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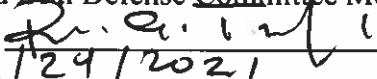
THE FEW, THE PROUD, THE MINORITIES

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

KETRIC D. BUFFIN

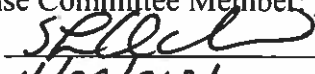
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: The Few, The Proud, The Minorities

Author: Major Ketric D. Buffin, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: Marine Corps culture is not conducive to the progression of minority officers resulting in a lack of diversity and inclusion amongst senior officer ranks.

Discussion: In wake of social tension in America, the topic of equality, diversity, and inclusion has become a topic of interest in the United States' Department of Defense. As a result, the Pentagon directed each branch of its military to analyze why there is prejudice within its ranks, and to institute initiatives to expand diversity and reduce prejudice in an effort to recruit, retain, and promote a more racial, ethnic, and gender inclusive force.¹ The Marine Corps has a history of refuting orders that it feels will negatively impact the effectiveness of its combat lethality.

Conclusion: This attitude is a derivative of the hypermasculine culture that the predominantly white male organization perpetuates. The culture of the Marine Corps harbors bias that results in the natural segregation of those that fit it in and those that do not. This is visibly and statistically identifiable amongst the senior officer ranks in the Marine Corps. This reality highlights the impact bias has on minorities as minorities historically receive lower fitness report averages. Until the Marine Corps takes an aggressive approach towards understanding bias and its impact on recruiting, promoting, and retaining minority officers, the Marine Corps will continue to have a lack of minority representation amongst its most senior ranks.

Recommendations: To combat the impact of bias on performance evaluations, the Marine Corps must provide training to assist with combatting bias and its effect in the workplace. The training must be a requirement prior to writing performance evaluations, and must require regular recertification consistent with the changes of the social and operational environment.

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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Figures

	Page
FIGURE 1: SENIOR MILITARY STAFF	9
FIGURE 2: FORMER MARINE CORPS COMMANDANTS	11
FIGURE 3: BAR GRAPH OF SENIOR OFFICER REPRESENTATION	18
FIGURE 4: GRAPH OF OFFICER REPRESENTATION BY RANK	19

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	0
Background	0
Historical Context	2
U.S. History of Segregation and Discrimination	2
Minorities in the U.S. Military	5
Culture and the U.S. Marine Corps	10
Three Levels of Marine Corps Culture.....	10
In Groups vs. Out Groups.....	13
Understanding Bias.....	16
Improve Diversity and Inclusion – How?	18
Conclusion	23
Endnotes.....	26
Bibliography.....	34

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Introduction

The social unrest of 2020 and 2021, likely exacerbated by the effects of a global pandemic, is unparalleled to any other time in recent history. The deaths of minority Americans such as George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, among many others in recent years brought to light a racial divide that was previously assumed to be a moot topic due to the progress of America over the past decade. It is commonly thought that the old-fashioned forms of racial and even gender bias have been relegated to implicit, subtle, and often unintended bias.² In his article *Thinking About Thinking: Beyond Decision-Making Rationalism and the Emergence of Behavioral Ethics*, James Bowman offers that humans are psychologically geared to maintain predisposed evaluations regardless of presented facts, as their emotions carry more weight than reason when assigning value to hard topics.³ Consider this while reading this paper.

This work's intent is to connect the relationship between history, social psychology, culture, and their influence on bias as it relates to the lack of diversity amongst senior military officers in the United States Marine Corps. While there is value in identifying intentional unethical behavior, this work is focused on illuminating the idea that most human beings harbor unintentional biases that motivate their decisions. The existence of bias does not in-and-of itself render an individual unethical; all persons have biases. Rather it is the reluctance to understand how one's personal bias impacts decision-making that should carry negative connotation.

Background

As a microcosm of American society, the United States military faces the same challenges that many American organizations face today. The United States Marine Corps is no exception. Similar to the demographics of Fortune 500 Chief Executive Officers, the demographics of senior leadership in the Marine Corps lacks diversity. This raises the question

of “Why?”. Through analysis of social psychology and human behavior, as they relate to bias and culture, the reason behind the lack of diversity amongst senior officers in the United States Marine Corps is made clear. The subjectivity by which officers are evaluated allows for bias to influence negatively how minorities are ranked during evaluations in relationship to their peers. Understanding that bias is a byproduct of human nature influenced by culture, the only way to eliminate the impact of bias is to raise the awareness of its existence and its impact in organizations. Fortunately, innovators in corporate training and leadership development such as Honesty and Maxfield have studied this issue and developed recommended methods and techniques to improve this shortcoming.⁴ The Marine Corps would be well-served to take these recommendations on reducing bias in an effort to create a more diverse group of senior officers, thereby increasing its capability to serve the young men and women of today’s America.

