverse talent. Despite the findings, the Corps has not made significant strides in its population of women and minorities. Issues of misogyny, Islamophobia, and misconduct have placed the Marine Corps squarely at a disadvantage in the court of public opinion. The advertising campaigns of the last forty years have been used to solidify the identity of the Marines. The rhetoric used has contributed to a hypermasculine culture that suggests that male Marine leaders are “few” and associated with “elite” and “exceptional” while female Marines are “fewer”, “weaker” and “an exception.” The Marine Corps Operating Concept (MOC) could be the tipping point for a diverse Corps. The MOC identifies key skills required for the warfighter of 2025 that challenge the current recruitment strategies and organizational standards. Using the specific and implied talent requirements outline in the MOC, the paper will propose methods to screen future applicants and current Marines to identify and manage talent in three categories: intelligence, character, and leadership. The recruitment and retention of individuals are the agents for organizational change by 2025. Additionally, the Corps must shift the strategic communication and engagement plan today to reach across media platforms to change the cultural perceptions and appeal to the force of 2035.

Conclusion: The MOC is a concept that requires action. The Marine Corps must develop a strategic communication and engagement campaign plan that frames the changing missions, values, and behaviors that will enable the Marine Corps to be manned, trained, and equipped for whatever challenges lie ahead. To make good on the Commandant’s commitment to change, the organization needs to invest in the resources to shift the narrative and rebrand to meet the needs of the future force.

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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I became interested in researching organizational culture and communication after working for the Task Force led by the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps in response to the *Marines United* social media scandal. I want to thank the many exceptionally talented leaders on the Task Force that helped me learn and grow as a leader, especially General Glenn Walters, Lieutenant General Michael Dana, Bridger General William Bowers, Major Kira Parrish, Captain Karen Holliday, Master Sergeant Tina Kelly, First Sergeant Collin Barry, and Staff Sergeant Chloe Honjy.

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Introduction

Words matter. This is a common statement from all leaders in the United States Marine Corps. This fundamental phrase carries significant weight during combat operations. Telling a pilot to wave-off means he cannot land. Telling a commander that he or she shall, means that they have a legal obligation to comply. The 2005 Haditha Massacre trial deliberated culpability of the Staff Sergeant involved because he was given the order to ‘clear the house’ by his platoon commander.¹ In accordance with Marine Corps Reference Publication 5-12A, “*clear* is a tactical mission task that requires the commander to remove all enemy forces and eliminate organized resistance in an assigned area.”² Applying their understanding of military terminology, individual Marines thought they were justified in killing 24 unarmed civilians because of one word - *clear*. Life or death, words matter.

Rhetoric is a mechanism used to assign meanings to language. This informs behaviors, beliefs, and values that create the organizational culture.³ The marketing campaign published by Marine Corps Recruiting Command (MCRC) influences the rhetoric that shapes the Marine Corps culture. While the Marine Corps owns the brand, it is MCRC that manages it through its annual marketing strategy. Meanwhile, Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC) crafts a separate internal narrative to communicate to Marines. It is despite these internal messages that recruiting media becomes a primary influencer of organizational culture and identity.

This paper argues that recruiting slogans, posters, and commercials from 1970-2017 have established a distinct Marine Corps brand that has contributed to a culture of intolerance inconsistent with cultivating the competencies of future Marines as outlined in the *Marine Operating Concept* (MOC). The first section will outline several symptoms which reflect an intolerant Marine Corps culture. Following that, an overview of the Marine Corps advertising

campaigns from 1977-2017 depicts several themes prevalent in how the brand has been promoted; the paper will then provide a rhetorical analysis of the content in order to illustrate symbolic patterns and priorities put forth in the aforementioned campaigns before concluding with a final recommendation to align the Marine Corps brand to support the diverse talent requirement as outlined in the MOC. As such, the paper addresses the following research questions: 1) Is there a disconnect between the message about the warfighter of 2025 conveyed in the MOC and current Marine Corps cultural values? 2) How can a rhetorical analysis further a better understanding of this disconnect? 3) What kind of rhetorical strategies does the Marine Corps use in its narrative about “Who Marines Are” in advertising campaigns and slogans from 1977 to 2017? 4) How can alternative narratives be used to project a diverse image of the Marine Corps that aligns with the concepts in the MOC?

Symptoms of an Intolerant Culture

In 2017, the United States Marine Corps made headlines for misconduct against women and minorities. *Marines United* was a social media site that was sharing naked photos of fellow Marines and was rampant with derogatory and abusive language about women. General Robert Neller, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, said in his testimony to Congress that *Marines United* and the treatment of women, reflected a culture that denigrates and objectifies women. As he called for the culture to be different, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, a Democrat from New York, responded strongly saying that the Commandant’s comments ring hollow and his statement was unsatisfactory.⁴ General Neller responded, “I’m responsible. I’m the Commandant. I own this. We are going to have to change how we see ourselves, and how we treat each other...We’ve got to change - and that is on me.”

