

Quick-Look Report: USMC.2017.0005

**Insights from the Marine Corps Organizational Culture
Research Project: Generational Differences in the Marine
Corps – Exploring Issues and Frictions Between Older and
Younger Marines**



Lead Researcher: Blagovest Tashev, PhD
TRG Contracted Researcher, Davis Defense Group

Principal Investigator: Kerry Foshier, PhD
Translational Research Group
Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning, MCU/EDCOM
kerry.foshier@usmcu.edu, 703-432-1504

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CAOCL Point of Contact: Dr. Kerry Foshier, Director of Research
703-432-1504, kerry.foshier@usmcu.edu

About the Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research (MCOCR) Project

What is MCOCR?

The MCOCR Project is a small, exploratory, qualitative research effort intended to gather Marine perspectives on a range of issues related to Marine Corps culture. The project resulted in 150 semi-structured interviews and 32 semi-structured focus groups with 267 unique participants (nine Marines participated in both an interview and a focus group). All participants were volunteers, and the project was conducted under a protocol approved by the Marine Corps Human Research Protection Program. The project was conducted under Marine Corps University's academic freedom policy.

How should the information in this report be used?

Because of the non-representative sample, data and analysis from MCOCR are intended to inform discussions in conjunction with other information sources. They should not be used to make broad claims about Marines or Marine Corps programs and policies.

Were Marine statements fact-checked?

No. The intent of the project was to gather Marine perspectives without regard to whether the perspectives were based on full knowledge of current Marine Corps policies and programs. In some cases, it was important to capture misperceptions, as they have implications for internal Marine Corps messaging.

What are the project's limitations?

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

Who funded and sponsored the project?

The project falls within the normal scope of work of CAOCL's Translational Research Group (TRG), and the majority of the project was funded out of CAOCL's existing budget. Manpower and Reserve Affairs (M&RA) requested that the research be done, but the research design, conduct, and analysis were controlled by TRG. M&RA provided assistance with logistics, travel for research team members who were not part of CAOCL, and funding to accelerate transcription of audio recordings.

When and where were data gathered?

Between August and October 2017, the research team gathered data at the following locations: Pentagon, MCB Quantico, MCB Camp Lejeune, MCAS Cherry Point, MCB Camp Pendleton, MCAGCC 29 Palms, MCAS Yuma, and MCB Camp Butler (Okinawa).

What are the qualifications and characteristics of the research team?

The principal investigator is a cultural anthropologist with more than 20 years of experience working with and doing research on national security organizations, including 10 years leading research teams on projects focused on the Marine Corps. The composition of the MCOCR research team has changed between 2017 and 2020, but team members have possessed graduate-level educational backgrounds in the following disciplines: cultural anthropology, sociology, cultural geography, international relations, education, communication, and evaluation science. Data gathering teams included male and female researchers. To the maximum extent possible, participants were allowed to choose the sex of the researcher with whom they interacted. All team members thus far have been Caucasian. The data gathering team included two members with Marine backgrounds. One was a recently retired field-grade Marine officer, and the other was an active duty company-grade Marine officer. The research team also consulted with other social scientists and Marines during design and analysis.

Generational Differences in the Marine Corps: Exploring Issues and Frictions Between Older and Younger Marines

Executive Summary

When discussing the broad topics of leadership, cohesion, and gender bias, Marine participants in the Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research (MCOCR) Project talked about generational differences. While at first glance many of them attributed those differences to Marines' belonging to different age cohorts with their unique characteristics created before they joined the Corps, the Marines also revealed much more nuanced insights that identified experiences within the institution that either created or contributed to those differences. As the Marine Corps integrates new recruits into its ranks and seeks to understand how they are different from previous recruits, we suggest that to better understand the new generation of Marines, the institution needs to look at changes within the institution that create those differences. In other words, in addition to studying how the demographic makeup and characteristics of new recruits coming from civilian society are different from those of previous generations of recruits, the Corps needs to look at how the experiences of those recruits once inside the institution distinguish them from other Marines. More specifically, the report explores the following themes:

1. Although Marine participants tended to single out civilian society as the most significant factor defining the characteristics of a different generation joining the fleet, they also revealed diverse factors within the Marine Corps that mold junior Marines into a group that is different from senior Marines. In other words, it is the experiences, knowledge, and characteristics that junior Marines gain within the Marine Corps that make them different from older Marines.
2. One factor Marines identified as creating differences between them was deployments overseas, in particular to warzones, and the effects they had on individuals and groups, including on their outlooks, beliefs, and commitment to the Corps.
3. The effect of connectivity caused by the proliferation cell phones and social media in the Marine Corps is another factor identified by Marines as promoting differences among Marines. Contrary to stereotypical beliefs encouraged by the generational literature, it is not just young Marines, but Marines of all ages who are actively navigating the effects of growing connectivity and making choices about the use of technologies associated with this phenomenon.
4. Marines invoked generational differences when discussing leadership issues in the Corps. Once again, although they frequently attributed differences in leadership styles to age, their conversations revealed trends within the institution as the causes of these differences.

The report does not argue that experiences, knowledge, values, and norms junior Marines gain prior of their entering service are not significant in shaping their identity as individuals and Marines. Rather it points out that, in addition, there is a need for a closer look at how life in the Marine Corps makes one group of Marines different from others based on length of service. Marines are not simply of different ages, they are also members of an institution whose operational tempo, missions, expectations and requirements placed on service members, and institutional culture constantly change over time, and, therefore, Marines' experiences vary depending on how long they have served.

Introduction

As the Marine Corps integrates into its ranks tens of thousands of new recruits each year, it seeks to better understand the characteristics of those recruits to effectively train, educate, and socialize them into the institution. There is a danger, however, if the Marine Corps follows currently popular approaches that assign common characteristics to large cohorts of people based simply on age, as they tend to minimize the impact of multiple other factors, including race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sex, national origin, and urban-rural distinctions, on identity development and behavior. Further, they ignore other factors, such as institutional experiences and how they can change over time, that inform how individuals perceive themselves and others.

