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Unconscious Bias in United States Marine Corps Leadership Doctrine: Examining Microaggressions Through Document Analysis

Patrick Butler

Unconscious Bias in United States Marine Corps Leadership Doctrine:

Examining Microaggressions Through Document Analysis

by

Patrick James Butler

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Dissertation Committee

Committee Chair, Dr. Hans Schmitz, PhD

Committee Member, Dr. Robert Donmoyer, PhD

Committee Member, Dr. Antonio Jimenez-Luque, PhD

University of San Diego

University of San Diego
School of Leadership and Education Sciences

CANDIDATE'S NAME: Patrick James Butler

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APPROVAL:

_____,

Dr. Hans Schmitz, PhD

_____,

Dr. Robert Donmoyer, PhD

_____,

Dr. Antonio Jiménez-Luque, PhD

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation employed a document analysis format to examine Marine Corps leadership education doctrine for microaggressions. The United States Marine Corps (Marine Corps or USMC) is the military service with the least diverse officer cadre in terms of sex, gender identity, and race. The study results show a pattern of repeating unconscious bias-related content within the Marine Corps' documents. Such patterns can negatively affect minority members in terms of their health, acceptance, and performance within the organization. The results also document an overriding bias-culture which puts Marine Corps leadership in a dilemma of trying to encourage conformity to traditional organizational cultural identity while embracing a new future of a more diverse and flexible workforce. This "Conformity/Diversity Conflict Dilemma (CDCD)" is likely to also exist in other organizational contexts.

CDCD, Macro Context: The Marine Corps' warfighting philosophy endorses *Maneuver Warfare* which relies upon a decentralized command structure with subordinates free to act under guidance given by a Commander's Intent mission statement. Subordinates require implicit understanding of the commander's intent statement to ensure unity of effort, but because the Marine Corps is also now encouraging diversity of thought and the recruiting and retaining of a more diverse workforce, the likelihood that implicit understanding of a commander's intent is achievable decreases under the current leadership paradigm.

CDCD, Micro Findings: Five of twelve microaggression-related themes appear more often in the publications: colorblindness racism, denial of individual bias, bias against non-male gender and non-traditional gender expression, sustaining

inequality with a myth of meritocracy, and pathologizing dominant historical white male cultural values in the name of organizational harmony. The themes are present in both words and by omission when authors deny diversity by using a one-size-fits-all approach to culture-building.

Recommendations: The USMC should update publications to reflect a way of writing Commander's Intent and using decentralized leadership which harnesses diversity of thought, communications styles, and ways of cultural knowledge rather than encouraging conformity to a singular mindset to achieve success. The publications should remove biased language including bias by omission or negation. Education efforts focused on eliminating unconscious bias and microaggressions must continue and become normalized.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work first to my parents, who taught me a love for the Marine Corps and the Marine Corps community. Second, I dedicate this work to all Marines past, present, and future. I hope that this research will help me give back to the Marine Corps, an organization that gave me and my family so much throughout my life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FOREWORD/AUTHOR'S NOTE

As the child of Marine parents and a Marine veteran leader of over 20 years of service, I want to give back to the military service which has had such a positive impact on my life. This dissertation continues my years-long attempt to find, catalog, and counter unconscious bias within the United States Marine Corps. And despite what I felt like was a successful career and an overwhelmingly additive lifestyle being a Marine and leader of Marines, my studies in the Adult Education and Leadership fields showed me that there is room for improvement.

Embarking upon this work presents something of a philosophical dilemma for me. As Marines, we are always taught (and generally agree) to have extreme organizational pride, some of which is certainly warranted given our long history of battlefield success, the individual sacrifice it takes a person to earn the title "Marine," and the stellar quality of our fellow Americans with whom we serve on a daily basis. Some of our institutional pride is also protective and strategic in nature; beyond simply building *esprit de corps;* the inherent "us versus them" mentality that often sets the Marine Corps apart from the other services is a reaction to the needs of Marine Corps leadership to constantly justify our existence both to the United States public and our own lawmakers, who have at various times questioned and actively tried to eliminate our existence. This consistent fight for survival as a military service can manifest in several ways, but one is an almost pathological justification within our members to put the needs of the Marine Corps above the needs of the individual Marine, and to put the needs of our fellow Marines above those of our own. This ingrained selflessness is ideal to building a healthy and respectful organizational climate in many respects, but can also lead to an atmosphere where

Marines who do not share these same values and conform to the existing culture, whether simply due to their not feeling included in the organization or due to prejudice and bias against them, can be ostracized and limited from promotion, retention, and meritorious recognition efforts.

This research will be an excellent way for me to use the education and context provided by the University of San Diego in a way which can maximize benefits for Marine leaders while both addressing an unstudied area of social justice and bias reduction and adding to the overall social justice movement within this country. However, I must also acknowledge that the Marine Corps influenced my life in ways which have perspective-altering effects on my research lens.