As the Commandant assumed responsibility for change, he established a task force, led by Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps (ACMC), to examine what aspects of Marine Corps culture enable the harassment and abuse of female service members. The ACMC published a newsletter in December 2017 acknowledging the organization's initiative to address cultural issues plaguing the Corps, "The purpose of this office [Personnel Studies and Oversight Office] is to ensure, under the Commandant's leadership and direction, we continue to create an organization where all Marines are fully valued based on their individual excellence and commitment to warfighting, regardless of race, sex, religion, or sexual orientation...leveraging everyone's unique strengths, and building the capabilities necessary to fight and win our nation's battles."⁵

The *Marines United* scandal broke on the heels of another serious issue, abuse and maltreatment of Muslim recruits at Marine Corps Depot Parris Island. The death of Raheel Siddiqui, and the follow-on death investigation, revealed a rampant toxic culture at the very place that is responsible for instilling the core values: Honor, Courage, and Commitment. The investigation found drill instructors targeted Muslims by using racial slurs and physically abusing at least three recruits. In November 2017, a panel of officer and enlisted members convicted Gunnery Sergeant Flix, the senior staff noncommissioned officer, of violating a lawful general order, dereliction of duty, maltreatment of subordinates, false official statements, and drunk and disorderly conduct.

The misconduct highlighted above are just the major headlines. In addition to this behavior, annually, misconduct in the Marine Corps includes thousands of Marines arrested for driving under the influence, reports of 5,536 sexual assaults,⁶ approximately 2,000 domestic violence and child maltreatment cases,⁷ hazing, and other behavior that is counter to the values

and ethos of the Corps.⁸ Collectively, these incidents indicate a culture that tolerates immoral behavior and violence against women. The 3,000 reports of gender discrimination provide the confirmatory data. Juxtaposed to thousands of females reporting discrimination are almost 4,500 male Marines that stated in a survey that they believe sexual harassment does not occur in their command.⁹

Hostile working conditions is not specific to gender relationships. Over 1,000 Marines from various protected categories reported experiencing racial discrimination in the workplace.¹⁰ The realities of harassment and discrimination are not confined to internal reporting. According to the Defense Department's Joint, Advertising, Marketing Research, and Studies found that among youth ages 16-24, the majority of Blacks (64%) and about half of Asians (50%) and Hispanics (53%) believe racial discrimination against their group exists in the military.¹¹

General Neller has released two messages and the MOC since 2016 which identify the characteristics we need in Marines. The MOC calls for, "Marines with mental acuity and resilience no less than physical fitness if we are to remain a professional, discipline, and moral force."¹² The Commandant's message to the Force in his annual messages called for Marines to sharpen their minds, think critically, and be adaptable.¹³ The call for intelligent Marines is undermined by a culture that is uncomfortable with diversity as evident by the misconduct trends and the manpower demographics. The brand and identity remain true to old values despite the findings that diversity is an enabler to creativity, innovation, and genuine leadership.¹⁴ Repeated training initiatives to address problematic aspects of the culture and bias by the Marine Corps over the last five years have failed to yield any significant changes in sexual assault reporting, retention of female and minorities, and inclusion as reported in command climates surveys. The

perversion of the culture has been orchestrated by senior leaders trying to maintain combat exclusion and gender-segregated training where it starts?

The culture and climate represented above conflict with the institution’s concept of the future fighting organization of 2025, the *Marine Corps Operating Concept*. Specifically, the last critical task, “Exploiting the Competence of the Individual Marine,” highlighting the need for “attracting and recruiting individuals with high levels of intelligence and aptitude...and a command culture that expects creativity and rewards initiative.”

Branding the Marine Corps: Recruit Advertising 1970-2017

The Marine Corps Recruiting Command (MCRC) is the owning agency of the Recruitment Marketing Plan (RMP) that orchestrates the intent MCRC’s commanding general and Commandant of the Marine Corps. The brand strategy supports the recruiting mission, the



Figure 1: USMC Poster - Free a Man to Fight

specific quotas to fulfill the organization's personnel requirements. J. Walter Thompson (JWT) is the advertising agency that has been on retainer for seven decades. Since 1947, JWT has been developing advertising campaigns for the Marine Corps. Advertising played a critical part in funding World War II. It was JWT that coined the wartime call, "Free a Man to Fight." depicted in figure 1.¹⁵ It is this substitute mentality that continues to be a legacy that shape female stereotypes.

Two taglines have dominated the last 40 years, "A Few Good Men" and "The Few. The Proud." These taglines accompanied every commercial and poster, sending the message of Marine Corps values and identity to appeal to the recruitable population. The most recent recruiting campaign, *Battles Won* is independent of a tagline. This was a deliberate move by the marketing department at MCRC because the tagline did not tell the story of who the Marine Corps was, or what it did for the nation. The rhetoric used in recruiting advertisements shapes the ideas, values, and identity of the Marine Corps. The next section provides a brief overview of the recruiting material that defines the Marine Corps brand before offering a rhetorical analysis of the content.

A Few Good Men

In the 1970's, the iconic phrase, "The Marines are looking for a Few Good Men" became the tagline for a series of posters. The standard posters contained a phrase complementing the image correlated to the tagline. Three posters from this era serve as the artifacts from the specific marketing campaign. "Rose Garden," shown in figure 2 is one of the most famous posters from this period.¹⁶ The slogan is "We don't promise you a rose garden" with the image of a Marine Drill Instructor staring intensely as he confronts a recruit.

The Drill Instructor is a white male. The face of the recruit and the rank of the Marine are both omitted.



Figure 2: USMC Poster - Rose Garden

The second poster shown in figure 3 titled "Looking for a Few Good Men."¹⁷ shows the image of a white male wearing a varsity letter jacket walking down the street in an urban environment with the slogan "If you just want to be one of the boys stick with the boys." The slogan text is directly under the image and smaller than the tagline, calling attention to the tagline.