One of the most frequently mentioned topics when analyzing group dynamics is human behavior. Human behavior evolved into a topic of significance as it relates to the success of organizations. Durkheim, Marx, and Weber, often considered the fathers of sociology, dedicated years of study to provide an academic understanding of what motivates people to do the things that they do.⁵ Their studies on conflict theory, cultural norms, common institutions, and stratification theories provide an academic understanding of how such motivations impact productivity, growth, team building, group dynamics, and ultimately culture.⁶ All of which are important variables to consider when analyzing organizational success. Additionally, scholars such as Kathy Gurchiek, James Bowman, and Miles McPherson suggest that the analysis provided by psychologists, sociologists, and philosophers provide fruitful insight into the longstanding issues of diversity and inclusion facing leaders in America today.⁷

Historical Context

Reflecting on the past makes it easier to analyze and understand the present. American history tells the story of a segregated America, a nation in which not all persons were always viewed as equal. History, however, also tells a story of change. Conscious efforts have gone into the idea of inclusion and acceptance with an end goal of equality. While progress is evident, equality efforts persist. This is the case for many major organizations today, to include the United States Department of Defense. Why do inequality and discrimination continue to exist in spite of societal changes? Many scholars have explored this question and have proposed many reasons as to why the fight for equality persists. In this case, historical context and its influence on culture is important to analyze because it plays a major role in bias formation.

In an article on leadership development, Bruce Avolio describes the leader's development process as a lifelong journey in which the individual interprets and makes meaning out of experiences that contribute to enhancing the individual's understanding of self and leader development.⁸ Before tackling the issues of diversity in the Marine Corps, it is important to understand United States history as it relates to diversity and inclusion. America's history plays a significant role in shaping the self-construct of Americans and American culture.

U.S. History of Segregation and Discrimination

"Manifest destiny," a term coined in 1845 by journalist John O'Sullivan, is the belief that Americans and American institutions are morally superior to others.⁹ As such, early Americans felt morally obligated to spread those institutions to less civilized societies such as Native American tribes and peoples of Mexico.¹⁰ Consider further early westward expansion from the early 1800s through the early 1900s to the Civil War. These periods saw discrimination and slaughter of ethnicities whose lifestyle and culture differed from that of early colonials. This was

ultimately a result of selfish ambitions and an unethical attitude towards the equality of human beings thus diminishing the preservation of humanity.¹¹ According to Phillip Goff, Jennifer Eberhardt, Melissa Williams, and Matthew Jackson, the dehumanization of a group of people was used to justify slavery in the United States much like the Jewish Holocaust of World War II.¹² The same can be said when considering the treatment of Native Americans, whose natural state was referred to as “savage” by Thomas Jefferson.¹³ This was a time where those whose physical characteristics and ways of life did not reflect that of European colonialists resulted in acts strongly influenced by bias, or the belief that Native Americans were culturally inferior due to their lifestyle and traditions.¹⁴ These biases contributed to colonist’s perception of Native Americans being inferior thus aiding an implicit moral exclusion ultimately enabling maltreatment.¹⁵

During the segregations era, 1900-1939, many Civil Rights activists joined white reformers to form the National Association for Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to combat dehumanization and racial discrimination.¹⁶ During those times, and often today, African Americans were frequently referred to as “apes,” allowing for moral exclusion through dehumanization.¹⁷ Following the Civil War, African Americans were freed but in many instances were still treated as slaves and viewed as less than men. When people are dehumanized, not only are they denied their identity as people, they fall into a category that allows moral exclusion.¹⁸ When this happens, maltreatment of people or a group of people is no longer viewed as immoral, thus allowing for morally sound people to act in ways considered immoral.¹⁹ In the case of African Americans, a remedy to combat this phenomenon proved necessary. One such attempt was the creation of the NAACP. The NAACP, founded by Mary White Ovington, focused its early fights to challenge disenfranchisement and residential segregation.²⁰ Throughout the 1900s,

several key progressive events proved to be monumental in the advancement of equality. For example, in a 1954 Supreme Court ruling entitled the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, Kansas' state-sanctioned segregation of public schools was found to violate the 14th Amendment.²¹ In its opinion, the Court agreed that segregation had a detrimental effect upon the colored children and contributed to a sense of inferiority.²² Shortly thereafter, the Supreme Court affirmed a lower court's holding that segregated seating on buses was similarly unconstitutional.²³ Courageous displays of fortitude in pursuit of equality persisted throughout the 1900s. Actions from people like Ruby Bridges who is known for her courage in being the first African American child to officially desegregate an all-white school, the Freedom Riders of the south, the March on Washington, or the Civil Rights Act of 1964 were all necessary for gaining ground in pursuit of equality.²⁴ Yet, there is still significant progress to be made.

Throughout American history women have similarly fought for equality. In 1776, Abigail Adams, wife of Founding Father John Adams, pleaded with her husband and Continental Congress to consider women when envisioning a government for the American colonies.²⁵ Her fear was women would be excluded and continue to be viewed as subservient to men as they had always been.²⁶ Her plea did not prove effective resulting in additional attempts by women to pursue equality. In 1848, the first Women's Rights Convention, known today as the Seneca Falls Convention resulted in sixty-eight women and thirty-two men signing a Declaration of Sentiments, thereby sparking decades of activism.²⁷ Following the Seneca Falls Convention, America would see women continue to display courageous acts, shattering glass ceiling after glass ceiling. In 1869, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Stanton founded the National Suffrage Association to later become the National American Woman Suffrage Association in 1890.²⁸ This was also the first year that women would be allowed voting rights in a state as a result of

Wyoming, becoming the forty-fourth state to join the Union.²⁹ It was not until 1920 that the 19th Amendment would ultimately be ratified, thus declaring that no state shall deny the right of an American citizen to vote on account of sex.³⁰ It should be noted that this occurred fifty years after African American men were allowed to vote.³¹ It was not a case of dehumanization for women, but rather a generally understood concept that women were not equal to men. However, landmark events such as the Equal Pay Act of 1963, Title VII, Title IX of the Education Amendments, and the Roe V. Wade decision improved the equality gap for women.³² Additionally, women such as Sandra Day O'Connor, Sally Ride, Janet Reno, Madeleine Albright, Nancy Pelosi, Hillary Clinton, and most recently Kamala Harris have shattered glass ceilings previously thought unattainable.³³ The progression of gender equality in America is apparent when the accomplishments of women today are compared to the social status of women in American history. Despite measurable improvement in gender equality, the United States still has significant progress to make to accomplish true gender equality.