In the Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research (MCOCR) Project¹, Marine participants frequently referred to generational differences while discussing diverse issues, problems, and frictions in their lives. In 2017, in response to the Marines United Facebook misconduct, the Marine Corps requested that the Translational Research Group (TRG) at the Marine Corps Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning conduct exploratory qualitative research on organizational culture with emphasis on leadership, cohesion, and gender bias. 267 Marines participated in semi-structured interviews and focus groups across the Marine Corps enterprise. While not an explicit question area, when Marines brought up topics about generational differences, TRG researchers probed deeper to explore Marine perceptions and experiences. As we initiated analysis of the transcripts, we noted that Marines did not use a single term describing these differences, instead referring to “generational thing,” “generational differences,” “Millennials,” “Generation X,” “Old Corps vs New Corps,” and “wartime Marine Corps vs peacetime Marine Corps,” to point to differences, in their view, between Marines based on belonging to a distinct age cohort rather than rank, military occupational specialty (MOS), socio-economic background, gender, ethnicity, or other characteristics. We coded these references to capture “generational differences” as an area of analytical interest. What emerged through these varied conversations and deeper analysis is a more nuanced understanding of what distinguishes cohorts of Marines.

This paper explores how Marines participating in the MCOCR research project talk about generational differences in the Corps and then looks at how Marines perceive these differences through the following lenses: combat and deployment, social media and cell phones, and leadership. The purpose of this analysis is to reveal how Marines uncover factors within the Marine Corps, rather than without, that affect the emergence of what they see as different age cohorts of Marines who possess different characteristics. This paper does not seek to challenge the notion that the society at large influences and shapes Marine recruits and leaves a deep impact on the young Marines well into their careers. Instead, it suggests that in addition to outside influences, Marine participants in our research identify changes within the Marine Corps that impact both junior and senior Marines’ experiences, knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and norms, and that might lead to issues and frictions between younger and older Marines. More specifically, the paper explores how Marine participants talk about factors such as combat and deployments, technology, the role of leadership, and the changing needs of the Marine Corps and how they are shaping young Marines into a distinct group, which in turn creates misunderstandings and frictions with older Marines. In other words, rather than simply concede that young Marines come from a civilian social group with a set of cultural characteristics that are distinct from the characteristics of older Marines, the paper focuses on how the Marine Corps as a constantly changing institution has presented younger and older Marines with different demands and expectations and, thus, has socialized Marines with distinct experiences and cultural features depending on when they joined the Corps.

It must be noted that most of the explicit discussions about generational differences analyzed in this paper are provided by older Marines, which is understandable given the limited experience of junior Marines in the institution. This is not to say that junior Marine participants did not discuss the same issues as more senior participants. Even when not directly addressing generational differences, young Marines reveal thoughts and experiences that are relevant to the issue. However, unlike senior participants, junior Marines did not use stereotypical terms and frames relevant to generations. This paper captures the conversations with participants who explicitly used terms associated with generational differences and, thus, mostly excludes the potential insights provided by Marines who did not use them.

¹ This research was conducted under Human Subjects Protection Protocol USMC.2017.0005 and Marine Corps University’s academic freedom policy. The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the individual speakers and researcher and do not necessarily represent the views of the United States Marine Corps or Davis Defense Group.

Another point of clarification concerning the use of terminology is in order. As noted above, Marine participants used varied terms, such as “generational thing,” “generational differences,” “new generation,” “Millennials,” “Generation X,” and others, when speaking about generational differences. The use of these terms was not precise as, for example, some participants used “Millennials” to refer to younger Marines, while technically belonging to the same generation. For the purpose of simplicity, this paper will use “generational differences” as an all-capture term to address how Marines use diverse terms to discuss the topic of this paper.

This paper also often makes references to senior and junior Marines. Marine participants did not define distinct groups of senior and junior Marines. Instead, individual Marines made references to “their” group of Marines of certain age as opposed to a group of younger Marines. Occasionally, for example, very senior non-commissioned officers referred to sergeants and first sergeants as belonging to the young generation when discussing leadership problems in the institution. For the purpose of this paper, however, junior Marines are referred to in the analysis as the group of Marines who are at the rank of corporal and below, while senior Marines are at the rank of sergeant and above.

How do Marines talk about generational differences?

There is a large body of generational research literature seeking to characterize broad cohorts of people according to age. This literature’s approach to analyzing social change ascribes a distinct, yet vaguely defined, set of characteristics to a group of people who happen to be born in arbitrarily selected time periods.² The literature gives each generation a name, which soon gains popularity in society and facilitates the socialization of stereotypes³ about people who often share little in common other than proximate birth dates. This approach is highly problematic as it takes little account of socio-economic, ethnic, gender, and sex differences among people categorized in the same age group. The popularity of this approach, or rather the popularity of its vocabulary and stereotypes, was reflected in how Marines participating in the research frequently, and uncritically, used those terms and stereotypes when talking about Marines of different ages. This, however, was also in tension with their observations about Marines of different ages that challenged those same stereotypes and revealed Marines’ experiences in the institution as sources of differences between Marines of different age and length of service.

When talking about generational differences, Marines mostly used very similar language describing the characteristics of Marines who are perceived to belong to a certain age group. One set of characteristics associated with junior Marines focuses on cultural characteristics those Marines bring from civilian society into the Corps. Sergeant #234 described them as, *“those Millennials, they have no discipline. They don’t have care for anything. They’re selfish. They only look out for themselves.”* Captain #600 defined Millennials as a generation of *“instant gratification.”* Master Sergeant #641 noticed that junior Marines *“do not like personal conflict. They are afraid of confronting people.”* First Lieutenant #045 observed that among the junior Marines, PFC⁴ to corporal, *“there’s a very, very big sense of entitlement that I see.”* Lieutenant Colonel #421 reflected on his long service in the Corps and argued that the new generation of Marines have *“a very 9 to 5 mentality.”* Lieutenant Colonel #400 pointed out, *“The Millennial generation is not as formal with their customs and courtesies even though they’re trained just like every other Marine.”* First Sergeant #118 observed

² TRG, “Quick Look: Generational Cohort Literature: Gross Generalizations, Insufficient Data, and Weak Methods Make Generational Research Unsuitable for Military Decision-Making” (Quantico, VA: Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning, May 9, 2013).

³ Stereotypes promoted by the generational literature can also be contradictory. See, for example, Sally Seppanen and Wendy Gualtieri, *The Millennial Generation: Research Review* (Washington, DC: National Chamber Foundation, 2012), <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/reports/millennial-generation-research-review>. The report reviews multiple studies advancing contradictory characteristics about Millennials. Some studies argue Millennials are “more caring, community oriented, and politically engaged than previous generations,” while others find them “more interested in extrinsic life goals and less concerned for others and civic engagement” as well as “self-absorbed.”

⁴ Private First Class.

Like, we can call them men, and we can call them Marines, but they are children mentally. I think they're raised differently now. I think they're treated differently in school now. I think society treats them different now. And they do not do well with adversity. Like, adversity, failure? They're not used to failure, and as soon as they meet failure, that's it for them, mentally check out.