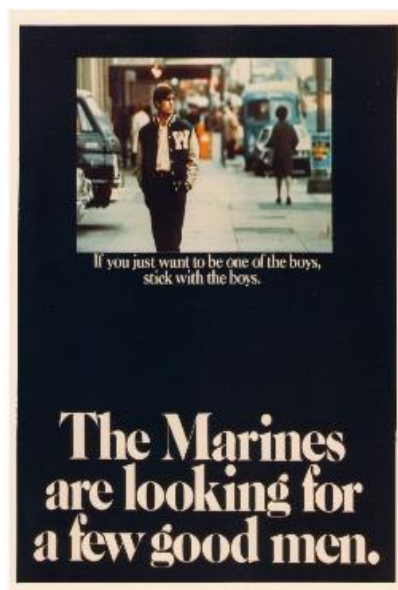


Figure 3: USMC Poster - Looking for a Few Good Men

The final poster shown in figure 4 is titled “Men Wanted”¹⁸ and uses the image of a white

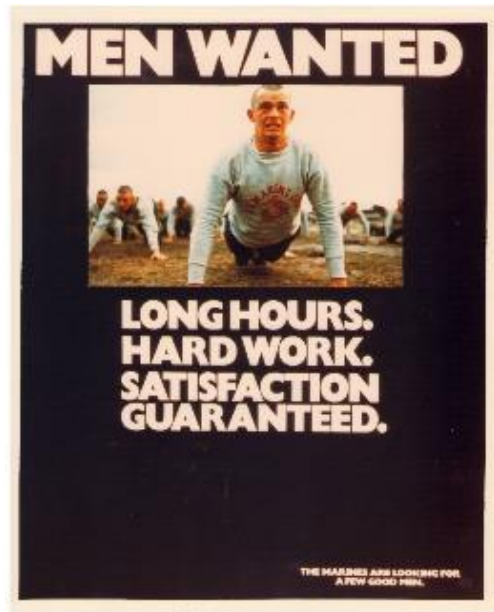


Figure 4: USMC Poster - Long Hours. Hard Work. Satisfaction Guaranteed.

male recruit at boot camp conducting push-ups during physical fitness training. The man’s face is grimacing as he to remain attentive to instruction while physically straining during the exercise. The image has a series of statements underneath, “Long Hours. Hard Work. Satisfaction Guaranteed.”

The Few. The Proud.

The 1980s and 1990s advertising shifted marketing efforts to television commercials, with supporting posters and billboards using the tagline, “The Few. The Proud. The Marines.” The tagline remained hallmark of Marine advertising through the first Gulf War, the terror attacks on September 11th, 2001, until 2016.

In 1998, the “Contest of Honor” commercial shown in figure 5, showcases the knight, a white male, battling the lava monster, commonly considered a dragon, as he traverses obstacles

to become a Marine. As good overcomes evil, the spot ends with the knight wearing the iconic Dress Blues with a sword.



Figure 5: Image from USMC Commercial - Contest of Honor

The post-September 11th brand had a new wartime, nationalistic focus. The commercial “America’s Few” was part of the “Toward the Sounds of Chaos” advertising campaign in 2012 that circulated on traditional media and digital platforms. The commercial focuses on three males, shown in figure 6, running toward the sounds chaos: a white, sturdy male wearing a



Figure 6: Images from USMC Commercial - America's Few

flannel shirt and trucker hat runs through a cornfield, a Hispanic male leaving a basketball game

wearing a backwards hat and basketball apparel, and the final is an African American wearing jeans, t-shirt, and light jacket as he runs against the flow of traffic in a crosswalk. The rhythmic sound of rifle manual complement the instrumental background music throughout the one-minute commercial.

All three young men arrive together on the infamous yellow footprints at a Marine Corps Recruit Training Depot. The new recruits move through boot camp conducting training activities to include climbing a rope on an obstacle course, swim training in boots and uniform, completing training with the gas masks, repelling off a tower, martial arts, combat training, and pugil sticks. The commercial ends with the same three males on the Silent Drill team conducting rifle drill movements across the United States. It closes with the tagline, “The Few. The Proud. The Marines.” These were the only words spoken during the entire commercial.

Battles Won

The 2017 recruiting campaign did not replace “The Few. The Proud.” as the Marine Corps tagline, but messaging strategy, “Battles Won Story” omits it completely. The primary commercial, “Anthem” embodies the overall strategy, which includes supplemental videos online. The baseline commercial depicts the long, storied history of the Marine Corp through bronze toy-like figurines with the narration starting, “Battles aren’t won solely on the battlefield. That is a common misconception.” The commercial is also now a statue at the National Museum of the Marine Corps, with the image from the commercial shown in figure 7.

Moving quickly from the Civil War, World War I and II, Montford Point, Iwo Jima, Korea, and Vietnam. The narration calling out that “battles are won over enemies of



Figure 7: Image from USMC Commercial - Anthem

fear...enemies of doubt” as the media pauses on the Marines of Montford Point, the first African Americans to serve in the Marine Corps. The narrator then shifts to a promise to one’s community, with a male bronzed figure holds a child, while others deliver supplies. The training images show males doing pull-ups, the rappel tower in the background, and quickly transitioning to images of Iraq, to include Marines assisting First Sergeant Bradley Kastle after he was wounded during the battle of Fallujah.