From a positive perspective, my in-group positionality makes me an ideal researcher in terms of access, credibility, and familiarity with the subject matter. Marines are much more likely to listen to a critic who understands the system from firsthand knowledge and whom they assume has the best interests of the overall Marine Corps at heart. From a negative perspective, my overall positive experience associated with the service and its members can also make my ability to assume a critical researcher viewpoint more difficult. I must ensure that my desire to help the Marine Corps does not morph into an attitude that prevents the critical realist perspective which I espouse. Similarly, because I am a white, heterosexual male, I resemble most leaders in the Marine Corps (DOD, 2020a; Reynolds & Shendruk, 2020;) and therefore may be inadequate or ill-suited to recognize microaggressions and offer a sufficiently critical approach to the existing USMC leadership paradigm. I have tried to mitigate these and any other potential positionality-based drawbacks which arise via transparency of my methods,

continued candor of opinion and dealing plainly with any potential author bias and citing

relevant examples which link bias reduction and improved military performance

whenever possible throughout my work.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AETC   Air Education and Training Command

CDCD   Conformity/Diversity Conflict Dilemma

CGT   Constructivist Grounded Theory

CMC   Commandant of the Marine Corps

CPG   Commandant's Planning Guidance

CPRP   Commandant's Professional Reading Program

DoD   Department of Defense

LGBTQIA+   Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual

MCDP   Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication

MCM   Marine Corps Manual

MCO   Marine Corps Order

MCTP   Marine Corps Tactical Publications

MCWP   Marine Corps Warfighting Publication

M&RA   Manpower and Reserve Affairs

MRP   Microaggression Research Program

PES   Performance Evaluation System

PP   Protocol Pattern

U.S.   United States of America

USMC   United States Marine Corps

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The United States' military is an all-volunteer force drawn from across United

States society. While enlisted military personnel populations in the services closely

mirror U.S. racial demographics writ large, the Officer leadership of all the military

services, especially in the highest ranks of General and Admiral, skews toward the white

male demographic (DoD, 2020a; Reynolds, G. & Shendruk, A., 2020). Similarly, female

and female-identifying individuals, especially in officer leadership positions, have less

representation in all ranks in all services compared to the U.S. populace with membership

dropping to as low as eight percent of the total officer population in the case of the

USMC (Reynolds & Shendruk, 2020). Considering the dominance of white and male

leadership, the United States military culture is increasingly at odds with a diverse

society. Thus, in cases where the U.S. military demographics skew from the overall

country towards a whiter and more male-identifying population, the likelihood for bias in

the culture created by the individuals who join the military would theoretically also

increase (Sue, 2010a).

The Key Role of Leadership Documents

Under the direction of a white and male dominated leadership, the United States

Marine Corps (USMC or Marine Corps) produces leadership development documents

which both define leadership culture and recommend methods for leaders to relate to and

motivate their followers. These capstone documents serve as representative examples of

how the Marine Corps communicates its unique ideals and mission accomplishment

styles. The documents are typically composed and edited by groups of servicemembers

drawn equally from diverse groups representative of the total population, but final validation and approval rests with the senior leadership of the respective military service. As such, the documents' composition style and verbiage reflect the leadership environment and culture as endorsed by the disproportionately white and male senior leaders (Scandura, 2019) and should be scrutinized for biased language in the form of *microaggressions*.

Microaggressions

First named by Harvard University psychologist Chester Pierce in 1970 and later expanded upon by Columbia University professor Derald Sue and others, microaggressions are brief and commonplace verbal or non-verbal indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory, and/or negative slights (Pierce, et al., 1978; Sue 2020). Often committed unintentionally and unnoticed by the offending party, microaggressions permeate U.S. society and serve to reinforce unconscious bias and prejudice present in the white male-dominated culture of the United States of America (Sue, et al., 2007). Existing in both attitudes and behaviors, microaggressions manifest themselves in everyday human interactions in numerous ways and, if left unchecked, can lead to discrimination and bias which undermines both the legitimacy of racial, ethnic and gender minorities and organizations' efforts to embrace diversity and equal opportunity (Sue & Spanierman, 2020).

Unconscious bias that takes the form of the written word could be difficult to study and reliably assess without a structure which eases characterization and categorization. As this thesis will explain, microaggressions research offers a framework of 12 bias *themes* with accompanying definitions that when used as a tool of analysis in a

given context such as homologous body of literature may be able aid in the identification of biased language and help to find larger trends in an organization's publication library.