Minorities in the U.S. Military

After considering the social construct of America with regard to African Americans and women in American societies, it is also worth exploring the social dynamics of the United States military from a historical context. Following the Civil War, African Americans were allowed to serve, but were constantly treated as inferior to their white counterparts. A 1925 memorandum addressing negro manpower in war stated that “when compared to the white man, the negro is of inferior mentality and is inherently weak in character”.³⁴ The thirty-three paged document went on to elaborate the negro’s inferiority to the American white man.³⁵ One such elaboration explained the negro’s principle use during war was for that which they are best fitted, as service and labor troops.³⁶ In 1941, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802

prohibiting all racial discrimination in the armed services, Marine Corps leadership objected. Then Marine Commandant, Major General Thomas Holcomb expressed that he would rather have a Marine Corps of 5,000 whites instead of 250,000 blacks.³⁷ He further stated that African Americans wishing to enlist in the Marine Corps were trying to break into a club that does not want them.³⁸ However, the Marine Corps was forced to begin recruiting African Americans in 1942.³⁹ Yet, African American Marines remained segregated until President Harry S. Truman issued Executive Order 9981, ending color bias in the American Armed Forces.⁴⁰ Despite these important initiatives, racial bias persisted. In 1962, the Gesell Committee, President John F. Kennedy's Committee on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces, found that many negroes in the Marine Corps were still grouped in assignments which perpetuated the image of the negro as a menial or servant.⁴¹ Following the efforts of President Kennedy and his committee, racial tension and discrimination persisted in the Marine Corps. In 1969, after an altercation between white and black Marines at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina that nearly started a riot, General Leonard Chapman acknowledged that the Marine Corps had a problem with discrimination.⁴² He also agreed that it was apparent that the Marine Corps had not been successful in eliminating discrimination.⁴³

Regarding women in the military, they have always played a role in the United States' conflicts. From the paid servants who followed the Continental Army, to the washerwomen and medical caregivers in the Revolutionary War and Civil war, women have found themselves actively participating in the military.⁴⁴ It was not until 1943 that Congress would allow women to actually enlist in the Army of the United States with the creation of the Woman's Army Corps.⁴⁵ This decision was significant because prior to, women were relegated to serving in temporary roles, only to be dismissed after wars ended. This was the case until service leaders grew to

realize that they could not afford to allow the women who served with distinction to leave.⁴⁶ In 1948, President Truman signed the Women's Armed Services Integration Act into law thus making women a permanent part of the military branches.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, their roles would become stigmatized and mocked most likely due to the types of jobs women were allowed to obtain and the history of how women served the military in the decades before.⁴⁸ Additionally, the Women's Armed Services Integration Act limited women to 2% representation across all branches, allowed involuntary discharge should they become pregnant, and limited the number that could serve as officers.⁴⁹ While progression has occurred, similar issues continue to exist within the Marine Corps today. For example, in 2017 the Marines United scandal perpetuated the sexual objectification of women similar to that of the women in the Continental Army.⁵⁰ Most recently, talk show host Tucker Carlson, ranted about the lack of masculinity amongst the military in refute to maternity uniforms.⁵¹ Comments such as Tucker Carlson's reflect the opinions of many Americans, and service members alike, thus exemplifying the bias commonly associated with women serving in the military. This bias is often relegated to female servicemembers as well. It is worth noting retired Air Force combat pilot, Martha McSally, who shared her personal opinion on pregnancy in the military. During a lecture at Duke University, McSally stated that women in the military get pregnant to skirt deployment while calling for a culture shift to teach service women that it is not appropriate to have a child just because they want to.⁵² While it is impossible to know whether this was said in an effort to gain favor with the masculine culture of military leaders, or if these were her sincere sentiments, what can be derived is that these types of statements are detrimental to increasing the recruiting and retention of female officers in the military.⁵³

Fifty-one years following General Leonard's statement and seventy-three years following the signing of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act into law, the issue of discrimination persists. General Berger, the current Commandant of the Marine Corps, mentioned the negative implications of having an organization that lacks diversity, alluding to the fact that there is still an issue with inclusion and diversity.⁵⁴ The very meaning of the word extends beyond the lateral limits that Marines frequently confine it to. Beyond race and gender, diversity includes the variety of thought influenced by the differing perspectives resulting from differing socioeconomic, racial, and gender backgrounds. United States Marine Corps Lieutenant General Lori Reynolds stated that she believes that diversity of thought will matter in the future fight.⁵⁵ An organization that possesses a diverse group, possesses also diversity of thought, which enables an organization to formulate diverse solutions to problem sets. She went on to say that a diverse force is about how we think about the tools we put in a toolbox.⁵⁶ A significant mix of talent of all races, backgrounds and genders will be required for future conflict resolution. According to General Reynolds we must talk about diversity as a warfighting necessity that is essential to the information environment.⁵⁷ Next, consider a photo, tweeted in May 2020 by former Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, of President Donald Trump and senior military generals.⁵⁸



Figure 1.