At the one-minute mark, the first and only female Marine appears (Figure 8). The



Figure 8: Image from USMC Commercial - Anthem

commercial shows the Marines conducting an engagement with Muslim women as the narrator says, “In the heart of every Marine you’ll find a promise.” The storyline closes with three bronze busts, two men, and one woman, wearing matching Dress Blues, looking over a scene of

Marine Barracks Washington. While many scenes are iconic Marines in battle, some images would not likely be common knowledge to the average American. All these bronze Marines and equipment make up a single bronze statue of a modern Marine.

The second commercial in the series was “Battle Up.” The commercial was released in March 2017, coincidentally after the *Marines United* scandal broke, “Battle Up” highlights the fighting spirit of a young, white female. The story follows the protagonist from school to post service. The sequence of shots shown in figure 9 depicts the individual as she stands up to bullies in elementary school, battles through the rain in a rugby match in college, earning the title as Marine Officer in combat training, serving as a convoy commander in a combat zone, and finally helping end hunger as a community leader.



Figure 9: Images from USMC Commercial - Battle Up

The narration is, “No one knows where it comes from. Why some have it and some don’t. It’s the fighting spirit that needs to be fed. It consumes fear, self-doubt, and weakness, it stands ready to protect those in danger. And to fight whatever shape the battle takes. Because as long as there are battles, there will always be Marines.”

Methodology

Rhetoric is defined by leading communication expert Sonja Foss as, “the action human performs when they use symbols for the purpose of communicating with one another,” with four dimensions that are particularly important in understanding: 1) rhetoric is an action; 2) rhetoric is a symbolic action; 3) rhetoric is a human action; and 4) rhetorical functions to enable use of

communication with one another.¹⁹ Conducting a rhetorical criticism is the process of understanding the artifact through an investigative process that helps explain the symbols.²⁰ This is the natural process that individuals go through as they consume media. Applying a systematic approach enhances the understanding and response to them, both individually and collectively.²¹ Theorizing the intentions of the creator is left to the analysis of the critic, and therefore requires the application of the original context to gain a better understanding of the content.

A collection of essays in *A Communication Perspective on the Military*, examine the relationship between communication and the military. Gordon Mitchell's essay, "Necessity and Possibility in Military Rhetoric" gives historical references on why military rhetoric and public communication become controversial; "Given the U.S. military's sprawling size, massive budgets, and entwinement with myriad elements of American culture, military issues serve as lightning rods for controversies generated from the friction of vigorous disagreement."²² The issues challenging the Marine Corps are often larger social issues being debated across the nation, affixing military rhetoric to the broader national narratives. Common social themes addressed by the military over the last century include but are not limited to racial integration, gender equality, religious freedom, and sexual orientation/marriage equality. The nation's highest courts debate and decide these complex issues, which quickly become actionable policies by the Department of Defense.

Young & Kaurin's (2015) "The Myth of the Warrior: Rhetorics of Masculinity and Don't Ask Don't Tell" reveals how the media and service members confronted policy changes that challenged a hypermasculine military identity – the warrior. The repeal of the policy Don't Ask Don't Tell in 2010 and lifting the ban on women in combat positions in 2013 were seismic shifts to military culture. Young argues that the current military actions are, "in favor of intellect,

ability to navigate in multiple roles and contexts, humanitarianism, collectivism, nurturance, cultural understanding and respect, and care.”²³ The national response called on traditional social norms, biology, and god to defend the role of men as warriors. The scholarly literature reviewed in the article looks at the warrior ethos in Campbell’s seminal work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. The journey of the hero starts with leaving the family, overcoming a challenge, and returning to their community a full man. A pattern mimicked in the *Long Marine Story*.

The journey creates a warrior that is both strong and honorable. Warrior Ethos draws from Greek origins of honor as a *manly virtue* and courage as physical combat.²⁴ This image of the masculine warrior is countered by Snyder’s concept of armed masculinity. She theorizes that masculine warrior can be replaced by arming individuals to fill the role of protector and defender. The challenge to the hypermasculine warrior would result in asserting dominance through hazing and harassment.²⁵ The policy threatened military leaders, past and present. These men looked to protect the warrior myth through official statements and testimony which received significant media attention. Some leaders were quoted as saying the repeal of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell would “undermine good order and discipline,” “be a distraction,” “be disruptive.”

The military opinion that received the most media coverage did not support the repeal based on the good of the collective group. Admiral Mullen, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said it would make the military stronger by affording individual to serve and protecting the individual’s right. The opposing opinions created debate and challenged the identity of service members as warriors. The intersection of military policy and changing social norms is how rhetoric and identity drive organizational culture and values. Young closes her essay, reframing heroes in modern warfare, noting that, “breaking down myths of masculinity and warrior identity

helps people see the damages these myths do to relationships, to political and social policy, to families, to the workplace, and everywhere in between.”²⁶

Szczesniak’s (2009) “Rhetorical Analysis of an Army Recruitment ad” examines the “Army Strong” advertisement by focusing on a single term, “strong.” Using both the narration and images, the author identifies all multitude of ways that “strength” is a tenant of character, leadership, resolve, as well as fitness. The Army released the ad while the service was engaged in conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq but it deliberately omitted combat. In connecting modern ads to historical posters, Szczesniak identifies meaning in the script’s color and size in the iconic “We Want YOU” poster. He relates the ads details and ambiguity to the role the military and war played in society during World War II. He closed the article acknowledging the changing relationship between society and the military, hoping to coax an individual viewer into believing they need the Army to become stronger.

