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| <b>14. ABSTRACT</b><br>There have been many senior leader and media discussions, reports, definitions, and contexts of a prevailing culture of entitlement in the United States and specifically within the military. Recent senior officers relieved of duty for ethical misconduct have provoked concerns in this regard. What remains unclear is the correlation between historical events and other occurrences that have contributed to this condition. What is transparent is that such a culture, if it exists, may present a significant leadership challenge to overcome. During the research for this debate, a connection was discovered between the all-volunteer force, the civil-military gap, narcissism or culture of entitlement issues, as well as the identification of suggested solutions to overcome these evolving adversities. This paper is informative in nature with the purpose of bringing awareness to the subject matter and to improve leadership discussions. Supported conclusions have been provided with recommended courses of action to mitigate adverse effects. |                               |                                                                    |                                         |                                                                    |                                                                                               |
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Leadership Challenges in a Culture of Entitlement

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## Executive Summary

Title: Leadership Challenges in a Culture of Entitlement

Author: Major Cameron P. Evans, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: The Marine Corps, through understanding of narcissistic tendencies of the millennial generation and society, adherence to Marine Corps Values maintenance, and proactive professional military education, can overcome the challenges of recruiting and retaining Marines without breeding or exasperating a culture of entitlement.

Discussion: In the nearly 40 years since the draft was ended, the United States military has evolved, through the all-volunteer force, into a competent and professional force. The military in particular has enjoyed increased public support and admiration over the years as the far reaching arm of national security strategy on the global scale. Although many military engagements have not been whole heartedly supported by society from a political standpoint, the public in general has an understanding that the military is merely a tool of the government and it supports our efforts and sacrifices. In fact, when compared to post-Vietnam era, the military is the most trustworthy organization according to recent polls and enjoys unprecedented patriotic support by Americans.

Recent senior leadership disciplinary issues have illuminated an underlying theme of a developing “culture of entitlement” within the military, as a result of the military being incentivized and the existence of narcissism within the ranks. Service members exploit these conditions through unethical behavior when military members violate ethical standards by believing that they are owed something from society. This feeling of being owed is increased by existing cognitive gaps between the military and society thus making unethical choices easier to justify in one’s conscience. The civil-military gap has expanded over the years since the end of the draft, and may be contributing to this behavior as the distance between society and civilian leaders in relation to the military has expanded.

Leadership challenges for the future must seek to remedy the furtherance of any military culture that does not value the importance of service to the country and the people it represents. This study does not seek to identify a panacea for eradication of these undesired behaviors, but seeks to examine the contributing factors and forge a productive outlook for preventing and reducing culture of entitlement behaviors.

Conclusion: Any military culture of entitlement that is developing or exists is unproductive and must be addressed. Consequences as a direct result of this unhealthy culture may affect the future of military relationships with the public and civilian leadership, as well as reduce service effectiveness. This issue must be confronted before military services lose the trust of society, jeopardize leadership credibility, and face reduced combat efficacy through reductions in recruitment and fiscal austerity as a result of such behavior.

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

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## **Preface**

This paper triggered my interest when the Marine Corps Strategic Initiatives Group (SIG) published a list of topics that were of enduring Marine Corps interest. This particular ethics subject, “culture of entitlement” has held many recent headlines and revealed many different meanings, and I hoped to highlight the significance and impact to the Marine Corps.

In my 23 years in the Marine Corps I have witnessed an outpouring of support from society that for me began following the Gulf War. Lee Greenwood’s song, “Proud to be an American” was patriotically played throughout the country at the end of the war, a celebration not shared with Vietnam veterans when they returned home. I have been fortunate to serve in a time of improved quality of life, increased retirement benefits, salary increases, tax free special pay, and abundant promotion opportunities. Additionally, I feel a bit spoiled, in some regards apprehensive, in receiving accolades from the public for serving. I certainly appreciate their support, however, I also at times feel we might be over-celebrated and there may be some who serve that feel they are “owed” accolades. With numerous government benefits, military discounts, special recognition at events, free admissions, and the like, I often feel the military is enjoying too much fanfare. After all, we are a volunteer force, and many other people in society serve in different but equally beneficial professions, just not always in the context of volunteering their life for their country, which is certainly an honorable sacrifice.

I would like to thank my family and the many military and civilian mentors that I have had the opportunity to serve with and that provided me steering marks along the way allowing me a successful career in the Marine Corps. I sincerely hope this evaluation provides a useable approach for the future.

## Introduction

As the war in Afghanistan draws down, the United States finds itself in the familiar territory of defense cuts and military troop reductions. While these budget shifts are to be expected, what may not be expected is the unprecedented support and admiration of the military by the American people which it supports, even after 12 years of war. A June 2011 Gallup poll rated the military as the top institution that Americans had confidence in, with over 78% of those polled voting for the military, above 15 other institutions, that included the U.S. Supreme Court, organized religion, and Congress. Compare this to the Gallup confidence poll of 58% following the Vietnam War in 1975, or its lowest point of 50% in 1981.<sup>1</sup>

While the military has generally enjoyed relatively high confidence ratings through the years, especially since 9/11, this confidence can be easily dismantled by the misconduct of military members that creates a muddled perception to the society it is sworn to defend. Of particular concern is a perceived culture of entitlement. Recent senior military officer misconduct in this regard, outlined later in this paper, prompted former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates to reiterate his concerns of a festering culture of entitlement in high ranking officers that contributes to ethical misconduct when he stated, “There is something about a sense of entitlement and of having great power that skews people’s judgment”.<sup>2</sup>

This power or elevated status can foster a culture of entitlement in the military, at all levels, and can jeopardize the trust of society with detrimental consequences if allowed to be learned, remain, or proliferate. When military members feel entitled to certain privileges and believe that they are of elevated status to the citizens, specifically as a result of their military service, we have departed from the intent of the foundations for which the military exists. The

Marine Corps, through ethical leadership and leadership development, can overcome the challenges of recruiting, retaining, and leading Marines without breeding a culture of entitlement.