This was seconded by Chief Warrant Officer 3 #208, who observed the new generation of Marines is not used to being “... verbally reprimanded or verbally put on the spot of criticism. Any type of criticism. If they get anything less than positive criticism, they don't know how to react. And the Marine Corps is all about criticism.”

The last two observations are a good illustration of how the Marine participants critical of the new generation frame the differences between senior and junior Marines. Very often discussions about the negative characteristics of the new generation were used to highlight different negative trends in the institution as seen by the participants. They brought up what they saw as negative characteristics of junior Marines as a group to juxtapose them with the positive characteristics of the older Marines who represent the institution's better past. For example, for Chief Warrant Officer 3 #208, discussing the new generation was a way to highlight his displeasure with what he saw as declining Marine Corps standards. He stated, “*I think it's a generational thing. But I also think because the services - and not just the Marine Corps, but unfortunately the Marine Corps is also having to adjust, which is understandable, to the demands of society - that in some regards we are lowering our standards.*” Similarly, during a focus group with female Marine officers, Chief Warrant Officer 2 #057 tempered her fellow officers' criticism of Millennials by observing, “*Fun fact. 75 percent of us are Millennials in this room.*” In other words, talking about generational differences in the Marine Corps is in many cases not so much about the new generation but a way to make judgments on what is seen as negative tendencies in the Marine Corps and the direction its leadership is taking the institution. For Master Gunnery Sergeant #321, the Marine Corps is moving away from what it does best because of its increased focus on the needs of junior Marines. He noted,

The Marine Corps has started to conform so much with what the new, new Marines that're coming in and the way they're like, “well, we have to address it this way, and we have to-” and we got to a point where we do so much unnecessary, in my eyes, so much unnecessary training. And I don't know the numbers like from when I came in until what they are now, but I think that we've over-sensitized things. I think if we refocus on, “okay, hey, let's get back to the bare basics.” [sighs]

Not all Marine participants discussing generational differences have negative feelings about the characteristics of junior Marines. Their views range from the positive, to mixed, to neutral. For Master Sergeant #236, the new generation is “*smarter.*” According to Captain #217, “*They are smart. They're very smart.*” First Sergeant #508 observed, “*the young Marines now have a deeper sense of purpose, or at least they're looking for that.*” Some Marines go beyond observations about the positive qualities of junior Marines and find behaviors and skills that benefit the Marine Corps. Master Sergeant #236 cited above observed,

They ask questions, they're smart, and they're not asking questions to like, you know, question the leadership. They're asking questions because they wanna understand, because nine times out of ten they can do it a better way. Instead of creating this board, they can create you [a] spreadsheet that updates itself, that's linked to Mars. [both laugh] You know, they are smarter. And I tell my Marines all the time, “Hey, you know, if I ask you a question, I'm not asking that question because I'm trying to check your knowledge. I'm asking you that question because I wanna know.”

This attitude toward junior Marines' questioning the rationale of their seniors' decisions is echoed by Lieutenant Colonel #421, who saw incorporating a leadership approach which uses those Marines' inquires as a tool to motivate and build positive group dynamics. He stated, “*I grew up in a household, very much respecting authority, discipline. But now it seems like it's not that you have to give them the why, but if you give them the why, you actually get them. They join the team, and they're willing to roll their tail off for you, which I think is generationally really different.*” Similarly, Master Sergeant #425 observed, “*Cause Marines of this generation are why. They want to know. They want to be told why they're doing something before they're told to do it. And that way, in their mind, they're able to comprehend, ‘Okay, well, now I get it.’ Kind of going back to ‘why are they important in the mission?’.*”

Chief Warrant Officer 4 #301 expanded on this theme by speculating that it was the Marine Corps' changing missions and requirements that brought in recruits with different characteristics. Observing the institution

since joining in the early 1990s, he recounted that the Corps used to be the “*juvenile detention camp*,” an institution many young men were given as a choice to join instead of being in custody of the judicial system. In his words, “*it's either jail or the Marine Corps.*” Reflecting on his long service in the institution, he observed how the increased use of technology in the Marine Corps forced the institution to seek less-troubled, more well-rounded recruits.

Well, now, we're looking for a different audience. It's the between years and between wars. We learn from- after the Gulf War, well, we're very technical now. So do we need the troubled youth that we're just trying to rehabilitate? America's not asking us for that anymore. It's asking us for well-rounded children to come into our organization, and we just make- it makes the organization better.

Chief Warrant Officer 4 #301 observed that rather than being a passive recipient of whatever society had to offer from a generation of young people, it was the Marine Corps that defined the desired characteristics among new recruits. This logic seems to be supported by a recent analysis of individual-level data of two representative samples covering the period 1979-2008, indicating that unlike the past, the U.S. military no longer primarily recruits individuals from the most disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.⁵ The authors of the study argue that the introduction of advanced technology together with the adoption of different tactics, concepts of operations, and doctrines has prompted a qualitative change in the demographic composition of the U.S. military, including the Marine Corps. The military has become more selective in admitting recruits from the 1990s onward, including in their cognitive and physical abilities.

Yet other participants in the MCOCR research were very dismissive of the generational differences talk and pointed out that this might be indicative of problems of norms that have nothing to do with generational differences. Some pointed to Marines’ tendency to complain, while others suggested the focus on supposed negatives characteristics of junior Marines simply betrayed one’s inability to lead them. Captain #015 observed,

I hear it almost on a daily basis that “Oh, it's the new generation.” I hear it from every rank. And I don't buy it, whatsoever. Because you know what? We've been saying that probably since the beginning of the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps in 1776 was complaining about the Marines- or the Marines who had come in in 1775 were saying, “Oh, these Marines from 1776, they're not like we are.” That's a way to build our identity to an extent. But it also causes an othering.

He continued,

And when you ask the Marines, like every Marine romanticizes about, “Oh, my last unit was so much better.” Every Marine says, “Oh, my last year was so much better.” But when that Marine was at that last unit, they were complaining that, “Oh, this unit sucks. The unit before me was so much better.” And this is part of our culture. We complain quite often.

This opinion is seconded by Lieutenant Colonel #517.

I think individually for the Marines, if you want to call it Millennial, I mean, what kills me is every generation-every generation that I've- so I entered in '93, and I remember everybody saying, “Well, back when I was in boot camp, pfff, man, it was much harder. We used to have to do that and this.” Everybody, once you get rank or once you get time separated from your entry level, it seems that the catch phrase is like, “Well, back when I was in, when- back when I went through, that wasn't the case.”