Serious and specific rhetorical analysis enables a critic to create multiple interpretations of a professionally crafted message and potentially reveal new insights. Marketing and communication professionals understand how to create meaning, and persuade personnel, even to the point of manipulation.²⁷ Marketing campaigns craft messages and control the images. It is a set of choices, woven together to create a simple and direct message consumable to a targeted population. While some advertising is bait to a larger conversation, the Marine Corps “brand” is not ambiguous. The commercials are not orchestrated to make the audience wonder about who or what the Marine Corps is. The communication professionals use specially crafted language and other semiotic means to achieve their goals. They can create specific meaning through images, symbols, color, lighting, articulation of detail, repetition, positioning, etc.²⁸

Communication theorist Kenneth Burke developed a method, cluster criticism, to gain insight into the unconscious and conscious use of language in an artifact. Kevin McCandlish used Burke's theory to conduct a cluster analysis on judicial rulings. In his paper, "The Categorical Balance of Safeguarding Honor: A Cluster Analysis of Rhetorical Value Hierarchies in the Ninth Circuit's *United States v. Alvarez*," the author identifies the repeating terms and concepts to reveal the underlying motives in the legal decision and opinions expressed around the argument of the *Stolen Valor Act*. He states, "The careful legal language, which a judge deliberately selects for a decision, revolves around formal terms embedded in law. How formal terms are described, applied, and justified, however, will reveal the underlying level of importance they are attributed... Cluster analysis provides a fascinating method for unraveling the complex fabric of judicial decisions, and for examining the way in which certain values wrap around important concepts within the text."²⁹ In McCandlish's used three primary key terms in his analysis: "honor," "freedom of speech," and "false statements." The analysis reveals that while the subject was the Medal of Honor, the rhetoric did not focus on the term. The judges navigated past the emotion of terms like "honor" and "valor," to uphold the democratic value of "freedom," specifically protecting the freedom of speech from government interference.³⁰ While the author focused solely on legal text, the application of communication theories to understand how individually crafted messages reveal a hierarchy of values within a nation, organization, or specific profession provided useful insight.

In the case of Marine Corps marketing, the organization, Recruiting, and the advertising professionals, JWT, have been crafting the "brand" and message together for almost seventy years. The biases of the organization may be unintentional yet counterproductive. A cluster criticism requires identifying key terms for units of analysis and the terms that cluster about

them. Frequency and intensity determine key terms.³¹ The repetition of visual elements included the number of images and their actions; all images were considered individual elements within the media analyzed. Positioning, repetition, and tone project intensity and importance. The artifacts selected represent social changes in the military. By conducting a cluster analysis, this paper identifies the rhetorical strategies and symbolic patterns that inform Marine organizational culture and examines if these findings conflict with the future requirements of the MOC.

Cluster Analysis

The following analysis will provide insight into the images and languages used in recruiting advertisements that support a single Marine Corps identity. The analysis will be organized as follows: first, clusters surrounding the key terms (important elements used in the rhetoric) discussed; next, the opposing terms/images are identified; and the analysis concludes with an interpretation of the clusters. “Men,” “few,” “fight,” are three key terms identified in the artifacts based on frequency and emphasis, and “female” as the opposing term. Using Burke’s method of cluster analysis to demonstrate how each communication act is in itself a microcosm of motive, providing a deeper understanding of Marine Corps culture and identity through analysis of its rhetoric in sampling of three decades worth of advertising.³² The terms and accompanying images will be clustered and then examined within the context of the larger military culture that includes testimony by military leaders, policy, and popular media.

“Men”

The Marine Corps creating a single identity, the Marine as a man. Historically, the Marine Corps has had the lowest number of females in the Department of Defense. Overall, the female population in the Marine Corps was less than five percent, only reaching eight percent in

the last year.³³ Its standards to reason that the male dominance in the recruitment media reflected the organization's population. The slogan, "A Few Good Men" provide the consistent use of the term during the 1970's.

The 1970s advertising was shaped by three significant changes to the organization: the All-Volunteer Force (AVF), the 26th Commandant of the Marine Corps General Louis Wilson, and organizational misconduct at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego. The AVF dramatic changed the way the armed service recruited. Where the Army sold trade training and experience, General Wilson wanted to sell the tough, elite Corps. Drug use and disciplinary problems plagued with a force. While improving the overall good order and discipline, the Commandant had to simultaneously purge the force and increase recruitment standards. The "Rose Garden" achieved the goal of a marketing strategy that did not pander to the recruitable population. The grit and intensity captured in the photo of the drill instructor depicted the challenges that lay ahead at the recruit training depots. General Wilson released a White Letter and recruitment goals for women, to influence the conduct, professionalism, and culture for women Marines.³⁴ While the Commandant was clear and direct to the force about the treatment of women, the rhetoric of "A Few Good Men" strengthened the legacy of the white, male culture and gave little room for women to seize a foothold. As the Marine Corps moved into the next decade, "A Few Good Men" was replaced by "The Few. The Proud.," but male dominance remained the service identity.

Hypermasculine males in featured roles like Rambo, Rocky, Terminator, and Top Gun dominated 1980s popular culture. The Marine Corps brand mimicked the popularity of these characters, remaining focused on the physical training at boot camp, to transform individuals into "A Few Good Men." The slogan made it to Hollywood. The 1992 movie *A Few Good Men*

glorified the abrasive leadership and unyielding defiance of Colonel Nathan Jessup. While the plot shows the legal team probing the murder of Private First Class Santiago, a victim of a toxic culture of hazing and intolerance, the audience often remembers the speech of Colonel Jessup.