### Background

General William Ward, Commanding General of U.S. Africa Command, was recently reduced to lieutenant general and forced to retire as a result of abuse of travel related expenses charged to the government. The investigation revealed misuse of official government transportation, unauthorized funds for his wife, wasting government resources for excessive travel, permitting staff members to perform personal services for him, accepting free meals and tickets to Broadway from a prohibited source, and misuse of Official Representation Funds.<sup>3</sup>

Admiral James Stavridis, Commander, United States European Command was also found guilty of travel related misconduct in utilizing military air for unofficial travel, collecting per diem and entitlements he did not rate, allowing his wife to collect entitlements she was not authorized to receive, failing to utilize his Department of Defense Government Travel Charge Card for military travel, and receiving gifts from foreign governments without reporting them or disposing of them in accordance with regulations.<sup>4</sup>

These two examples allude to a perceived belief that these commanders as a result of their rank and status, presumed that they were entitled to such privileges or indiscretions, even when in violation of regulations. Is this culture of entitlement reserved for high ranking military officers? Absolutely not, with a generous allotment of incentives available to service members, feeling owed from society for sacrifice, and neglected maintenance of ethical values—it can

easily afflict even the most junior members of the military and create a leadership challenge if unchecked.

### What is a Culture of Entitlement?

First we must attempt to define what the problem is and if there is a potential negative impact to the Marine Corps. For the purpose of this discussion, culture of entitlement can be defined as set of learned behaviors through socialization that centers on entitlement or a self-centered belief that a person is worthy or owed certain privileges as a result of their status or position, whether that status is real or perceived. Socialization in this context would be military indoctrination, service, rank or position, incentives, as well as societal support for the U.S. military. There may be several contributing factors to this phenomenon that will be addressed, but we must first determine if this is a detriment to the Marine Corps.

Former Commandant General Charles Krulak discussed the importance of ethical behavior during remarks at the Joint Services Conference on Professional Ethics in 2000. He remarked that he considered integrity as his, “ethical and personal touchstone.” He was emphatic that the military, “produces men and women of character,” which subsequently makes them more capable to face leadership challenges.<sup>5</sup> Culture of entitlement can put a wedge between integrity and leadership by producing fissures that may tempt a leader to sacrifice ethics for personal benefit. This sense of entitlement seduces an individual to make poor choices or comfort based decisions at the risk of mission. While the Marine Corps prides itself on doing more with less, personal sacrifice above personal glory, thriving in adversity, and generally has the lowest budget or benefits when compared to the other services, this does not mean the Marine Corps is entirely inoculated from being affected.

### Factors for Consideration

First, the transition from conscription to an all-volunteer force has created a proficient military, through incentivisation, that has seen unprecedented defense spending and increased pay and benefits. This incentivizing of military service has ballooned to epic and possibly unsustainable proportions—such as the case of military retirement. Retired Marine, Major General Arnold Punaro a senior associate with the Center for Strategic and International Studies stated, ““I am very concerned that as current trends continue, this country will not have the strong military it needs 20 years from now, because all of the money is going to go to pay people that are no longer serving.”<sup>6</sup> The government has taken great care to create and sustain the force so that it has the prerequisite skill sets required to operate in a rapidly evolving global environment that has seen enormous change in both technology and warfare. This professionalism of military service, necessary to meet these challenging needs, has earned the respect of our nation but can easily be misused by service members. It is perverted by service members through abuse of privileges extended as a result of military service and perceived elevated status above those the military serves.

Secondly, the civil-military gap as a result of making the military a profession has widened over time. Although a gap is somewhat expected with the military becoming a professional force, similar to other occupations that operate under a specialized culture, it leads to a force that sees itself so separate from the civilian leadership and that it does what it wants to do instead of what it should do.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, as the gap grows, the civilian leadership becomes so inattentive and ignorant of what the military is doing, that it leads to more temptation in the gray area of conduct for military members that includes abuses similar to the senior officers discussed earlier.

Translate that to the macro or lower leadership level and you have the opportunity for widespread violations of trust, with young Marines believing they are entitled to special recognition, incentives, and privilege as a result of their military sacrifice—however large or small their contribution. Even a service member who has never deployed to a combat zone may seek entitlement and feel he or she is owed something from society.

Lastly, as this leadership challenge is evaluated, recruiting efforts and indoctrination of potential enlistees and candidates must focus on service to the country and away from a sense of privileged behavior, regardless of the value system of society as a whole. Additionally, by understanding the psychological aspects of the culture from which the military is recruiting from, it helps the Marine Corps anticipate ingrained behaviors of enlistees and candidates that may be predisposed to a culture of entitlement. As the Marine Corps draws down, the selection criteria for military service is likely to become more stringent and may help serve as a filter to mitigate potential effects. An additional distilling effect is the current period of fiscal austerity that will help highlight temperance over privilege. This is not to say that there is not a particularly unique element of honorable sacrifice in military members who volunteer to give their life in the service of their country.