Interestingly, Mr. Esper tweeted the photo out as a celebratory thank you to President Donald Trump for hosting the Department of Defense's top leadership at the White House.⁵⁹ This resulted in blow back from veterans, including retired General Dana Pittard and Iraq War veteran Lieutenant Colonel Walter J. Smiley, who likened the picture to a time resembling the early 1900s when such a photo would have been expected.⁶⁰ There were only two black generals amongst the forty-one most senior generals in the military at the time the photo was taken.⁶¹ Brandy Baxter, an Afghanistan War veteran, stated that the absence of minorities at the top means the absence of a voice capable of addressing issues that go otherwise unrealized.⁶² In July 2020, United States Air Force General John E. Hyten told a senate committee that racism in the military is a thing of the past.⁶³ He would later go on to claim that he feels color-blind when in uniform.⁶⁴ Such a statement contradicts the statistical analysis of diversity and inclusion amongst the senior ranks in the United States' armed forces.

The introduction of historical facts is not meant to suggest that the current racial and gender discriminatory environment is consistent with that of the early to mid-1900s, rather to posit that the events that occurred in the 1900s were less than a century ago. The historical context provided in this work is meant to connect the relationship between Americans today and the psychological impact a discriminatory history has had on the development of human psyche and cultural influence. For example, Major General Holcomb, the seventeenth Commandant of the Marine Corps in the 1940s, held a strong bias against African Americans and women serving in the Marine Corps.⁶⁵ The children of his generation are now either the grandfathers or fathers of today's generation of senior military officers. This is important when considering the issues of diversity and inclusion that the Marine Corps faces today. People cannot help the environment in which they were raised and the impact it had on their self-constructs. Nevertheless, studies such as those conducted by the fathers of social science, have proven that people can benefit from identifying how history influences who they grow to become.

Culture and the U.S. Marine Corps

Culture is defined as “the customs, arts, social institutions, and achievements of people or social groups, in the byproduct of heritage”.⁶⁶ Edgar and Peter Schein identify three major levels when analyzing culture: artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions.⁶⁷ These levels of culture are instrumental when considering the implications they have on bias and the role bias plays in the cognitive domain of human decision making.

Three Levels of Marine Corps Culture

Artifacts are described as those tangible, overt manifestations that one can see and feel such as: architecture, clothing, rituals, language, myths and stories about the organization, and published photos.⁶⁸ Like their Army and Navy brethren who celebrate past leaders such

as Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and Franklin Buchanan, the Marine Corps also celebrates past leaders like John A. Lejeune, Archibald Henderson, and Pete Ellis by enshrining them in history. Marines immortalize these men with statues, buildings, roads, and federal installations in celebration of their war acumen while sometimes ignoring the ethical fiber of their character. We fail to recognize the implicit messages associated with immortalizing these men. We also fail to realize the impact that this immortalizing has on culture and how that culture feeds continued bias. Furthermore, we fail to address the influence this has on the leaders of tomorrow. Consider the picture below:



Figure 2.

This photo depicts six of the Marine Corps' most highly revered leaders as well as the Marine Corps' only four-star generals at the time. There are few Marines who are unable to name these men. However, like many command boards displaying past commanders, the photo reveals much

about diversity. Additionally, the message to minority officers is not that there is a glass ceiling waiting to be broken, but rather an impenetrable barrier to their rise.

Culture as a set of espoused beliefs and values, defines for us what to pay attention to and what things mean, how to react emotionally to what is going on, and what actions to take in various kinds of situations.⁶⁹ For the Marine Corps, these are the goals, philosophies, and values that are communicated and branded on the heart of every Marine. Some Marines even imprint these ideas by tattooing them onto their bodies. Marines sing the Marine's Hymn which praises Marines for triumphs in past battles. At Marine Corps boot camps and The Basic School (TBS), Marines are made, not trained. Marines hang their hats on their core values of honor, courage, and commitment whilst commonly greeting each other and ending speeches with "Semper Fidelis," Latin for "always faithful." Additionally, Marines have coined phrases like, "Once a Marine Always a Marine," or "First to Fight," to build a strong sense of camaraderie. These are all examples of the personal values that should be expected of every Marine. Likewise, these are the values that public relations teams do a great job of portraying to the American public. Unfortunately, the espoused and taught values of the Marine Corps do not perfectly align with the basic underlying assumptions that comprises the third level of the culture of the Marine Corps.

The basic underlying assumptions and beliefs associated with the culture of the Marine Corps are the unconscious perceptions, thoughts, and feelings that are rarely spoken of.⁷⁰ An example of basic underlying assumptions about Marines was eloquently stated when Eleanor Roosevelt described the Marines who she had seen around the world as "having the cleanest bodies, the filthiest minds, the highest morale, and the lowest morals of any group of animals she had ever seen".⁷¹ This is a common description of the type of individual with whom Marines

commonly identify. This type of mentality amongst Marines gained national attention in 2018 when a Facebook group known as Marines United was recognized for its womanizing, chauvinistic, and immoral content.⁷² The content contained within the group was egregious enough to cause the Commandant of the Marine Corps at the time, General Robert Neller, to have to answer to Congress.⁷³ While General Neller took full responsibility and vowed to correct the deficiencies within the organization, the damage was already done.⁷⁴ The content contained within the Marine United group represented a culture that objectified women. This cultural underpinning is a detractor for females looking to pursue careers as a Marine. Another common colloquial phrase associated with the Marine Corps is the saying that it is a “white man’s gun club.” This is a result of the sheer number of white males who make up the majority of the organization. While there is truth in numbers, the association of “a club” with one gender and ethnicity can easily be a detractor for minorities. These examples of common Marine lexicon exemplify underlying assumptions of Marine Corps culture that has influenced those who have served, those who serve, and those who have the potential to serve within the organization.