‘You can’t handle the truth...my existence, while grotesque and incomprehensible to you, saves lives. We use words like honor, code, loyalty. We use these words as the backbone of a life spent defending something. You use them as a punch line. I have neither the time nor the inclination to explain myself to a man who rises and sleeps under the blanket of the very freedom that I provide, and then questions the manner in which I provide it! I would rather you just said ‘thank you’ and went on your way.’

As the speech indicates, Colonel Jessup was himself as an elite warrior, entitled to the trust of the American people by virtue of his title, Marine. The sentiment of the film, coupled with the exclusivity of the organization’s de facto motto, “The Few. The Proud.” creates an isolated, self-selecting culture that glorifies toxic masculinity.

“Few”

The term “few” establishes the Marine Corps as an elite organization. “Many will hear the calling, few will earn the title” is the closing of the commercial “America’s Few.” The term is present in two slogans, the previously discussed “A Few Good Men” and the dominant tagline, “The Few. The Proud.” The phrase was introduced in the 1980s and became the hallmark tagline for more than 30 years. The phrase was on posters, billboards, t-shirts, bumper stickers, and more. The slogan became so familiar and synonymous with the Corps, it often overshadowed the actual organizational values of honor, courage, and commitment.

Internal sub-cultures like the infantry and reconnaissance also claimed elite status. The occupational specialties were defined in the policy as elite, taking only the most physically fit Marines, and those Marines had to be men. The 1990s altered the social demographics of the military. The decade was framed by the first Persian Gulf War, the 1991 sexual assault scandal

Tail Hook, the Combat Exclusion Policy that opened additional military occupations to women, implementation of Don't Ask Don't Tell in 1994, and the 1998 impeachment trial of President Bill Clinton. These events and policies changed the social dynamics of the military. Given the new opportunities for women in the military, it is curious that the population of women and minorities saw little change.³⁵

In the commercial "The Contest of Honor," the Marine Corps bypassed policy and focused on heroic fantasy. The military recruiting commercial omits imagery of military training or combat operations. The rhetoric directly supports the "The Few. The Proud" with the words and phrases, "rite of passage," "challenge," "elite," culminating with, "changed forever." Interesting, that an organization that trains to achieve a collective culture of putting others before self, used of the individual to achieve individual transformation and a personal sense of accomplishment.³⁶ The 2012 commercial "America's Few" depicts a racially diverse group of young men that leave the individual for the group. The transformation was about leaving Anytown, U.S.A., to serve their nation during a time of war. The narration delineates between those that "hear the calling" and those that "earn the title," making becoming a Marine not only a choice but a selection into the elite organization. The term "fight" will be the final term examined, prior to interpreting this portion of the paper.

"Fight"

The rhetoric that clusters around "fight" include the images of "strength," "battle," and "courage." The use of these clusters follows the sequence of Marine maturation. The Marine Corps has three objectives: make Marines, win our nation's battles, and return as quality citizens. This is known as the *Longer Marine Corps Story* and has been the threads that tie the last fifty years of advertisements to the organization. The 2018 Recruitment Marketing Plan

clearly states, “It [Battles Won] communicates that differentiating narrative through the three promises Marines make to our Nation and its citizens: We Make Marines, We Win our Nation's Battles, and We Develop Quality Citizens. Each is framed as a fight (either figurative or literal), one we intend to win as either an individual or an organization.”³⁷

First, the making of Marines is a transformational process. While common to think of training as a transformation today, it was General Krulak, the 31st Commandant, who coined the phrase and focused the rhetoric on transformation. The Marine Corps took pride in making men of boys, and it became part of the culture and the “brand.” Recruiting posters in the 1970s and 1980s depicted individual recruits taking on the physical challenges of boot camp. In the commercial, “Toward the Sounds of Chaos,” these young men are partaking in the physical demands of life, the farm, and the basketball court when they run to the yellow footprints of the recruit training depots. The physical training in the commercial is an accurate depiction of the graduation requirements to become a Marine. The second part, the Title 10 requirement to fulfill the wartime requirement, negotiates the idea of war by focusing on the battle. Marines talk of Belleau Wood, not World War I; Iwo Jima, not World War II, Fallujah, not Iraqi Freedom. It is specific to the legacy of the Corps and isolated from the success and failures of war. This is the dominant rhetoric in “Anthem,” showing the men in battle from the Colonial Marines to the Battle of Marjah. Finally, returning quality citizens - an ideal outcome of the citizen soldier protecting the republic. While not specific, it bookends service as a civilian rather than a casualty, avoiding the grim reality of service.

The use of the term “courage” is often tied to heroic feats on the battlefield. The media refers to both the moral and physical, however, the latter is dominant. Courage on the battlefield during peacetime is a romantic interpretation of war. During a war, it is the reality that the

American people become quickly familiar with via news reports. This is especially true after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Following the terror attacks on American soil, the Marine Corps saw no shortage of volunteers, but the force was growing and the standards had not changed. The propensity to serve saw a slight increase from 2001 to 2003, and then a steady downward trend from 2004 to 2008.³⁸ The brand focused on a nation united by war and patriotism. While women took on new roles in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, these sacrifices were not part of a story the Marines portrayed.