Each topic for consideration is discussed in the following chapters and I will define terms with relevant examples to help guide to the proposed end state. The Evolution section speaks to the end of the draft and transition to the all-volunteer force, as well as the incentivizing of military service. The Gap section discusses the civil-military gap, how it has been expressed over the years, today's landscape, and why the civil-military gap is important when considering a culture of entitlement. The Resource section attempts to understand societal influences present

in the recruiting environment from which enlistees and candidates are drawn. This will assist in understanding preexisting conditions that are intensified as a result of military service in addition to learned behaviors through indoctrination into the military culture, if not understood and planned for. Lastly, the Way Ahead discusses the ethical leadership challenges to a culture of entitlement and recommendations for averting that course through better understanding and leader education. To reiterate, culture of entitlement can be defined as set of learned behaviors through socialization that centers on entitlement or a self-centered belief that a person is worthy or owed certain privileges as a result of their status or position, whether that status is real or perceived. This behavior is fed by the incentivizing of military service; the distancing of the military from the society it serves, and existing psychological characteristics of the people from which the services recruit.

## EVOLUTION

### End of the Draft

The end of the draft during the Vietnam War and the professionalization of the United States military is a contributing factor to entitlement behaviors due to the incentives required to attract a volunteer force discussed below. Incentives included increased pay, retirement, free housing or allowances, health care, education opportunities, and enlistment preferences (duty station/occupational specialty/tour length or location). The Vietnam War and the public discontent with the conduct and execution of that war put pressure on leading politicians to address issues with military service, in particular, the military draft system. The military draft system was seen as an unfair system that offered too many exemptions for those to avoid being drafted.<sup>8</sup> There was an underlying theme in the draft process that only a small portion of the

population was actually being drafted. It became time to review the selective service process, but a secondary concept was also addressed during these years—the all-volunteer force. While not initially a viable solution originally, it became a platform for change in the presidential election when candidate Richard Nixon began his run for the presidency. Once he was elected as president in 1969, he followed up on his campaign promise to put serious evaluation into the possibility and sustainment of such a force.<sup>9</sup>

President Nixon established a commission to, “develop a plan for eliminating conscription and moving toward an all-volunteer force.”<sup>10</sup> The commission, headed by Thomas S. Gates, former Secretary of Defense, was subsequently named the Gates Commission. The commission addressed the primary arguments against the draft in detailed findings published in the final report to refute these concerns. There were several elements that drove this policy shift and included issues with lottery procedures, the fairness of the conscription tax burden, and the quality of the force issues that had prevailed over the years.

Key elements such as an overhaul in military compensation and retirement structures would be required in order to recruit and retain members.<sup>11</sup> At the time of the Vietnam War, the United States was not in universal agreement as to the legitimacy of the war when compared to the nation firmly united during World War II. When a large portion of the military during Vietnam included draftees who had not volunteered to serve (except to avoid the draft), it underlined the lack of support for the draft system with friends and family protesting its functionality. It is difficult to ignore a system that has directly impacted your life through involuntary service of a friend or loved one, and when associated to a war that lacked support, it was a catalyst for change.<sup>12</sup>

## All-Volunteer Force

The draft officially ended in 1973 and the services began the arduous process of recruiting to entice potential enlistees to join. Without mandatory service the militaries had to rely on techniques of offering incentives to recruits in order to appeal to potential enlistees. Early incentives were elementary and included unit and location of choice allurements. Longer term remedies were developed as well which focused on pay reform and bonuses—a costly endeavor.<sup>13</sup> While the initial years were challenging as funding initiatives were explored and advertising techniques were learned, the all-volunteer force has evolved into a profession of arms with quality persons requesting to serve their country. This does not come without a cost however. Recruiting is in a competition against the civilian economy and a potential enlistee must compare military incentives against non-military opportunities. Additional noneconomic factors such as patriotism, perceptions and attitudes of military service, and quality of life issues are also weighed by the potential recruit.<sup>14</sup> As a result and over the years, especially during times of a strong economy, increased military pay and additional enlistment incentives have been necessary to compensate and meet recruiting needs.<sup>15</sup> The military continues to draw in capable and willing personnel to fill its ranks, many as a result of these incentives.

A consequence of this highly incentivized military is that the military establishment has begun to believe that is a special microcosm of society that deserves higher praise and recognition than the average citizen. The military even fosters a level of expectation that it is to be treated accordingly and to not do so is unpatriotic. In 2011, United States Army reservists Staff Sergeants Fred Hilliker and Robert O’Hair posted a critical video on YouTube when Delta Airlines charged them excess baggage charges for their fourth bag upon return from a

deployment to Afghanistan. O'Hair stated the charge was for one of his bags containing his weapon and said "It was the tools that I used to protect myself and Afghan citizens while I was deployed in the country." Hilliker even signed off at the end of the video with, "God bless America" in order to incite the patriotic card. These two soldiers highlighted the sense of entitlement in the dialogue of the video and in their actions to inflame the situation for payment of a fee that was reimbursable by the government.<sup>16</sup> Delta Airlines, received much bad press coverage from angry citizens, including a statement from Veterans of Foreign Wars public affairs that stated, "A \$200 bill for extra baggage by a government-contracted airline is the worst welcome home any soldier could receive."<sup>17</sup> Delta immediately issued a statement via their blog, "First and foremost, we want you to know we're continuing to work with the soldiers individually to make this situation right for each of them. We regret that this experience caused these soldiers to feel anything but welcome on their return home. We honor their service and are grateful for the sacrifices of our military service members and their families."<sup>18</sup> This social pressure is where difficulty arises and a plan for addressing this issue must be conceived. Senior leaders have voiced concern for a growing self-awareness of the destructive type—a culture of entitlement.

This culture is not reserved for senior leadership. It can trickle down to the young Marine who feels society does not understand or appreciate his or her sacrifice and begins to demand special treatment while going through airport security, or the argues with a local vendor because he or she did not receive a military discount. A recent example of cutting benefits as a result of budget constraints is the halting of the military tuition assistance program. The immediate backlash from military and society combined, to the interruption of this incentive has caused Congress to relook at this decision and possibly reinstate the benefits soon.<sup>19</sup> This

highlights the political repercussions of backtracking on the rising cost of military inducements—in a culture that has come to expect such perks.