In Groups vs. Out Groups

In his book, *The Third Option: Hope for a Racially Divided Nation*, Miles McPherson references two terms that social scientists use when discussing the us-versus-them dynamic; in-groups and out-groups.⁷⁵ Often, culture causes us to sort people into groups that are either “like me” or “not like me.”⁷⁶ This dynamic is perpetuated in the Marine Corps through terms and acronyms created to refer to different groups. For example, the acronym “POG”, meaning person other than grunt, is a mildly derogatory term referring to servicemembers that serve outside of combat arms military occupational specialties.⁷⁷ This is important to consider when analyzing the demographics of senior officers in combat arms specialties in the Marine Corps. The majority

are white males. As McPherson puts it, those who have a healthy sense of self subconsciously assume that the “like me” group is better than the “not like me group.”⁷⁸ Additionally, people have the tendency to subconsciously give preferential treatment to members of their “in group” while withholding similar treatment from those in their “out-group.”⁷⁹ When analyzing the demographics that feed into the senior ranks of the Marine Corps, the aforementioned dynamic of in-group and out-group lends reason to why similar individuals continue to hold the same positions in the Marine Corps.

Human beings often find themselves conflicted when emotions do not align with truth. This phenomenon, referred to by James Bowman as motivated reasoning or the “smart idiot,” is human reality.⁸⁰ When people feel strongly about something, they are less likely to consider facts that oppose what they have allowed their emotions to confirm.⁸¹ This hinders personal growth and change thus crippling one’s ability to grow as a leader. Furthermore, the natural tendency to agree with personal beliefs hinders the growth and effectiveness of leadership within organizations. Considering the Marine Corps, the benefit diversity brings is easily ignored or nullified through the use of common statements such as; “all Marines are green,” or “we all bleed red,” statements that share common understanding amongst Marines. Discounting differences and placing everyone and their unique characteristics in common categories, is the same as ignoring the reality that differences exist. Perhaps, taking advantage of the different types or groups of people that accompany a more diverse force may prove more beneficial to accomplishing a well-rounded and capable force, as opposed to trying to conform everyone to the expectations of a specific culture.

The current culture of the United States Marine Corps is not conducive to the advancement of ethnic minorities, or females amongst the senior officer ranks. As a derivative of

historical context, ethnic minorities and females find themselves in the out-group of a predominantly white male organization.⁸² The ultimate result of this is lower fitness report averages.⁸³ The issue of diversity and inclusion is not new to the Marine Corps. Many studies have been conducted to connect numbers and percentages to an issue that does not necessarily require numbers to address. Some would offer that addressing the numbers for the sake of creating a quality spread does not address the moral issue of inequality thus ultimately allowing the issue to be morally excluded. Starting at The Basic School, minorities on average receive lower leadership grades than their white male counterparts while maintaining similar averages in the other two graded categories of academics and military skills.⁸⁴ Research conducted by the Marine Corps' Manpower Team in the Resource Analysis Division revealed that the second lieutenants class rank upon completion of The Basic School accounts for most of the racial/ethnic gap reflected in the fitness reports that officers receive over the course of their careers.⁸⁵ The leadership grade, a completely subjective grade, carries more weight in the final determination of a lieutenant's final grade point average while academics and military skills, the two objective categories, account for the remainder. The report showed that on average, white officers received a grade seven points higher than other ethnic minority groups.⁸⁶ This shows that when left to the evaluator's opinion, African Americans do not fare well. Additionally, leadership accounted for forty percent of a student's final grade while military skills and academics accounted for the remaining sixty percent. Ten percent of the leadership grade was determined by a peer evaluation; a grade given by classmates whose ability to judge leadership abilities is based on his/her personal experiences over the course of approximately twenty-three years, only five of which can be considered to be mature years. As a result, the way in which students were graded at TBS changed. TBS adopted a tiered system that resembles the enlisted

Marines tiering system. Upon assignment to a tier, the assignment is then validated by the company commander. While the ranking system was amended at TBS, there has been no such change for disparities that exist post-TBS. As officers progress, the only ranking system that exists that compares performance against that of their peers is the fitness report; a completely subjective report in and of itself.

In an evaluation of the fitness report system conducted in 2012, it was found that on average, African American and Hispanic officers receive lower fitness report averages and reviewing officer (RO) marks than white officers in the same pay grade and year.⁸⁷ The gap between white and black officers is .06 which equates to one letter grade.⁸⁸ Another noticed disparity was comments made by reporting seniors and reviewing officers.⁸⁹ The study showed that when white officers and African American officers received similar fitness report averages, white officers received stronger promotion recommendations.⁹⁰ Recommendations like “strongly recommended for promotion and command” are highly valued when a Marine is screened for command opportunities. The absence of such comments in minority officer reports weakens their case when being screened from command. While no such research exists that can explicitly identify the impact of bias on officer fitness reports, one can only assume that the aforementioned examples of bias leads to disparate outcomes.