Gunnery Sergeant #054 went even further and argued that complaints about generational differences reveal a significant problem with senior Marines, stating “[*concerned sigh*] I think there's a stigma out there about this Millennial generation that is- is negative, and too many leaders push that as an excuse why they can't lead.” This observation is supported by Lieutenant Colonel #512 who found the generational talk to be entirely misplaced. He pointed out that those differences were not about age difference but about different experiences in the institution. Senior Marines have long experience leading and dealing with certain demographics of Marines,

⁵ Andrea Asoni, Andrea Gilli, Mauro Gilli, and Tino Sanandaji, “A Mercenary Army of the Poor? Technological Change and the Demographic Composition of the Post-9/11 U.S. Military,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* (January 30, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2019.1692660>.

while excluding others, because of institutional requirements and restrictions. Those requirements and restrictions are gradually changing because of mission and operational changes as well as judicial and legislative mandates and requirements. Accordingly, senior Marines are increasingly dealing with and leading Marines belonging to demographics previously excluded from certain MOSs. He provided,

It's just a matter of [inhales loudly] how our senior leaders--which is now a generational thing. So you get a lot of guys, uh, they have grown up in the ground combat arms MOSs, that have dealt with only males for years. And now they're gonna have to deal with females. So they'll gonna have to deal with issues that they haven't dealt with before. And that'll be challenge for them.

In this case, the lieutenant colonel observed that the increasing participation of women in ground combat arms MOSs created professional and human interactions previously mostly unknown to members of large Marine communities. In the MCOCR research many of those senior Marines reported having had either no or very limited interaction with female Marines because of the MOS they are in. Some of them also summarized the new reality and interactions as a generational thing. The increasing participation of women in previously all-male occupational fields is not the only change taking place in the institution, but perhaps the most salient one, and thus, an easy reference for Marines talking about change. There are others. Marines also made references to “cyber” Marines, those involved in the Corps’ increasing capabilities in cyber and electronic warfare, when discussing the growing number, in their view, of Marines who had difficulty meeting physical standards. Some senior Marines marked this as a “generational thing” and rued what they saw as declining physicality among junior Marines and the institution’s policies to accommodate physically weaker Marines. Other senior Marines, however, recognized that those new recruits are essential to the Corps’ new missions. Some Marines went as far as identifying this as creating a cultural conflict between the institution’s long held norms and beliefs of what the ideal Marine is and the increasing number of mission-critical Marines who do not fit old stereotypes of the idealized form.

Captain #214 dismissed complaints about the new generation of Marines and suggested that, technically, it was this exact generation that was fighting the nation’s wars and struggling through economic and social hardship.

So I hear a lot of Millennial bashing. I'm technically a Millennial. Um, and I always bring up the fact, “well, you know Millennials have been the ones technically fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq. The ‘snowflakes’ have lived through the worst recession since the Great Depression. They fought two wars, and they're still here. So you can complain all you want about Millennials, you know, but they were also the ones driving the economic recovery.”

Gunnery Sergeant #136 had an entirely different reason for dismissing the notion that the Marine Corps of the past was a better institution by pointing out that it all depends on personal perspective and bringing in his father’s experience which was far from positive.

The old timers talk about the great times, but for my father, it wasn't great. He was Puerto Rican. So, he wasn't treated- he- for him, it wasn't great times. He was a minority. He was- could barely speak the language. For him, it was even worse. So when they talk about those times and then I hear my father, I'm like, “I don't think that was- maybe they were great for you, but I'm pretty sure for those around you, it wasn't that great.” You were belittling people, there was a lot of rape, there was a lot of discrimination. I think we forget history really quick, and I think that's one of the problems.

The gunnery sergeant included personal experience to implicitly challenge the view that people belonging to the same generation are alike and instead revealed how differences in individual experiences create different beliefs and attitudes. This is just one example of the way Marine participants often included their individual experiences before joining the Corps – both positive and negative ones including economic status, family circumstances and traditions, personal ambitions or struggles, and others – to illustrate how they navigated professional and personal life in the Corps. Although many Marines identified themselves as belonging to a particular generation with its own characteristics, they also spent considerable time describing their personal experiences as essential in understanding their beliefs, assumptions, and attitudes. The insights provided by Marine participants challenge the notion that it is possible to identify a set of personal characteristics that are common for people simply based on their belonging to a particular age cohort without taking into

consideration their varied personal experiences as well as socio-economic status, ethnicity, gender, sex, and other factors influencing individuals in that cohort.

The argument made by some Marines that the generational talk is not really about age differences was reinforced by the way some participants discussed changes in the Marine Corps without bringing up age differences. Master Sergeant #321, for example, pointed out, *“More Marines speak up than ever before.”* “Speaking up,” “questioning,” and “asking questions” are terms often used by some senior Marines when referring to a new generation of Marines and generational differences. This master sergeant, however, pointed to this tendency without any mention of age, generations, and generational differences. Instead in the interview, he observed a cultural change relevant to all Marines regardless of rank and age. This was echoed by a female Major #201, who, while commenting on gender issues, said, *“Compared to five-six years ago, females are more willing to speak out.”* Once again, these comments were not related to discussions about a new generation and generational differences; instead, they alluded to a change in institutional culture. Yet, many other senior Marines made the same points while framing them as a generational thing.

The way participants in the MCOCR research talked about generational differences was varied and provided important insights. Although Marines often used stereotypical terms to describe generations in the Marine Corps, they challenged stereotypical thinking about generations, revealing the richness of individual backgrounds, experiences, values, attitudes, and beliefs that defy generational categorization. They also pointed out that talk about generational differences is not necessarily about generations but about the institution and how it handles changing missions and its relationship with society.

Talking about generational differences in the context of combat and deployments

*Interviewer: How do you think that today's Marine Corps is different from the Marine Corps of the past?
Sgt: Um, less combat.⁶*

By the time data collection for the MCOCR research was conducted in 2017, the number of Marines who had experienced deployments, including to war zones, was already in deep decline. That year, fewer than one in five Marines had a single deployment, and less than one in ten had deployed twice.⁷ Many previously deployed Marines participating in the research made numerous observations about the effects of deployments and combat on individual and group experiences. Some of them went as far as separating Marines into those who have deployed, including to war zones, and those who have not, while framing this division in generational terms. As Gunnery Sergeant # 062 in a focus group with other senior Marines pointed out, *“A generation of war has to adapt to a generation that has never seen war before. Warfighters are either out or getting out.”* Others used generational references to discuss this division while also framing the issue as either “old Marine Corps versus new Marine Corps,” or “wartime Marine Corps versus peacetime Marine Corps.” Previously deployed Marines identified several differences between the wartime Corps and the peacetime Corps. Lieutenant Colonel #421 observed that small unit discipline has been lost because of the lack of combat mindset and the Marines Corps’ return to garrison life. Corporal #072 with eight years of service noted the peacetime Marine Corps is about ridiculous classes. This observation was seconded by Captain #209 who argued Marines are overwhelmed by briefs and trainings that have nothing to do with combat. Master Gunnery Sergeant #231 pointed out how deployments effected cohesion, stating *“I mean, obviously, like, you know, I've been to Iraq before, and I obviously saw like even amongst whatever the peer groups were, there was a lot of camaraderie for that time frame. Like when we were like in country, we were like- we were like that, you know.”*

It is in the context of discussing the effects of deployments, or their lack, that Marine participants revealed how experiences within the institution create differences between older and younger Marines. It is significant

⁶ Sergeant #007.