It is imperative that the military emphasizes, during recruiting and retention (as many services do), the importance of civic duty to the country where the reward for such service is the self-awareness of putting self before others, not being owed special treatment or distinction from those whose freedom you are charged to protect. It does not necessarily mean reducing benefits currently offered to service members (unless fiscally prudent), but instead highlighting the more substantial benefits of moral character developed through civic service. Additionally, reinstituting the draft is not a viable solution to restraining entitlement either, as it would harm combat effectiveness. Former Commander of the United States Army Reserve, Lieutenant General James R. Helmly says of the draft, “A draft functions as an inefficient, ineffective mobilization. It generates a large quantity of raw, untrained manpower, which must be trained and infused into organized units to provide a capability. It does not mobilize already-trained personnel who can be organized and structured into agile, flexible units.”<sup>20</sup>

## GAP

### What is the Gap?

Secretary of Defense, William Cohen, expressed a concern for a “gap” between society and the military during a speech for the Landon Lecture Series and Kansas State University and defined the challenge, “And so our challenge it seems to me in peace time is to prevent any chasm from developing between the military and the civilian worlds, where the civilian world doesn't fully grasp the mission of the military and the military doesn't understand why the memories of our citizens and civilian policy makers are so short or why the criticism is so quick

and unrelenting.”<sup>21</sup> Specifically in his speech he wanted to reconnect with the public to describe to them why the military holds itself to high standards and why a military is needed even in times of peace. He was particularly concerned with society understanding the military establishment and not disconnecting from its military.

There are several ways military service differs from civilian life as well as variables between the services that may highlight or widen the range of disparity. As stated earlier, public support and confidence of the military remains high, but this can have a separatist effect. Andrew Bacevich in his book *The New American Militarism* states, “Confidence in the military has found further expression in a tendency to elevate the soldier to the status of national icon, the apotheosis of all that is great and good about contemporary America.” He writes that Soldiers tended to concur with this consensus and that this “moral superiority” is unhealthy behavior for a democratically supported military.<sup>22</sup>

The Marine Corps in particular is a very structured environment that may be seen as existing at the widest deviation from society, with many that lovingly call the Corps a “cult” with an extremely successful propaganda machine for survival. A case could be made that this makes the Marine Corps the least susceptible of the services to the influences of entitlement as it has the lowest rate of incentives and relies heavily on the challenge and pride of being a Marine as selling points. The Marine Corps has a proud tradition of doing more with less, thriving on adversity, and enjoys a certain pride in delivering outstanding results even in circumstances where resources or time is a luxury. This however, does not equal a reason to believe we are immune from entitlement behaviors. The distancing of the Marine Corps from society in a special category of individuals sets the conditions for entitlement beliefs.

Exposure to military or those that serve has seen drastic changes through the years if one were to compare today's force to the World War II generation. The large draft during World War II, essentially "civilians in uniform", increased the proportional sampling of society when compared to the all-volunteer force we see today. It is these considerations that must be measured to a specific gap in order to properly frame why a gap is something we should be concerned with and how it affects the Marine Corps' ability to function efficiently. Even President Eisenhower expressed concerns coming out of World War II. President Eisenhower in his farewell address remarked his concern for the influence of, "the military-industrial complex." He specifically pointed out that military industry had achieved immense economic and political influence throughout the government and that the United States must, "guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex." He was gravely concerned of their effects on the democratic process or liberties of the people.<sup>23</sup> An industrial complex, or military, that becomes self-serving at the detriment of the people it protects is an undesirable position.

### Does a Gap Contribute to a Culture of Entitlement?

A civil-military gap contributes to culture of entitlement, by basing decisions on internal drivers instead of considering the larger ramifications and obligations to society. Admiral Mike Mullen, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, gave a speech at National Defense University on military professionalism and emphasized his grave concern for this gap between the military and civilians. He was emphatic that this threatening chasm will one day have unforeseen consequences not yet realized. The admiral identified that the military is also disconnected from the people as much as society does not understand it's military. Admiral

Mullen's primary concern was that, "everything we are, everything we do comes from the American people", and, "And we cannot survive without their support--across the board--can't be done."<sup>24</sup> A culture of entitlement abuses the trust and confidence of the American people and takes advantage of this gap in an exploitive way.

Furthermore, military leaders with political objectives, utilizing their admired military service for credibility, can derail unified national strategic objectives by exploiting the gap with unwarranted leverage. Samuel Huntington writes in his book, *Soldier and the State*, "Politics is beyond the scope of military competence, and the participation of military officers in politics undermines their professionalism, curtailing their professional competence, dividing the profession against itself, and substituting extraneous values for professional values. The military officer must remain neutral politically."<sup>25</sup> As a professional and government official in a position of leadership in the military, one must remain "apolitical" and take due diligence to ensure that one does not utilize their position in uniform to exert political influence. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Dempsey recently underscored this theme when he said, "We are not elected to serve, rather, we elect to serve" and emphasized the importance of remaining apolitical to maintain the trust of the American people.<sup>26</sup> If the military simply becomes another special interest group, it is confusing to the public as to our intentions of service and underscores the existence of a gap between military and society.