Understanding Bias

Unconscious biases are a fact of life; everyone harbors them.⁹¹ They are prejudices or mental shortcuts based on collective representations of group conduct as well as individual perceptions of particular group conduct.⁹² The history of the United States writ large, and the history of the United States Marines Corps has created a culture strongly influenced by its past. Unfortunately, the culture continues to encourage and promote biases of the past thus never

progressing. This culture, going unstudied or misunderstood, creates the possibility for misunderstood discrimination. People unknowingly form truths based off of experiences, then automatically apply their formed opinion to similar situations.⁹³ These biases can be based on age, height, weight, gender, skin color, race, or accent to name a few.⁹⁴ Biases cause people to make decisions in favor of or to the detriment of others.⁹⁵ Unfortunately, this has the tendency to permeate into the workplace. This is proven via multiple studies such as one study referenced in McCormick's article which found that blond women salaries are seven percent higher than women who were brunettes or redheads.⁹⁶ Another study found that fifty-eight percent of Fortune 500 CEOs are just shy of six feet proving that tall men tend to move into positions of leadership more frequently than their shorter counterparts.⁹⁷ This proves that everyone has the capacity to allow bias to impact the way they view and perceive the abilities of another.

In his article, *The Real Effects of Unconscious Bias in the Workplace*, Horace McCormick reveals the scientific confirmation of unconscious bias being rooted in the same part of the brain that is associated with fear and threat, as well as the lobes of the brain responsible for storing general information and forming impressions of others.⁹⁸ The brain automatically organizes our thoughts and experiences for us and files them away in common categories. It is when people associate good or bad with particular categories that bias is born.⁹⁹ As McCormick continues, he informs us that scientists have identified more than 150 unconscious biases, however the most common biases that impact the workplace are affinity, perception, confirmation, halo effect, and group think.¹⁰⁰ These are the biases that most commonly influence judgement in the workplace.

Scholars such as James Bowman challenge the accuracy and efficiency of the philosophical and economic rational choice models which suggest individuals make decisions

based on rational calculations.¹⁰¹ The argument is that such models have the tendency to leave important elements of the decision-making process out therefore devaluing the rationale behind how a conclusion is formed or judgements are made; specifically, unconscious emotional, and tacit elements in making judgement.¹⁰² Furthermore, these models tend to lack analysis concerning the relationship between moral theorizing and ethical action.¹⁰³ This raises the question of how the human brain is impacted when making judgements. Neuroscientific studies reveal that judgement and conduct are guided more by emotion than by reason, proving that the human brain has the tendency to allow one's personal beliefs to supersede the reasons behind the beliefs.¹⁰⁴ This is another way biases are formed.

Improve Diversity and Inclusion – How?

When conducting analysis, numbers provide confirmation.

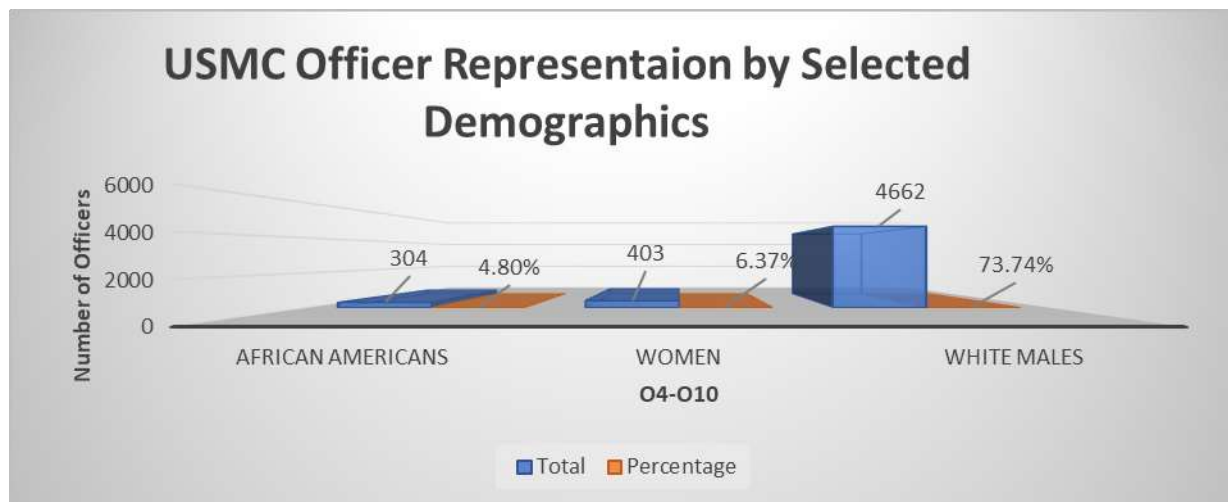


Figure 3.