⁷ Jeff Schogol, “Were Have All the Combat Vets Gone?” *Marine Corps Times* (August 14, 2017).
<https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/2017/08/14/where-have-all-the-combat-vets-gone/>.

that in these discussions, previously deployed Marines tended not to speculate about how civilian society is shaping the characteristics of current recruits and junior Marines but instead focused on how their experience of deployment and combat made Marines of their age a distinct group with its own identifiable characteristics, including values, norms, and attitudes. These characteristics were then compared to the characteristics of the Marines of the “new generation” or the “peacetime Marine Corps,” explicitly arguing that the old generation and the wartime institution were better. Lieutenant Colonel #400 said, *“But I think that the younger generation is more apt to not think of second order effects, certainly not third order effects of decisions that they make. And with that, I think we have a risk that, you know, our culture that we know we've adapted over a hundreds of years is-is fading to loose behavior that's culturally accepted.”*

When the MCOCR research explicitly explored themes related to cohesion, Marines frequently pointed to deployments as a factor accounting for the presence or lack of unit cohesion. Shared experiences, especially experience of hardship, were often identified as a factor that fostered cohesion, trust, and leadership qualities. On the other hand, lack of deployments was seen as the explanation for the lack of those in unit and individual characteristics. As Corporal #221 noted, *“I've seen the cohesion in the non-deployable units is very different than the cohesion in a victor unit⁸.”* Sergeant #007 observed deployments confer authority and turn Marines into leaders.

I believe it affects leadership for the simple fact that a leader- some leaders would undermine their subordinates because they've never gone to a combat zone. I was one of the last groups to go to Afghanistan, so I just got luck of the draw, but a lot of people will be like- when you see sta- a ribbon stack, you see a combat deployment, they're like, authority.

That's what- that's what you think. That's what people think most time like, “He went to Afghanistan, authority.”

Staff Sergeant #635 echoed that attitude, stating, *“Like if we're looking at it and said, ‘How come, you know, this sergeant has two ribbons?’ Like because we compared them, like, “Okay, I have the stack that I was lance corporal, E3, and he's a sergeant but he only has two. You didn't do anything.’ I mean the kid has nothing to prove himself. So I mean it's a different, way different Marine Corps now.”*

The staff sergeant's comment is typical of many previously deployed Marines who not only talked about how deployments have affected their experiences but also made generalizations about how the new generation of Marines and the new Marine Corps are different from the old ones because of the relative lack of such experience. Some Marines ascribed to the old generation aspirations, attitudes, and beliefs that are lacking in the modern Marine Corps. Gunnery Sergeant #046 pointed out he was a member of a generation deeply affected by the 9/11 terrorist attacks and joining the Marine Corps was an attempt to regain control over uncertain external circumstances and restore a past sense of security. He explained, *“But it was still something that shook everyone, and I think the ability for people to feel like they had an opportunity to exert control on their external circumstances because they felt hurt, they felt vulnerable. Nothing like that had ever happened CONUS before. So it shattered that image of invincibility. And we wanted to get back.”* The same Marine contrasted this attitude with the one exhibited by the younger generation of Marines who did not know the past and the global war on terror as the norm. The new generation was seen as joining during very different times and accordingly was assumed to have very different motives and commitments.

They're not driven to fix a wrong because it's been 16 years. I think it's now- I don't want to say stabilized but I feel like that's the best way to describe it. You're not seeing the emotional anymore. It's more of a logical choice for a lot of people whether it's financial, whether it's to get out of the circumstances in which they were raised, whether it's a stepping stone to get to a future career. I think people are logically joining the military now versus emotionally joining the military immediately post-911.

It must be noted, however, that while many Marines participating in the research point to 9/11 as the reason for joining the Corps, others, who also joined after the attacks, included a variety of other reasons, such as seeking a challenge, a steady career, and college money, escaping circumstances, and continuing a family tradition of military service. In other words, this Marine ascribed his motivations for service to a whole generation of Marines who happened to join at approximately the same time. Similarly, he painted the

⁸ A “victor unit” typically means a deployable unit.

generation of junior Marines with a wide brush, seeing a lack in commitment to serve in times of national crisis. This wide generalization was seconded by a previously enlisted First Lieutenant #048.

And now I feel like there's a newer group of Marines coming in that are doing it for different reasons. I mean we're not in kind of a time of war now. Like, I joined 'cause I wanted to go fight. There are people now that join because they wanted college. Nobody in 2003 was joining the Marine Corps because they wanted college money because they knew, or to use TA⁹ because they weren't going to use TA. You were going to go on deployments, you know.

In talking with junior participants, however, their own words did not necessarily support these claims, as their motivations for joining the Corps seem as varied as those of the 9/11 Marines, including a desire to deploy and fight for the country. In fact, one of the interesting conflicts revealed in this study is junior Marines' struggles to reconcile their expectations of serving in a warfighting organization and the routines of everyday life in garrison. Many expressed surprise and disappointment when realizing everyday life in the Marine Corps had little to do with their expectations about being part of a warfighting institution. This realization was compounded by another realization – this one is common not only for current junior Marines but also for many Marine participants across the ranks – that what they learned as values and behavior in their initial training and socialization in the Corps (recruit depot, Officer Candidates School, and The Basic School) was sometimes very different from values and behavior in the fleet. Confronted by these cultural clashes, junior Marines seemed to have several coping strategies. Some contemplated leaving the Corps, others planned on lateral moving across MOSSs, and others created a new purpose and motivation to serve.

The disappointments of junior Marines and their struggles to cope with them do not stay hidden from senior Marines. Several senior participants revealed in their conversations that they were aware of these struggles and disappointments and discussed strategies to help Marines overcome them and find new purpose to serve and renew their commitment to the Corps. Some explained to their Marines how their seemingly inconsequential duties and skills fit the big picture and enable the Corps to fulfill missions, including warfighting. Other Marines tried to create work environments that foster unit cohesion and value individual contributions. And others sent Marines under their charge to temporary assignments, including Marine Expeditionary Unit tours. However, many other senior Marines saw these struggles as something unique to the current generation of junior Marines. They branded this a generational problem – a group of young Marines with characteristics created by a civilian society very different from the one older Marines came from.