### Is there a Gap?

Spotlighting the civil-military gap is an October 2011 Pew Poll that found 44% of post 9/11 veterans had difficulty transitioning to civilian life. Additionally, the poll revealed that 84% of veterans believe that society does not understand the struggles of military life, and 71%

of society agrees with that perspective. These polls and the disparity highlighted are important because it accentuates the uncoupling between the military establishment and the general public understanding of one another.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the number of veterans in society has dropped dramatically over the years exposing fewer families to the military establishment. World War II and Korean veterans are passing daily. Couple this with base closures due to downsizing, and less people are likely to know someone serving on active or reserve duty thus missing an opportunity to gain insight into military service. The United States continues to rely on this small proportion of society (the military) to fight its wars.<sup>28</sup> According to a 2010 report, only 1% of society currently serves in the military, a miniscule proportion that may not reflect the true diversity of the nation.<sup>29</sup> As the military continues at the forefront of engagements worldwide, it is apparent combat services are essential to strategic objectives. Alexander Hamilton addressed a concern for a gap as the military becomes a staple of government requirements by saying, “The continual necessity for their services enhances the importance of the soldier, and proportionably degrades the condition of the citizen. The military becomes elevated above the civil.”<sup>30</sup>

A recent blog by a young, and admittedly liberal college student at Colorado State University, was tired of seeing military discounts offered everywhere she went, and felt that the definition of “service” could be extended to a multitude of professional that are not in the military such as policemen, firemen, doctors, nurses, teachers etc. She believed that by handing out discounts or special privileges, stores were defining what service to the country meant and placed the military above all others. Part of her concern is the fact that the military is a volunteer force and while inherently risky, many other professions also share similar risk but are not rewarded. This blog highlights how well-meaning patriotism can be perceived as preferential and create a disrelished outlook on the military.<sup>31</sup> While it is likely that society is well-meaning

and wants to support its military, and appreciates the sacrifices, it becomes toxic when society begins to question the integrity of the military. Why is this important? It is all a matter of perspective, and although her beliefs may differ from what the majority of the public may feel (her blog received many angry comments), if the services exhibit a culture of entitlement, it can only widen the gap and exasperate the situation and create an “us versus them” dilemma. Bacevich writes that it has become an immoral action to not support the troops, and it has become compulsory for the public to show reverence to the military.<sup>32</sup>

How soon does the gap occur? Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Thomas E. Ricks tracked a platoon of Marine Corps recruits through their transformation into Marines and observed their experiences returning home following boot camp. He noted that the newly graduated Marines had difficulty relating to friends and family members and they were unable to explain the military metamorphosis that had occurred in their lives. Ricks described how these new Marines, “seemed to experience a moment of private loathing for public America. They were repulsed by the physical unfitness of civilians, by the uncouth behavior they witnessed, and by what they saw as pervasive selfishness and consumerism.”<sup>33</sup> The gap tends to widen in the interwar years and as we draw down in Afghanistan, the military will be facing dramatic cuts. When during war time the military is properly funded and manned accordingly to win the nations battles, there is little bickering between the military and civilian leaders--it is when those funds evaporate and troop reductions begin again, that there is potential for increased distances or gaps at the leadership levels.<sup>34</sup> The nation will expect such cuts to redirect funds back to issues faced inside our borders, and still expect our military to ensure we maintain a force capable of maintaining security of the nation.

There are other differences in the military that may increase the gap. Decreases in morale and increases in disciplinary problems are a trend of behavior that typically follows the end of wars such as may be the case with Iraq being over and Afghanistan in the process of completion, which the Marine Corps will face in the very near future.<sup>35</sup> This type of dormant but anticipated behavior will require leadership at all levels to maintain high standards ethical conduct and continue the warfighter mindset for a possible plethora of world events in which they may be employed, often times in short order. The time to address culture of entitlement is now.

Fortunately, the media has remained ideally balanced towards the military for the last 10 years, although as John Swomley, author and professor of Christian social ethics put it, “More often a whole series of techniques are used to present the military line to the people, techniques which are rarely discussed in print because a newspaperman who does may find it difficult in the future to get certain breaks from military public relations.”<sup>36</sup> The military certainly does not need to create negative stories of such magnitude where generals are being relieved for misconduct due to a culture of entitlement, jeopardizing public opinion. Furthermore, the Defense Science Board (DSB) Task Force, responsible for making recommendations towards the transformation of military to meet future national security requirements, included in their report on Human Resources Strategy the importance of governmental leadership connecting with the American people. The report highlighted how important public service (not entitlement) is to supporting national security. Military leadership that performs poorly or unethically exasperates the gap reducing the military’s ability to relate to society. This is yet another example of how a culture of entitlement resulting in ethical lapses derails the goals of the Department of Defense.<sup>37</sup>

## RESOURCE

### Recruiting and Public Opinion

If the military is perceived to be a culture of entitlement among those serving, it could have drastic impact to recruiting efforts. The long term repercussions of a culture of entitlement can have detrimental effects to public perceptions and the support society desires to impart on its military. Lieutenant General Helmly stated, “Manning the forces, from my perspective, is the most critical issue facing both the active and reserve components.”<sup>38</sup> Public opinion of the military does matters, if the services wish to recruit successfully. When confidence in the military remains at a high level such as is enjoyed now, the ability to recruit and retain is dramatically increased, even in times of austerity. Reduction in enlistment incentives will necessitate that the military rely on public support and motivation to join based on high-principled motivation to self-improvement based on benefits of military service. If we were to lose the trust and confidence of the people it could have significant adverse impact to recruiting efforts. The DSB Task Force in their February 2000 report stated, “A critical element in recruiting is public perception of and public attitudes toward the military and public service”. The report is concerned about the gap or the public’s “lack of awareness” as to the mission of the military and other Department of Defense organizations.<sup>39</sup>

Additional recommendations by the DSB discussed a holistic approach to communicate not just with potential recruits, but also to external influences such as parents, teachers, coaches, etc. By positioning an underlying theme of patriotism and the benefits of service to country, it would underscore a higher calling as opposed to the traditional calling cards of educational benefits or adventure as several advertisements have proliferated.<sup>40</sup> Weaning service members

off the entitlement addiction can take time. Of particular importance to the topic of this paper was the need to address the “integrity of leadership.” It is imperative that commanders up and down the chain exhibited the highest standards of ethics at all times and this must be emphasized, as it has direct correlation to the future health of human resources (i.e. recruiting).<sup>41</sup>