According to a Marine Corps diversity report pulled by the Marine Corps Opportunity, Diversity, and Inclusion Branch on March 23, 2021, African Americans make up 4.8% of the Marine Corps' field grade and flag officers while women make up 6.4% of that population, while white

males account for 73.74%.¹⁰⁵

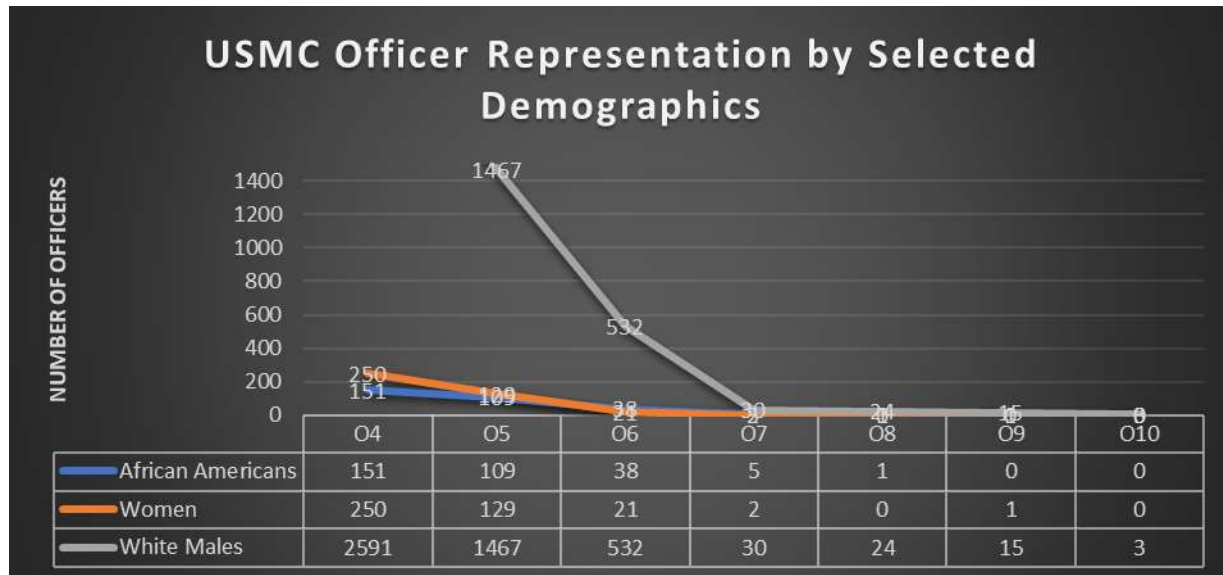


Figure 4.

As previously mentioned, the numbers provide confirmation. It only requires a brief glance at either of the two previous graphs to see the disparity in representation. Additionally, it only requires attendance at a senior level meeting to get visual confirmation of the lack of diversity and inclusion amongst the Marine Corps' senior ranks. Identifying "the why" behind the numbers better assists leaders with correcting the disparities. The root cause lies in the connection between history, culture, and bias. If not addressed, the lack of diversity amongst senior military officers in the Marine Corps and the overall impact it has on organizational leadership will go unchanged.

In 1910 Theodore Roosevelt delivered a pointed speech called "Citizenship in a Republic," that rallied against cynics who looked down on men who were trying to make the world a better place.¹⁰⁶ During a time of hardships, Roosevelt found it important that people work together for the betterment of the whole.¹⁰⁷ He went on to describe cynical speech,

thought, a readiness to criticize work with which a critic himself never performs, and an intellectual aloofness which will not accept contact with life's realities as traits of weakness as opposed to the positions of superiority from which they often come.¹⁰⁸ Following this, he went on to deliver his most quoted message widely known as "The Man in the Arena."¹⁰⁹ This message, required to be memorized by all first-year midshipmen during their indoctrination period at The United States Naval Academy, discredits critics and places all credit upon those who are courageous enough to actively pursue great achievements. It is important that efforts persist in the area of addressing diversity and inclusion if progress is ever to be accomplished.

One of the Marine Corps' leadership principles is to know oneself and seek self-improvement.¹¹⁰ In that, one must evaluate his/her strengths and weaknesses, assess them, and seek ways to improve.¹¹¹ The Marine Corps must acknowledge that bias, derived from its culture, is negatively impacting individual leadership development as well as organizational leadership development. This acknowledgment has started at the top with General Berger's declaration that diversity and inclusion is lacking among senior officers.¹¹² It is now up to the rest of the senior officers navigating the challenges of their personal arenas. The desire to produce a better end-state has to be a unified desire that will require a unified effort. Senior Marine officers must honestly evaluate themselves. "Only those who understand their own potential for unethical behavior can become the decision makers they aspire to be."¹¹³ If individual biases go unrealized, the Marine Corps will continue to produce the same diversity results that it always has. However, if the Marine Corps works to uncover and minimize individual and organizational bias, the product of diversity and inclusion will produce the diversity of thought, ability, and experiences needed to continue to propel our fighting force as one of the most revered fighting forces in the world.

This leads to the realization that an increased effort in dealing with the complex issues of diversity and inclusion in the Marine Corps needs to be addressed. Horace McCormick, author of *The Real Effects of Unconscious Bias in the Workplace*, identifies three steps to uncovering and combatting bias and its effects in the workplace: offer awareness training, label the types of bias that are likely to occur, and create structures to address bias.¹¹⁴ The first step that the Marine Corps must make is ensuring proper education on bias. Marines responsible for reporting on a subordinate should be educated on bias and how it may potentially impact their ability to evaluate fairly. Marines are generally disinterested in annual training; however, career level schools are taken very seriously. This is a key opportunity to introduce and continue to expand upon bias and its impact on individuals and the organization writ large. Furthermore, upon being career designated, every officer should be required to take an implicit association test, and be mentored on their results and how their biases may impact their ability to evaluate subordinates. This encourages open and honest communication. Chubb, one of the largest property and casualty insurers in the United States, made all of its managers undergo bias-awareness training to learn the core concepts of bias and practice real-life scenarios like how to avoid bias when reviewing resumes.¹¹⁵ Research has shown that honest, frank, and respectful dialogue builds understanding and cultures of respect.¹¹⁶