Finding generational differences in attitudes towards cell phones and social media

No, this is a generational, societal problem. Had we always had cell phones with picture sharing capabilities, this would have been a problem when we were teenagers. This would've been a problem when we were young adults.¹⁰

Marines brought up multiple themes when discussing generational differences in the context of the proliferation of social media and smart phones in the Marine Corps. Once again, senior Marines fell into two broad categories – some frame it in generational differences terms while others have a much more nuanced view tying it to multiple other issues and themes explored in the study.

For some, mostly senior, Marines, cell phones and social media were among the most defining attributes of the generation of junior Marines. This technology was seen to make Marines more informed and knowledgeable, more isolated from the Marine Corps and more connected to the outside world, more difficult to engage in activities promoting unit cohesion, and more likely to get in trouble as social media and electronic devices keep record of Marines' misconduct.

⁹ Tuition Assistance.

¹⁰ First Lieutenant #045.

The effect of such technologies on junior Marines' knowledge and staying informed was a major theme in generational talk. Senior Marine participants observed that, unlike the past, junior Marines have easy access to information and knowledge in the palms of their hands. As Gunnery Sergeant #300 explained,

They just know too much, where we were more naive. Back then we didn't have internet readily available on our cell phones. We didn't have that. So, for us it was more, "Oh, well, master sergeant told me." Oh no, now these junior Marines will be like, "Oh, master sergeant said that, but this Marine Corps Order over here," and hopefully it means that my generation taught them well, "This Marine Corps Order says this, this, and this." And they put up a fight faster than I think our generation did."

Master Sergeant #425 seconded this opinion and also pointed out the benefits this trend is bringing to the Marine Corps.

I've also noticed, we've seen-I've seen a lot more with more world experience, just based on how information technology has gotten around. They know what's going on in the world. They're interested in it, kind of thing. That helps us out as Marine Corps, too, because, I mean, here in the Pacific, we go and can see and be around all sorts of different nations at one time. And to understand the conflicts that might have taken place before-hand.

The use of modern technology by junior Marines as a source of information and knowledge was universally seen as a positive trend by both older and younger Marines. Senior Marines also tended to identify junior Marines' comfort with and ease of using these technologies as one of the very few positives related to the ways civilian society is preparing young people for life in the Marine Corps. Except for this and young people's tolerance of demographic differences, civilian society was mostly seen as instilling characteristics and values that the Marine Corps must overcome and change radically.

It must be pointed out that, while most Marines credited these technologies and social media with junior Marines' being better informed and knowledgeable than previous generations, some participants also pointed to changes within the organization as the explanatory factor. As Master Sergeant #511 reflected on his experience,

I just look at the change over past 20 years. When I was a PFC, I got my information from my section leader and my platoon sergeant. Those was only two people that ever told me anything about what was going on. Maybe I saw a read board at the PX¹¹, or something like that. Now, you know, every Marine has an MOL¹² account. He probably has an e-mail, he probably has, he's probably part of somebody's SharePoint group, he's probably part in- everybody's throwing different announcements at them and advertising to him different stuff and what's going on, it's like-a lot of them getting information overload.

This insight into how the institution created services to keep Marines better informed is supported by other observations by senior Marines who argued that in their experience, the Corps has increased the number of services pertaining to all aspects of Marines' lives, including social status, gender and sexual issues, entertainment, and others. Although it is hard to provide an assessment of how effective these services are based on the available MCOCR data, it is clear some senior Marines saw this as one of the signs of generational differences as well as a distinction between the old and new Marine Corps. In other words, these Marines pointed to a development within the Marine Corps that might explain why the junior Marines' socialization in the institution creates different Marine cultures across different age cohorts.

A few of the senior Marines took the ubiquity of cell phones and social media in the institution beyond their role in keeping Marines informed and knowledgeable and observed how they are used in challenging the established relationship between the Corps and individual Marines. They argued that technology is changing the nature of the Marine Corps as a total institution. Connectivity with the outside world and social media are enabling Marines to create an autonomous sphere of life, one that is outside the total control of the Marine Corps. Marines today, regardless of their age, are able to maintain ties, relationships, and exchanges with the world outside the Marine Corps. Some Marines are now experiencing professional and civilian lives within a single day, leading some to a sharp bifurcation of their identity. As Major #068 observed,

¹¹ Post Exchange

¹² Marine Online.

But [pauses] so with the way society, as I mentioned, it's kind of the information flow and stuff like that earlier, right, where everything's- information's at your fingertips, large portions of the military don't live on the installation, don't live in barracks. At the end of the day, everyone wants to go home and leave base and act like a civilian. For some people, being- the Marine Corps is a job, right? "I drive to work. I am here from 0730 to 1630. I take my hour lunch or whatever, and then at 1630, I drive home somewhere off base in this civilian community." There's very much more of the external societal influences, right? In the middle of the day, I am pulling out my phone every five minutes to go on Facebook or whatever, you know, texting, whatever, watching videos. So I'm very much more exposed to societal norms than perhaps some idealized old Corps vision of the past where, you know, you did have the Marines all live in barracks or even open-squad bays. Now, there were all male, but, you know, the officers lived on base in the officer housing, right? Like there was less of "I have the entire world at my fingertips on my phone."

The ability to create and maintain a strong autonomous sphere of life where the Marine Corps' influence is either not present or weak challenges individuals' adherence to Marine culture, affecting their beliefs, norms, attitudes, and commitments related to the institution. Although the major cited above did not refer to a specific age group, implying that all Marines could experience that, most other senior Marines tended to associate this trend with junior Marines. This partially explains their focus on cell phones and social media as the most visible tools enabling this trend, as fewer young Marines tend to live outside base. It is also probable that this trend is more salient among junior Marines who are still in the early stages of their socialization in the Corps and are yet to form their commitment to the institution. In fact, many of them never develop a long-term commitment as they do not look beyond their first enlistment.

