



# Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Project Overview

June 2020

## Project Overview

The Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research (MCOCR) Project was an exploratory research effort requested by Manpower and Reserve Affairs (M&RA) in July 2017 to gather information on Marine Corps culture. The project arose in part from concerns related to the Marines United social media misconduct and also from longer-term leadership questions regarding shifts in Marine Corps culture. The research was conducted by the Center for Advanced Operational Culture's (CAOCL) Translational Research Group (TRG) at Marine Corps University (MCU). The project was governed by Marine Corps Human Subjects Protection Protocol #USMC.2017.0005 and the provisions of academic freedom in MCU's *Academic Regulations* (2016).

The intent of the project was to develop a broad base of data and analyses to provide context, considerations, and insights that could be used to inform problem-framing and decision-making on a range of issues. The project was not intended to be representative of the entire Marine Corps or to support statistical analyses. As with most exploratory research, results were intended to inform discussion rather than make claims or advance particular positions regarding any Marine Corps program or policy. Additional information is provided in the Frequently Asked Questions on page 3 of this overview.

The **first phase** of MCOCR involved research design, data gathering, initial analysis, and production of two expedited reports. The research team collected data from Aug-Oct 2017 at installations in the United States and Japan, conducting 182 interviews and focus groups that were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Initial analysis focused on issues related to leadership, cohesion, and gender bias, captured in reports to the Personnel Studies and Oversight (PSO) Office, now the Talent Management Oversight Directorate (TMOD).

A *Quick Look Report* on issues specifically related to the Marines United misconduct was delivered to PSO in February 2018. A broader initial *Report to PSO* was expedited and delivered on 30 March 2018. This report organized preliminary analysis into the following themes:

1. Marines United and the Prevalence of Online Misconduct
2. Challenges with and for Leadership
3. The Procedural and Social Uses of PFT/CFT Scores
4. Experiences of Female Marines
5. Hostile Environments
6. Remaining a Marine: How Enlisted and Officers Deliberate and Decide
7. Cohesion, Leadership, and Difference through the Lens of Humor

With the delivery of the initial report and associated materials to PSO, the first phase of MCOCR was complete.

The **second phase** of MCOCR was intended to have three parts:

- Cleaning the transcripts to correct errors and removing protected information to develop them into a dataset that TRG could mine on a broad range of issues of interest to the Marine Corps
- Conducting deeper and more structured analyses on topics of interest to the Marine Corps and those of scholarly value
- Continuing to advise Marine Corps organizations based on MCOCR and other datasets as requested.

**The Marine Corps' decision to close CAOCL in June 2020 altered the plans and timelines for the second phase.**

Original analysis plans for this phase also were disrupted by TRG's inability to procure necessary analytic software and questions regarding the applicability of MCU's academic freedom policy to MCOCR outcomes. Questions regarding academic freedom were resolved in late 2019. These factors significantly reduced the scope of analysis planned for Phase 2. **See additional information below.**



# Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Phase 2

## Advising

The TRG team continued to provide advice for problem framing and the development of more structured data gathering efforts to various Marine Corps organizations, including M&RA and TMOD.

## Dataset Development

Work to clean the transcripts to correct errors and remove protected information was completed in January 2020. This work ensured the transcripts could be analyzed accurately. Potentially, transcripts also may be able to be released to other researchers with an appropriate human subjects protection protocol.

## Completed Analyses

Due to the limitations imposed by lack of software and CAOCL's closure, TRG focused on completing several "quick look" reports on different topics rather than the in-depth analyses originally planned. The following additional reports were completed:

- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Implicit and Explicit Perceptions of Fairness
- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Pregnancy Loss
- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Alcohol
- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Rethinking Mentorship
- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Trust in the Marine Corps – the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly
- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Sexual Assault and Harassment
- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Implicit and Explicit Perceptions of Fairness
- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Empathy in Leadership
- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Generational Differences in the Marine Corps – Exploring Issues and Frictions Between Older and Younger Marines.
- Insights from the MCOCR Project: Elements and Antidotes for Disillusionment

All reports from the project were submitted to the Defense Technical Information Center for posting on the public portal. We recommend searching on the PI's last name (Fosher) to identify them. See also data management plan for additional locations.

## Scholarly Works

TRG team members presented on aspects of the MCOCR project at numerous academic conferences and in Marine Corps meetings. One scholarly article was published and another is under review as of this date:

- Translational Research in a Military Organization: The Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Project. Feb 2020 in *Annals of Anthropological Practice*.
- Post-Heroic Leadership in a Heroic Organization: The Secret and Gendered Life of Empathy in the United States Marine Corps. Submitted to the journal *Human Relations* for review.

## **Long-Term Data Management Plans**

Protection of the Marines who volunteered for the project and the data they provided was a priority for TRG. However, TRG also felt a responsibility to ensure that the data provided by Marines is used to the maximum extent possible. The principal investigator worked with the Marine Corps' Human Research Protection Program to identify a data repository that balanced internal and external discoverability with necessary security. After reviewing several options, The Qualitative Data Repository (QDR), hosted by Syracuse University was selected. Versions of transcripts that have been scrubbed of protected information, along with project documentation and reports, were deposited in the QDR when CAOCL closed. Some materials from the project, but not the data, also were included in the CAOCL collection provided to the Archives Branch of the Marine Corps History Division at MCU.

The original audio recordings, raw transcripts, and any materials that could link participants with the data were destroyed when CAOCL's closed.



# Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Frequently Asked Questions

## What is MCOCR?

The MCOCR Project was 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 by CAOCL's Translational Research Group under Marine Corps University's (MCU) academic freedom policy.

## How should the information in MCOCR reports 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 fell 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).

## Can Marines who participated be identified?

Identification is unlikely. Marines who volunteered for the research went through a process that informed them of the risks and the steps the research team would take to mitigate them. (A copy of the informed consent information is available in the project documentation through the Archives Branch of the Marine Corps History Division at MCU or the Qualitative Data Repository at Syracuse University.) Names were removed from the dataset and other measures were taken to mask identities, but Marines were cautioned prior to agreeing to participate in an interview or focus group that it might still be possible for some readers to identify them through their habits of speech and/or combinations of characteristics, such as MOS and location.

## What were 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 PhDs or MAs 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 were 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.