The second step that McCormick recommends for eliminating bias in the workplace is labeling the biases that are likely to happen in the workplace.¹¹⁷ This is also emphasized by Max Bazermann and Ann Tenbrunsel when insisting that managers and employees be made aware of the biases that can lead to unethical behavior.¹¹⁸ Likewise, the Marine Corps must continue to identify and address bias commonly associated with minority officers. As previously mentioned, scientists have identified more than 150 unconscious biases, however the most common biases

that impact the workplace are affinity, perception, confirmation, halo effect, and group think.¹¹⁹ An example of perception bias exists in statements such as Martha McSally's when she made the common assumption that women in the military strategically get pregnant.¹²⁰ This bias impacts the personal lives of female officers as they often plan their personal life around the Marine Corps. A report by the Service Women's Action Network identified that thirty percent of active duty and veteran females reported infertility, an alarming rate in comparison to the twelve percent reported by civilians.¹²¹ Another common bias that the Marine Corps needs to contend with is the halo effect, or the tendency to see the good about someone because of a personal affinity for that person.¹²² This bias probably has the most significant impact on minorities because the majority of officers in the Marine Corps are white males, and they are better able to relate to younger white males. When referencing General Lejeune and his philosophy on the relationship between an officer and his/her subordinate reflecting that of a father and son, it is much easier to establish this type of relationship with someone that is more relatable.¹²³ Therefore, educating Marines on the existence of bias, different types of biases and how they can negatively impact progression is important. Likewise, education on the topic is a key enabler to the advancement of the institution.

The last step that recommended by McCormick is creating structures that allow for more deliberate actions and to give peers the opportunity to point out times when unconscious biases may be seeping in.¹²⁴ The Navy created Task Force One in July of 2020 to explore issues of racism, sexism, and bias and how they affected the readiness of the Navy.¹²⁵ Over the course of six months, the Task Force held twenty listening sessions with sailors from various commands, and conducted more than 280 focus groups.¹²⁶ The sessions resulted in recommendations grouped into five areas: recruiting; talent management and retention; professional development;

innovation, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; and additional recommendations.¹²⁷ While the Marine Corps has initiated efforts to improve in the efforts of diversity and inclusion, they are not well known. The majority of Marines are unaware of the issues that exist and any efforts going towards correcting them. The Marine Corps must create a structure that allows all Marines to assist with attacking the issue of diversity and inclusion in the Marine Corps.

A topic that cannot go unmentioned is that of the Marine Corps recruiting efforts. While the majority of this work focuses on biases associated with Marine Corps culture, it is equally as important to mention the culture of the communities that the Marine Corps must recruit from to improve diversity. In a survey designed to determine America's confidence in the American military, only 55% of African Americans polled said they would encourage a young person to join the military.¹²⁸ This was the lowest amongst any demographic polled. The lineage and influence associated with African American cultures is important to understand. It is imperative that the Marine Corps focuses its efforts towards inner city communities and Historically Black Colleges. Additionally, the Marine Corps needs to utilize the minority officers within its ranks to provide a face and perspective that minority cultures can relate to.

Conclusion

In a recent *60 Minutes* interview with the current Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin, addressed multiple questions on the topic of diversity and inclusion amongst the most senior ranks in the American Armed Forces were posed.¹²⁹ The most pointed question, perhaps, was why there is no African American representation amongst the top twenty-five positions available in the American Armed Forces considering it has been seventy years since integration.¹³⁰ For the Secretary of Defense, the answer was simple. He stated that he believes there is a direct

correlation between the rate of progress that America has made with regards to diversity.¹³¹ He then went on to say that while the military has led the way for diversity, progress in American society and in senior leadership positions in the military has been slow to improve.¹³²

. When analyzing the demographics of the Marine Corps officer population from the rank of major to general, there is very little minority representation. While there are many potential contributing factors to the lack of minority representation amongst the selected data field; cognitive and physical capabilities, as they relate to physical performance and academic performance, were not contributors. Disparate leadership performance evaluations guided the research of this paper to an area that is less objective than numbers; social science. Research confirmed that human behavior plays a pivotal role in societies and organizations. Specifically, the implicit biases that different groups harbor about other groups are key contributors to the association or disassociation of one group with another. This idea led influenced the hypothesis of the culture of the Marine Corps, being a derivative of the majority of its servicemembers, makes it hard for others to thrive. In this case, the others are minority officers.

With that being said, this is not a new topic in the Marine Corps. There are many initiatives taking place to identify the association of implicit bias with fitness report results. The results of the analysis will be beneficial in that it will provide a foundation for the Marine Corps to improve upon. Additionally, research suggests that improvements will come via education on the topic. Education will increase transparency and raise awareness.

As statistics continue to reflect the same long-standing issues of Marine Corps history, it will take an honest and concerted effort on the part of Marine Corps leadership to educate its personnel on how history influenced the culture of the Marine Corps, and how the implicit biases derived from Marine Corps culture negatively impacts evaluations. Furthermore, it should be

emphasized how personal biases may impact reporting. When the Marine Corps takes a hard stance and begins to make this issue more of a priority, it is then that recruitment, promotion, and retention will occur resulting in the improvement of diversity and inclusion amongst the senior ranks of the Marine Corps.

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