“Female”

Isolating the females in the advertisement, they are shown separately or in roles that do not highlight their leadership capabilities. In the 1990s, the only recruiting reference found for women was a parody of the “Rose Garden” with a female drill instructor and the line of “We don’t promise you a rose garden either,” followed by the tagline, “The Few. The Proud. The Women Marines,” a marketing strategy to denote women are atypical for the gender identity associated with the title Marine. The poster did not have a date, but the drill instructor was wearing the campaign cover, a uniform item that was not authorized for females until 1996.³⁹ Females are completely omitted in the majority of advertisement campaigns.

In 2017, both “Anthem” and “Battle Up” included female Marines. As described above, “Anthem” shows two female Marines. The first is an individual female is engaged in a cultural exchange, not in a leadership position or operating in their occupation specialty. While the intention is to highlight women in battle, showing a woman participating in Female Engagement Team (FET), there is no context for the viewer. Individuals unfamiliar with the FET program would not intuitively connect the image with a positive message of developing roles of women in combat. The second female is static and shown wearing the proposed unisex uniform. There are

over 50 identifiable human faces shown during the advertisement, but there were only two female Marines.

A similar examination of media shows that the Marine Corps fails to present women in non-traditional roles in media coverage on the marines.mil website and photographs published on the marines.com recruiting website.⁴⁰ Overall, including less than four percent of all images on the two websites owned and operated by the Marine Corps include women. The use of the terms “heart” and “promise” while the Marine engages only with women, creates a feminine Marine. The choice of “promise” over the similar Marine Corp value of commitment shows the alternative rhetoric. It is culturally sensitive and compassionate.

This continued in the second commercial associated with the campaign, “Battle Up.” When it premiered, it was received as an organizational knee-jerk to provide female Marines credibility after Marines United. It focused entirely on the story of a female Marine Officer’s long story of character and fighting spirit. The message was well received by the general population but received a litany of degrading comments online by Marines and veterans. One of the issues with “Battle Up” is all the actions are done in relative gender isolation. While in elementary school, the future Marine talks to two young girls and then combats bullying amongst an all-girl cohort. The women’s rugby match transitions to the individual transformation of becoming a Marine. The battle scene does not include any indication that she is the leader of the convoy, as she moves independently without leading or communicating with other Marines. The closing scene of combating hunger in America’s inner city has her delivering material with two other women to an elderly man. All the effort to create a realistic portrayal of women in the Marine Corps, honoring all those that have served and paying respect to those that have made the

ultimate sacrifice, fall short of endorsing women as leaders. “Free a Man to Fight” concept remains a prevalent stereotype of women in service.

Cluster Analysis Interpretation

Conducting a cluster analysis of the verbal and nonverbal symbols found in a representative sample of three decades of advertisements characterizes the Marine Corps as a male exclusive warfighting organization. Casting Marine Corps identity and culture in this light is not necessarily negative; history has revealed that the Marine Corps has been highly effective in battle. The problems arise when this exclusive culture fails to adapt to the organizational needs, whether through societal expectations, policy, or operational requirements. Analyzing the clusters that emerged around the terms “Few”, “Men,” ”Fight” and “Female” suggests that male Marine leaders are “few” and associated with “elite” and exceptional while female Marine leaders are “fewer”, “weaker” and an exception. Consider the word association below:

If Marine is Male, **then** Female \neq Marine

If Marine is Male, **then** Male Marines are Few, Elite, and Exceptional

If Female is not Marine, **then** Female Marines are Fewer, Weaker, and an Exception

Male Marines are better for the organization than Female Marines

This finding reflects the formal report on gender integration funded by the Marine Corps. General Dunford, the Commandant in 2014, spent \$64 million dollars to establish the Ground Combat Element Integrated Task Force (GCEIFT) to collect data on the impact of female integration into ground combat roles. The Ground Combat Element Integrated Task Force Experimental Assessment Report’s executive summary provided the following conclusion: females cannot perform physically demanding tasks at the same level of their male counterparts, females degraded the overall performance of a unit, and women incurred more occupational

injuries than males.⁴¹ The research methodology and conclusions isolate the overall requirements and performance of the infantry occupation relative to the scope of physicality.

The study did not identify any objectives that evaluated the leadership, intellect, cultural aptitude, language proficiency, maturity, decision-making, or many other characteristics typically valued by the Marine Corps as highlighted in their own doctrine and policies. Marine Corps Doctrine Publication 1, *Warfighting*, states, “The Marine Corps' style of warfare requires intelligent leaders with a penchant for boldness and initiative down to the lowest levels.”⁴² The Marine Corps *Warfighting* Publication 6-11, *Leading Marines*, defines the Core Values of Honor, Courage, and Commitment. These phrases are embraced within the Marine Corps and are used in narration in recruiting marketing. The publication calls these values the cornerstone, bedrock, and heart of our character.⁴³ Honor is defined by dignity, respect, maturity, trust, and dependability. Courage is, “the mental, moral, and physical strength integrated in Marines to carry them through the challenges of combat and the mastery of fear; to do what is right; to adhere to a higher standard of personal conduct; to lead by example, and to make tough decisions under stress and pressure.”⁴⁴ Commitment is more than the individual character trait, but a contribution to the good order and discipline of a unit.⁴⁵ The core values, leadership traits, nor leadership principles were evaluated in the GCEIFT study, omitting the character evaluation that makes a unit a professional warfighting origination. The MOC states, “We always screen for individuals that can demonstrate the physical strength, intestinal fortitude, temperament, and maturity required to lead Marines in combat...[we must] continuously examine and refine our recruiting, employing our institutional values to gain advantage in the competition for military talent.”⁴⁶ Using the MOC as the call for action, this paper concludes with a recommendation on how to achieve the goal of using recruiting marketing to both attract talent with the traits

identified in the MOC, as well as change the culture of the organization to further retain the talented Marines currently serving.