While some seniors Marines speculated that cell phones and social media might be isolating Marines from the Corps and undermining the institution's totalizing function, others also observed an opposite trend – their ability to reinforce an individual's ties to the institution. Several participants indicated that while in the past cell phones were rarity in the Corps, in the early 2010s, they quickly became not only ubiquitous but a required necessity. Senior Marines shared that starting in the 2010s, cell phones made them increasingly available to their superiors and junior Marines. Even when off-duty, they were not only on call but also easily reachable. In addition, social media was seen as providing senior Marines with one more tool to oversee and lead their Marines. As Lieutenant Colonel #400 observed,

So they have to be more engaged in their lives to-to really know, and I think that you'll find that corporals and sergeants are looking at the Marines' social media profiles and seeing what's going on there. And I tell you- I probably have numerous case studies where a Marine who is, you know, struggling may post something on social media. [snaps fingers] Bam! His NCO¹³ picks it up, and they're going to see him or they're picking up the phone and calling him, and- because they understand that these young Marines that we're seeing now, that's their outlet.

Thus, while cell phones and social media might be enabling Marines to carve out an autonomous space for themselves, they also facilitate the creation of new ties to the Corps. Many senior Marine participants recognized this and embraced social media as another tool in their leadership toolkit. Other senior Marines, however, refused to adopt this tool and saw it as a phenomenon associated with a younger generation they did not understand. Those Marines also tended to see social media and cell phones as getting Marines in trouble, thus something to be careful about or to avoid. Many senior Marines argued that junior Marines were not that different from the Marines from when they joined the Corps. Unlike the past, however, social media and cell phones today keep a record of personal misconduct. Master Sergeant #200 observed,

Like, man, like this is- this is tough and like we look at Marines United now, like you see that what's going on Facebook and sharing pictures and these new- these new Marines coming into the Marine Corps are- are out there where their mistakes can never come back. Like, I can't- I can't post something on social media, delete it the next second and think that it never went out there because now it's in cyberspace forever. So the only difference between this generation and ours is that their mistakes are- are life-long and life-lasting and life-long lasting and- and- and forever. Like you can't pull them back no matter what you do.

¹³ Non-Commissioned Officer.

Marines' conversations about the penetration of cell phones and social media into the Corps reveal how, in addition to changes outside the institution, some changes within the institution can explain differences between senior and junior Marines. Technology should not be exclusively associated with junior Marines. Senior Marines, too, navigate its effects in the institution. Marines' responses to it are varied. Some saw it as a distraction afflicting junior personnel and undermining organizational cohesion. They associated social media as civilian society's cultural intrusion into the Corps – an unwelcome trend the institution has little power to resist. It is interesting that the senior Marines resenting this did not recognize social media as a tool to be used by leadership to lead and inform. It is also interesting that those same Marines also did not describe an alternative style of leadership to be juxtaposed with the one adapting such technology and means of communication to lead Marines. Another group of senior Marines, on the other hand, embraced technology and social media not only as tools to relate to and lead junior Marines but also as a phenomenon that empowers the institution and all Marines. In fact, they framed the penetration of technology and social media not in generational differences terms but as something that defines future Marine Corps missions and the way Marines operate. They did not see Marines of different ages having different behaviors related to social media and technology but rather saw Marines with different responsibilities and needs related to them. They saw it as the Corps' embracing progress.

It must be pointed out that most of the Marines discussing social media and cell phones are senior Marines, while junior Marines had relatively little to say on the topic. One plausible explanation for this gap is that the researchers explicitly ask Marines about their take on the Marines United controversy, which spurred the MCOCR Project. Most junior Marines had relatively little to say on the topic as they had short careers in the institution and, accordingly, did not explore the role of social media in their lives. More senior Marines, on the other hand, had more familiarity with the controversy and more observations about the changing role of social media in the institution and, accordingly, had more to share. It might also be that while junior Marines have grown up with social media, more senior Marines have experience observing its spread in the institution and, thus, have more to say about its influence in the Marine Corps.

Generational differences and leadership

Marines also brought up generational differences when discussing leadership in the Marine Corps. Perhaps the most salient relation between the two is when Marines talked about leadership shortcomings among NCOs. When Marine participants saw leadership problems, they sometimes framed them in generational differences terms. Those identifying a negative leadership trend very frequently contrasted it with the leadership in the past, which was described as better and more competent. Participants noted a certain trend within junior NCO leadership ranks, mainly among corporals and sergeants, that there seemed to be many who lacked competence, did not know how to lead and inspire junior Marines, did not take responsibilities, and frequently did not live by the Corps' values. This was sometimes framed as a generational differences issue. When describing the deficiencies of young leaders, participants brought up all the stereotypical characteristics associated with Millennials discussed in previous sections of this paper, including their fear of personal conflicts, individualism, fear of taking responsibility, aversion to physical hardship, etc. Senior Marines pointing to these characteristics often stated they were cultivated in civilian society, incompatible with Marine Corps values, and difficult to overcome in the context of a short transformation process in the institution.

Other Marines, however, while framing the issue in generational differences terms, also identified reasons within the institution that explain the declining quality of leadership in the Corps. Some participants converged on the belief that several developments in the mid-2010s have had lasting effects on leadership. In the aftermath of the surges in Iraq and Afghanistan many experienced enlisted Marines left the Corps and left a gap of leadership and skills in the institution. The Corps responded by promoting a large number of junior Marines in what many senior Marines described as picking up rank "ahead of schedule." Those early promoted Marines were seen as young and immature, lacking requisite professional and leadership skills, and

having limited experience in the institution.¹⁴ A first sergeant, master sergeant, and gunnery sergeant in a focus group spent considerable time discussing the qualities of today's NCOs, pointing out the newly-minted Marine leaders were scared to make decisions and did not know how to lead because many of them were promoted too fast to fill in the gap left by experienced Marines who left the Corps.¹⁵ The first sergeant in the same focus groups observed, "*When we came back from the war, and everybody got out. And then they just 'Whoosh, look at me. I was a lance corporal, now I am a sergeant.'*" The master sergeant in the same focus group also noted that this lack of experience when promoted was compounded by personal characteristics developed in civilian society.

I think it's really endemic of society too because you see the younger kids, the kids, you know, the 18, the PFCs, lance corporals, and even the corporals and they come up and they're just- I don't know just a different mentality. Like they- their foresight is so short. Ya know, all they say is, "Okay, we need to get to this contract so..." you know, do they get proficiency in their job? Like that's all they have? And they don't do anything to more well round themselves, like make them better people. And when they don't do that, we really get the shit from that the farther up they go. So if you didn't do anything in your first eight years in Marine Corps to make yourself like a better human aside from just "Well, I'm really good at, you know, turning this wrench." Then you're going to have a leader eight years down the road that doesn't really know how do anything except turn a wrench.