### Character of Resources

A culture of entitlement may be present in today’s society from which the services draw upon for sourcing of the ranks, and this culture can be magnified once becoming a Marine—as the Ricks article pointed out. While this “culture of entitlement” has many meanings within society, it has been specifically defined for the purpose of this paper. Surprisingly, the definition of entitlement sounds remarkably like narcissism. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV* outlines the symptoms of this “personality disorder” as, “a pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and sense of entitlement. Often individuals feel overly important and will exaggerate achievements and will accept, and often demand, praise and admiration despite worthy achievements.” The manual goes on to state, “There is a sense of entitlement, of being more deserving than others based solely on their superiority.”<sup>42</sup> . Of course while the diagnosis of an actual “personality disorder” must meet certain additional criteria, the general narcissistic behaviors seen in society today may be contributors to a culture of entitlement in the military once recruited. This is not to say that the military is more narcissistic than society, but that narcissism existing in society today can be exasperated through joining military service thus elevating an already high level of narcissism.

So is narcissism bad? According to Doctors Jean Twenge and Keith Campbell, authors of “Living in the Age of Entitlement: The Narcissism Epidemic”, American culture encourages

self-admiration with the belief that it will improve our lives. Admiring yourself feels good and makes you happy. If you believe in yourself, you are more likely to keep trying even when you don't succeed the first time. Self-respect is no longer restricted to the privileged few, "you can feel good about yourself no matter what your race, sex, or sexual orientation is."<sup>43</sup> Twenge and Campbell describe that this is bad in that it can be damaging when society feels so competitive and inferior that they focus on artificial conditions to make themselves more competitive--such as bigger houses, faster cars, improving their looks, or cheating to get ahead.<sup>44</sup>

This negative aspect contradicts the qualitative character ideals the military looks for in its members. Apply this nugatory connotation to military behavior and this may manifest itself in Marines by focusing on one aspect of the total-Marine concept such as physical fitness while sacrificing proficiency and leadership, or perhaps being so technically proficient and hoarding of the knowledge from other Marines to make oneself maintain power or importance--while ignoring physical fitness, leadership, and education/PME. The example listed above employs "artificial" conditions that capitalize on one skill (exaggerating achievements for self-admiration) while ignoring other important key components that are desired characteristics of a well-rounded leader. Retired Army Lieutenant Colonel Joe Doty, Ph.D., and Master Sergeant Jeff Fenlason, U.S. Army in *Narcissism and Toxic Leaders*, describe the focus of narcissistic leadership as, "consciously or unconsciously, is on themselves, their success, their career, and their ego."<sup>45</sup>

How prevalent is narcissism? Surveys of college students such as the American Freshman Survey are reportedly discovering narcissistic trends within the Millennial Generation, otherwise known as Generation Y. The report from the Higher Education Research Institute of UCLA, *The American Freshman: Forty Year Trends*, states that while there may be a trend in

growth of self-confidence, it has been trending that direction since the mid-1980s and downplays the generation as being narcissistic.<sup>46</sup> Dr. Morley Winograd, senior fellow at the USC Annenberg Center for Communication Leadership and Policy disagrees with the Millennial Generation being too narcissistic and compares this generation with The Greatest Generation as he draws parallels in timelines of global conflict—the Millennial Generation and Iraq/Afghanistan and the GI Generation during World War II—as well as similar economic conditions (although not to the same extent- recession).<sup>47</sup> Specifically he disagrees with the narcissism critique of the Millennial Generation and believes that this unique generation acts to, “support racial and ethnic equality and inclusion, and look for win-win solutions that advance the welfare of everyone, whether it’s their friends or all of society.”<sup>48</sup> These characteristics are desirable in Marine leaders and can be seen as a key force multiplier in recruiting. This equates to positive aspects of narcissism that if understood, can be made useful.

There are many unique technology characteristics of this generation that have served as enablers for narcissistic behavior such as Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook that must be considered towards identifying behavior markers. When discussing Facebook and narcissistic behavior Twenge highlights conduct such as bragging about ones accomplishments through photos and words, showcasing how incredibly successful one is, self-promotion, a higher number of friends than everyone else, as being narcissistic behavior, even if it’s just a charade. Self-absorption and vanity as well as exhibitionism can present itself on this platform. Facebook also allows people to connect and follow each other with some obsession towards other narcissistic friends as well.<sup>49</sup> These media outlets of self-expression can help to understand current generation motivations.

In a culture of entitlement, entitled people also lack empathy, a critical leadership tool, as entitlement behavior degrades the desire to show respect for other people. The person displaying entitlement conduct believes his or her needs are more important than others.<sup>50</sup> This type of behavior contradicts the leadership traits and principles expected and demanded from military leaders. Winograd however, argues that the Millennial Generation is a civic generation, one that is looking to contribute to society, to volunteer, to be optimistic. This may be translated to a desire to serve their country, which for military institutions can be an important part of their character to revere and improve the force.<sup>51</sup> There may be a way to harness these self-confident or narcissistic traits to the benefit of the services. The key takeaway is that narcissism exists in society, can be intensified through military service, and become a problematic leadership challenge if unprepared for and not directed in a positive way.

## THE WAY AHEAD

So how does the leadership of the Marine Corps examine the culture of entitlement phenomena, compensate for any adverse implications, understand narcissism, and then harness the capabilities of the Millennial Generation? The comprehensive approach required to maximize the potential outcome has three applicable mechanisms for application. The first is to understand the contributing factors and existing narcissistic/culture of entitlement traits in society and determine how they may express themselves in the force. The second is reviewing and revising leadership publications and the Marine Corps Values Program. The third is through changes in Professional Military Education (PME) to identify leadership pitfalls and reinforce values over the course of a Marine's career (no matter what the rank), these important principals.