The rhetoric in the MOC supports a collective identity. The 27-page document uses the term “we” approximately 180 times. The “we” referring to Marines, which is a term used 40 times. The document is internal to the organization with a clear intent to address the changing nature of war. The last section uses a cluster of terms to reframe the character of Marines as creative, intelligent, strong, and mature. Phrases and terms like the power to make a difference, perceptive (operate in the human terrain), resilient (overcome frustrations), and culturally competent. The one minor but obvious misstep in the rhetoric was the use of the term “gentlemen” in the opening vignette. However, much of the rhetoric articulates a shifting identity of a service member and best practice as outlined by Young and Kaurin; “Warriors may be fit and strong and brave, but they are also culturally sensitive, smart, and compassionate. This less hypermasculinity is a better sell in our contemporary political culture and we anticipate greater recognition of the strength of this competing vision as it better supports the rights discourse of liberalism that undergirds American political rhetoric and self-understanding.”⁴⁷

Recommendation

For the Marine Corps to make good on the Commandant’s commitment to change, the organization needs to shift the narrative, rebrand to meet the needs of the future force, and invest in the communication tools to achieve both. The Marine Corps understands culture, communication, information, and messaging. To achieve the organization’s strategic goals, it communicates with multiple populations: Congress, the American people, foreign militaries, veterans, industry, and its Marines. The Marine Corps has treated these groups separate and distinct, with different leaders crafting separate narratives. Furthermore, the message becomes

distorted by the disjointed effort across the organization. While Communication Strategy and Operations Officers are craft the organization's position on a variety of internal topics, JWT and MCRC manage the brand, and then there are hundreds of Marines in positions that create, control, or influence communication that have no formal training or professional communication experience.

Language *is* the culture and how the organization uses it matters. The tools to build the organizational culture cannot be an afterthought carelessly managed by novices. The language that crafts external and internal media, community engagement, congressional testimony, doctrine, policy, etc. should be one cohesive message tied to a cohesive multi-year campaign plan for the modern Marine Corps. The heavy reliance on the motto *Semper Fidelis*, the core values of Honor, Courage, Commitment, and saying "Once a Marine, Always a Marine" are legacies that reflect on where the organization has been and offers very little on where the organization is going.

The MOC is a concept and must be develop in an action plan. A strategic communication and engagement campaign plan should frame the changing missions, values, and behaviors that will enable the Marine Corps to be manned, trained, and equipped for whatever challenges lie ahead. The Marine Corps needs to expend the resources to research, plan, employ, and monitor an internal marketing program, nested in the larger strategic communication and engagement campaign plan. All plans need to properly articulates the qualities of the Marines of the future. MCRC has the made tremendous progress, and the methods and tools they have today need to be implemented to influence the Corps writ large. The marketing material available on marines.com and their YouTube channel, *OurMarines*, should be the standard that the organization uses to create an internal communication strategy.

The strategic communication mission needs to be operationalized through engagements to create an alternative narrative to shape and develop a culture that values the unique contributions of every Marine. The *new* narrative currently exists within the ranks. The Marines need a platform to tell their stories and share their ideas - in their voices. These personal stories of leadership, perseverance, creativity, innovation, and humility could help validate current values and will influence emerging beliefs and behaviors. Marines could engage in online forums, attend conferences, and community relations event to share ideas with Marines past, present, and future. It could affirm and realign relationship in communities, industries, and families. It is a power shift back to the Marines and the nation. Online forums offer a unique tool of real-time feedback and metrics (likes, shares, etc.) that enables leaders to learn and grow from within the organization.

In Brigadier General William Journey's focus paper on Communication Strategy and Synchronization, engagement defines, "mapping the human networks, and planning, executing, assessing, sharing, tracking, and refining engagement can help identify, inform, and influence key personalities."⁴⁸ While HQMC and MCRC understand the communication concepts and doctrine, unit commanders writ large do not. "Marine commands involved in their local communities are the best ambassadors for the Armed Forces and for recruiting."⁴⁹ To make this concept successful, the commanders need to the personnel and resources to control the narrative. The new strategic communication and operations personnel structure at the Marine Forces Commands and Marine Expeditionary Forces (MEF) and presents an opportunity to employ these resources in support of the campaign plan.

Using the insights from Brigadier General Journey, the MEF Commanding Generals should develop an action plan that: 1) nests all narratives with the campaign plan while

addressing local unit requirements, 2) ensure all commanders employ the message in all formal and informal engagements with their Marines and the community, and 3) create a comprehensive operations plan that includes a clear mission, intent, tasks, and metrics for effectiveness.⁵⁰ This plan needs to be supported by HQMC with narratives, themes, messages, and supporting resources to include professional marketing products. The following best practices should be published in the campaign plan: 1) Be patient and build trust before attempting to influence, 2) Develop a cultural map to understand all the subcultures in the organization, 3) Avoid fratricide between subcultures, 4) Prevent “engagement-overload, 5) Remain proactive and develop new engagement opportunities, 6) Leverage commands at all level when implementing the plan but remain selective, and 7) Record and report all engagements to support assessment and the development of future engagements.⁵¹ The professional and deliberate plan will be expensive, but the cost should not impede the progress that postures the organization for the future.⁵²

Notes

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