In addition, some Marines believed the Marine Corps lowered standards to meet surge requirements, thus creating a worse-than-usual pool of personnel from which to choose leaders. In other words, it was not so much the civilian society but the Corps' needs that determined the qualities of recruits entering the institution. As prior enlisted Captain #230 said,

Capt: I believe it has in the sense that, um, as a- I was a drill instructor from 2004 to 2007 when I was a staff sergeant, and I noticed a change in the quality of recruits from 2004 to the end of 2007. There was a- there was- you could tell we were trying to plus up.

Interviewer: What does that mean exactly?

Capt: That means we were trying to grow our force quickly. And I honestly feel that standards were lowered. I know we stress that that never happens. However, when you need people, regardless of their skills or their knowledge or their intelligence, um, we need people period. Bottom line. Nothing could replace a person but more people.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. So they were- some of them were of lower quality you'd say.

Capt: Yes, absolutely.

Marine participants also identified another factor that affected leadership that was within rather than without the organization. The separation of experienced Marines from the Corps created not only a shortage of leaders but also a shortage of skilled professionals. The shortage of skilled personnel affected not only Marines' daily professional activities but also their ability to lead other Marines. Staff Sergeant #063 explained he had 50 Marines, of which 46 were in their first enlistment. He worked in an aviation maintenance shop and already worked 12 hours on aircraft because none of his Marines had the skills to do it. He confessed to have no time in the day to know his Marines and lead them properly as his priority was to keep planes flying. Other Marines in the aviation community, too, observed that unlike earlier times, especially during the surges in the mid-2000s, their community was experiencing a lack of resources and skills, leaving them with little time to be proper leaders of their Marines. Thus, at least for the aviation community, according to some participants, the combination of senior, experienced Marines' leaving the Corps in the late 2000s and the diminishing resources partially contributed to leadership problems among enlisted Marines.¹⁶ When

¹⁴ The problems caused by the rapid promotion of junior Marines is more extensively discussed in a previous MCOCR report. See, Kerry Fosher, et al, *Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Project Preliminary Analysis: Marines' Perspectives on Various Aspects of Marine Corps Organizational Culture* (U.S. Marine Corps Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning: Quantico, VA, March 30, 2018) <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/1079774.pdf>.

¹⁵ Gunnery Sergeant #117, First Sergeant #118, and Master Sergeant #119, Male SNCO Focus Group, MCB Camp Pendleton, 13 September 2017.

¹⁶ Previously cited MCOCR report discussed additional reasons for those problems. See Fosher, *Marines' Perspectives*.

discussing those problems, Marines did not use references to how civilian society affects differences between generations of Marines.

Marines also talked about another development in the Corps that might support the proposition that the reasons for new leadership problems are to be found in the institution rather than emanating from the characteristics of the new recruits.¹⁷ Some participants argued that, unlike in the past, the process of addressing misconduct by Marines is increasingly burdensome and time-consuming. Some staff NCOs explained the effort today requires more steps, time, and paperwork. Master Sergeant #641 said,

Um, but the only thing--and in my generation doesn't like to do--we look at paperwork like it's a pain in the butt to try to punish somebody, you know? Okay, you're going to write a counselling on them. Well, you have to do three counsellings before it goes to a Page 11. And then you have to have three Page 11s¹⁸ before it goes to an NJP¹⁹. Um, the days of the gunny told you to and you didn't do it and now you're in violation of UCMJ²⁰ are over! And your paperwork [faint laugh] unfortunately can ruin someone's career but we have no other effective ways to...that we're legally allowed to use to discipline our Marines for basic jackassery.

In addition, those Marines felt the process today took away some of their discretion in deciding individual cases and transferred the decision-making up the chain of command. As a result, senior Marines were reluctant to pursue cases of misconduct unless they were egregious enough to warrant action. Inevitably, reluctance to address such cases of misconduct affected discipline and cohesion within units. Junior Marines, too, made observations about leadership in the Corps. However, unlike senior Marines, they did not use terms associated with generations and generational differences. Instead, they discussed their experience with senior Marines, both positive and negative, without referring to generational terms and stereotypes.

Conclusion

There is no single unifying theme that captured how Marine participants used generational references or even what these references meant when used by individual Marines. Marines have varied ways of discussing generational differences in the Marine Corps. In their conversations as captured in the MCOCR research, they reveal several insights that can inform institutional thinking when designing policies for and approaches to Marines of different ages and ranks.

- Although many Marines use generational differences terms popularized in society and widely used in the institution, those terms hide concerns, problems, and issues that have little to do with generational differences. Marine participants frequently used generational differences references and terms as a way to frame multiple problems including: frictions between junior and more senior Marines, the needs of the Marine Corps versus the influence of civilian world, leadership problems, attitudes about gender, and others. Sometimes, the generational references were used simply as a way to vent. Many Marines used the term as an explanatory factor for various problems and phenomena they encountered in the Corps. They seem to use clichés existing in the civilian world (Millennials, Generation X, etc.) as an explanatory framework for discussing policies and trends in the institution.
- Even when using generational differences terms and frames, many Marines provide nuances and insights that break the stereotypes associated with this type of discussion popularized in civilian society. Marines go beyond age as a factor and instead focus on differences among Marines based on experience, rank, and demographic characteristics such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, etc.

¹⁷ Because this report focuses mostly on senior Marines' perspectives, it excludes junior Marine participants' take on leadership issues. For more detail on junior Marines' views on leadership see Fosher, Marines' Perspectives. See also, Erika Tarzi, Insights from the Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Project: Trust in the Marine Corps – the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly (U.S. Marine Corps Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning: Quantico, VA, May 11, 2020).

¹⁸ Administrative Remarks.

¹⁹ Non-Judicial Punishment.

²⁰ The Uniformed Code of Military Justice.

- Although many Marines look at society as the culprit in creating generational differences, in their conversations they also reveal important factors within the Marine Corps that create differences between Marines with different lengths of service and experiences. The Marine Corps is a constantly changing institution, as its doctrine, missions, operations, regulations, social context, and interactions with society evolve. These changes are reflected in the insights provided by Marine participants who shared their experiences navigating such changes. These insights also show how Marines who joined the institution at different times have different experiences. It is the differences of experiences that partially shape the differences between groups of Marines rather than their age.
- Marines, regardless of their age cohort, are equal participants in and observers of institutional and civilian cultures. All of them navigate similar opportunities and challenges and have varied, individualized responses and coping strategies that defy generational stereotypes.
- Thus, when designing and implementing new policies and approaches, the Marine Corps may not want to focus on generational differences as created in popular generational literature, but instead take into account differences among Marines in terms of length of service, experiences, and socio-economic and other demographic characteristics that would provide a much more nuanced and fuller understanding of different groups in the institution.