## Understanding

The Wilhelm Study of 2006 frames understanding well, “There is an old adage that, if you have not written about a subject you have not truly thought about it.”<sup>52</sup> As discussed, there are important aspects of the current military relationship with society and culture of entitlement, and the gap is one of those aspects. As an all-volunteer force, the military has created a true profession with some unexpected consequences; it has arguably distanced itself from society and walled off a culture all its own. By taking a closer look at the development of this occurrence and evaluating why or why not it is productive, it can help shape future planning and force evaluation to better anticipate foreseeable hurdles. The Corps should take a renewed interest in understanding its relationships with civilian leadership and society and conduct constructive evaluations of progress or setbacks as a result of the evolution of the force. There is little in the way of recent military literature that considers all the potential pitfalls and advantages of the professionalization of the military and the civil-military gap. Conceivably, taking an analytical examination of recent high-level leadership concerns in this regard via interviews and written documentation would assist in discovering trends to be addressed. Those that have served during the changes to the all-volunteer force may have unique insight and experiences from which to draw viable conclusions and solutions.

Kevin M. Gilmartin, Ph.D., a behavioral sciences and management consultant studies Ethics Based Policing for law enforcement agencies and has had applicable experience with culture of entitlement within the police officer corps. He recommends a comprehensive review of the circumstances and tendencies surrounding ethical violations to determine what conditions influence a person to intentionally violate value standards. In his research, he determined

common traits leading to ethical lapses, the first being culture of entitlement. When a Marine feels owed something for the protection he or she provides to society (i.e. fighting the war on terror), there may be instances where a Marine feels the rules don't apply to him or her. Gratuities was a second trait identified (bonuses, tips, compensation, donations).<sup>53</sup> Generous expressions of such gratuities from a well-meaning society can entice Marines to skew value-based decisions. Sergeant David Budwah, a multi-channel radio operator and active duty Marine that once worked for me abused gratuities of well-meaning organizations in this way, "Prosecutors say Budwah wore unauthorized medals and accepted invitations to rock concerts, major-league baseball games, banquets and other events meant to fete wounded warriors." He utilized his status as a Marine to lie about post-traumatic stress disorder as well as combat awards and deceived Wounded Warriors for unwarranted gratuities. He was later prosecuted and discharged after attending many sponsored events to include lecturing to children and receipt of free merchandise.<sup>54</sup>

Dr. Gilmartin also describes a slow decline in moral values as one tries to explain away or justify minor infractions. He additionally states that violations, "span the rank structure" and that hypocritical leaders operate under a double-standard by correcting or enforcing regulations below them while violating standards at in their own actions.<sup>55</sup> Doty and Fenlason suggest that by accepting narcissistic behaviors from leadership, it establishes a new and lower standard that becomes the agreed upon benchmark. This lower standard that then becomes the norm becomes a self-defeating cycle that translates to operational deficiency.<sup>56</sup>

Lastly, examining the generational changes that have and are occurring to include technological, social, economic, and cultural, in order to properly gauge repercussions and

determine if there are important clues to draw from. This can be done perhaps via revised research studies with applicable questionnaires that collect data on current societal influences and how young potential enlistees form opinions on these subjects. Current Joint Advertising Market Research & Studies (JAMRS) reports focus on youth propensity to join the military based on current events and economic indicators, but fail to address any type of psychological profile to be examined—only how likely they are to join the military.<sup>57</sup> Understanding and putting into context the existing forms of narcissism or culture of entitlement in society, and differentiating and applying the correct meanings are important to determine adverse effects. Marine leaders should examine these denouements to proactively anticipate where improvements can be made and adaptations applied beginning with recruitment. Military schools, as will be discussed later, are the appropriate venue for these discussions. The anticipated adaptations do not mean putting aside our current ideals to attempt and become like society. That approach does not play to the values of military service. The Army had an unsuccessful attempt at an almost narcissistic motto that did not bode well with society or the military alike when it advertised, “Army of One”.<sup>58</sup>

### Principles and Value Maintenance

The Marine Corps in particular has always relied on its almost mythical persona in society as the uncompromising warrior, who takes the road less travelled looking for excitement and challenge, for use as a recruitment advantage. This is an excellent and well deserved approach, but it can easily be dismantled if the Corps were to become gambit to those that feel deserving of certain privileges due to the military service. Pride of service is amicable, while condescending attitudes of entitlement are not. Recruiting will suffer and the Corps could

experience a contagion effect with an opportunistic cultural anomaly that takes root in a time when the Corps is most susceptible - at the end of a protracted war. Complacency and boredom may encourage those that are exposed to temptation to lose their footing and succumb to a culture of entitlement, taking advantage of a well-meaning society. When it occurs at higher levels of command it means no one is impervious to its effects. This is an important message to educate to new recruits beginning in recruit training and reinforced during their service to ensure Marines stay on track with the correct focus.

The Marine Corps principles or Core Values of Honor, Courage and Commitment must be upheld, and more importantly maintained throughout the span of a career. Dr. Gilmartin emphasizes that no matter how stringent the pre-screening or selection process may be (i.e. recruiting and boot camp) it is the lack in maintenance of leadership values that proves a contributing factor to ethical breaches. He recommends enforcing a culture of accountability that is fostered at the individual level and reinforced by the organization. Through self-reflection, relevant discussions, and assessments of a Marines Corp Values against the command climate and organizational culture, the Marine Corps can help identify if situations are ripe for “situational suspension of core values”. Lastly, he states that it is dangerous to assume that a person’s ethics or values remain unchanging from the time of entrance into service or from indoctrination and reemphasizes the importance this maintenance. By doing this it acknowledges that challenges exist at all levels and tenure of leadership and must be nurtured.<sup>59</sup>

The Marine Corps Values Program published in 1996 and MCRP 6-11B W/CH 1: Marine Corps Values: A User’s Guide for Discussion Leaders published in 1998, have relevant material that can be reinvigorated and updated to reflect recent trends in ethical instruction. Last year, the

Marine Corps conducted an ethical stand down covering the role of command leadership and explanation of ethical challenges, albeit a reactive move. This process generated a plan of instruction for implementation throughout the Marine Corps. This POI as well as additional leadership challenges, to include culture of entitlement, can be incorporated in an updated version of MCWP/MCRP or another useful form to provide awareness and tools to overcome ethical transgressions. MCWP 6-11 Leading Marines has not been updated since 2002. It is important to remain proactive rather than reactive when possible to prevent detrimental effects of unethical decisions. The Army has already updated ADP 6-22, Army Leadership as of August 2012 and was given renewed expectations by General Odierno. Although not as comprehensive as the 2006 version, it updates definitions and expectations to remain relevant.

Corps Values and leadership has always been a pragmatic solution to potential problems; these values have a history of being successfully applied over generations and are enduring qualities that have enabled the Marine Corps to remain a premier fighting force as well as a highly professional and respected entity of the military establishment. These values are grounding attributes that can deter entitlement and must remain at the forefront of everything we do. We must, “truly be Old Corps. In other ways, though, they must represent a New Breed. So it has always been and must always be.”<sup>60</sup>

### Professional Military Education

The U.S. Marine Corps Officer Professional Military Education 2006 Study and Findings acknowledges the changing environment globally that Marine Corps officers must be prepared to confront including, “political, economic, technological, social, and military change.”<sup>61</sup> This approach is applicable internally as well so that we understand these changes in surroundings at

home, both civilian and military and adapt or update leadership training to reflect the changing landscape. The study specifically highlights behavioral importance when it states, “The strength of the officer corps rests on its moral and ethical values”.<sup>62</sup> This underlines the importance of resisting entitlement regardless of how strong the seduction to do otherwise if a leader finds him or herself in a compromising situation that could be potentially contradictory to these values.

As discussed earlier, Corps Values must be maintained and can be reiterated at PME schools to ensure perseverance of ethical values. Doty and Finlason state, “...to address the challenge of toxicity and narcissism in the ranks, our leader development schools and programs may need to focus more on skills that help leaders focus on themselves and their leadership styles.”<sup>63</sup> They also highlight the importance of emotional intelligence—the ability to manage “self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill”.<sup>64</sup> Gilmartin emphasizes the challenges young police officers face when confronted with peer groups that rely on camaraderie in order to survive—a daunting experience upon arrival at a new post that can test established values of the individual. He states, “loyalty becomes more important than integrity”.<sup>65</sup> This has been a historical trend in the Marine Corps with Tail Hook, blood wings, blood stripes, and other inappropriate indoctrinations of the past that have pitted loyalty and integrity against one another with undesirable results.

There are areas regarding the study of changes that could be improved via the PME curriculum. One particular area is the study civil-military gap and the role of the military professional as previously discussed in addition to the generational evolutions over time. To continue to be effective it is essential to remain ahead of developing trends to shorten the bridge

between changes. The HASC PME Report states, “The balancing of enduring PME requirements with emerging needs presents continual challenges. The schools’ curricula have adapted at differing, but generally appropriate, paces. However, these developments appear to have been in reaction to changing demands rather than in anticipation of them.”<sup>66</sup> Anticipation is the solution to this difficulty, to take the initiative and quell reactivity. The HASC report goes on to say, “The principal purpose of PME is to educate officers throughout their careers in preparation for this unique public trust.”<sup>67</sup> Trust is a valued belief that society deserves in its military. By evaluating and providing critical thought via symposiums or think tanks and discovering new influencers on behavior in today’s as well as potential future environments, leadership programs can be overhauled without major disruption to key competencies of current PME curriculum, and implemented smoothly while enhancing leadership. Supplement this with the mentoring program, and values will be imprinted and retained for the duration of a career.

## **Conclusion**

The Marine Corps, through understanding of narcissistic tendencies of the millennial generation and society, adherence to Marine Corps Values maintenance, and proactive professional military education, can overcome the challenges of recruiting and retaining Marines without breeding or exasperating a culture of entitlement. Mapping a historical perspective and referencing key events that have shaped the current military landscape helps clarify what makes the Marine Corps different today. The dialogue regarding culture of entitlement in contemporary society or the military is important and needs to be addressed to help mitigate unfavorable conditions. Understanding the evolution of the all-volunteer force, the civil-military gap, and the characteristics of society helps to identify how this culture has matured. Through understanding

and analysis of these influences, coupled with a rededication to core values, and open dialogue towards learning at professional military schools, the Marine Corps can shape the future to ensure ethics and integrity are not compromised.

## End Notes

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<sup>7</sup> Peter D. Feaver, ed., *Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil Military Gap and American National Security* (Massachusetts, MIT Press, 2001), 96.

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<sup>9</sup> Bernard Rostker, 61-66.

<sup>10</sup> Bernard Rostker, 61-66.

<sup>11</sup> Bernard Rostker, 83.

<sup>12</sup> Bernard Rostker, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Bernard Rostker, 157-158.

<sup>14</sup> Barbara A Bicksler, ed., *The All-Volunteer Force: Thirty Years of Service* (Washington D.C., Brassey's Inc., 2004), 62-63.

<sup>15</sup> Barbara A Bicksler, ed., 64.

<sup>16</sup> NBC, *Delta Does and About Face on Soldier Baggage Fees*, Transcript.

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