Study Overview and Results

To examine the scope and nature of bias in Marine Corps leadership doctrine, this dissertation took a closer look at the incidence and nature of microaggressions within Marine Corps' documents to find ways USMC leaders can reduce unconscious bias in leadership doctrine, policies, and artifacts. I tried to answer two research questions: 1) What types of unconscious bias are most common in United States Marine Corps Leadership writing? 2) What theory explains the unconscious bias pattern(s) in United States Marine Corps leadership writing?

The coding results suggest repeating unconscious bias-related trends in the form of microaggressions within the Marine Corps' documents at the potential cost of minority members in terms of health, acceptance, and performance within the organization. Results in a macro level analysis of bias themes show microaggression trends of gender and gender identity discrimination, denial of racism and sexism, and a pathology of reinforcing the status quo culture at the expense of diversity initiatives. Microanalysis shows that of the 12 themes, five repeat more often among the documents and that each document has areas to address in creating a better organizational leadership development The macro and micro analyses combine to demonstrate an overarching leadership doctrine culture which puts Marine Corps leadership in a difficult dilemma of trying to encourage conformity to traditional organizational cultural identity while embracing a new future of a more diverse and flexible workforce. This is the "Conformity/Diversity

Conflict Dilemma," or "CDCD" and described on both a macro and micro level in the "findings" chapters.

Organization of the Thesis

In presenting my research answering these two questions I organized this dissertation as follows. First, due to the insular nature of the organization which I am studying and my in-group status potentially affecting both the objectivity and reception of any research results, I begin with a statement on my positionality. Next, a section on context describes the nature of studying prejudice in military settings and the importance of doctrine to USMC leadership development. In the context section, I also explain the literature and theory which underpins my research via a deeper discussion of microaggressions and the microaggressions research program. Third, I clarify the logic of both my research design and sampling techniques with a focus on the uniqueness of the USMC and its publications as a population. Fourth, I present my sample documents and the research methods I employed to examine my sample and the ways in which I recommend presenting research findings. Fifth, I answer research question one by presenting a holistic micro and macro summary of my research findings including a discussion of their potential contextual significance and clarify my research processes including lessons learned from the first-time employment of my novel methods. Lastly, I suggest a theory which answers research question two and then I supply recommendations for Marine Corps leadership and doctrine authors to aid in writing further iterations of leadership development related texts.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Two overall bodies of literature are crucial to understanding the study of microaggressions within literature as conducted by this study, 1) Marine Corps leadership doctrine and its context, and 2) the Microaggressions Research Program (MRP) and its application to this research. We will start with the Marine Corps. In the USMC, leadership development as it exists today is the product of more than 200 years of tradition combined with continual adaptation reflective of collective organizational experiences both in and out of combat. Explaining the historical development of Marine Corps leadership instructions is beyond the scope of this proposal but is something that I would explore in greater detail in a dissertation. Of relevance to my research context are the unique nature of the written documents used to convey Marine Corps leadership priorities by its leaders to their subordinates.

Marine Corps Leadership Documents

Not all USMC leadership texts are of equal importance. They vary from decades-old historical texts referenced as examples of desired leadership traits to ad hoc mass electronic communications sent from the senior leadership. From a literary/doctrinal perspective, the Marine Corps leadership culture centers around two types of documents. The first are formally tracked, service-wide publications which undergo periodic review and update. Second, commanders at all levels can issue strategic messaging in between update cycles of the doctrinal leadership documents, often in the form of electronic messages and/or letters to the organization which direct and clarify current focuses of effort in leadership culture creation.

In terms of the former category, the most relevant publications for this thesis are found in the "Doctrinal" and "Warfighting" series. Written as short books or manuscripts in a style intended to relate the topics in an approachable manner that reaches the widest possible audience, the publications form a complimentary body of literature meant to be understood in its entirety rather than as individual documents. The series begins with broad concepts and addresses more specific ideas as the series continues. The later, more specific publications tend to reference concepts found in earlier documents in the series making the earliest documents seminal in their effect on the entire body of literature. Also appearing in the category of formally tracked and periodically updated documents are "Marine Corps Orders," which are directives from Headquarters Marine Corps to all members of the USMC on specific subjects. While these Orders are typically administrative and/or too specific in nature to have significant relevance in terms of this study, specific orders direct the creation of leadership culture creation and explain how to evaluate the skills of leaders in terms of promotion and retention.

In terms of the latter category, strategic communication addresses specific, time-sensitive topics that the formally tracked and updated category of documents processes would otherwise take too long to address within normal revision timelines. These documents are typically shorter in length than doctrinal publications and often specific to the current senior leader(s) of the USMC who write the documents to reflect their policies and vision for the organization. Strategic messages serve as de facto mandates for establishing organizational policy and often become formalized within the tracked publications on subsequent update cycles, so they are relevant to study in this work.

Leadership Documents and Bias Reduction

The interplay of these two forms of communication (doctrine and strategic communication) has both positive and negative effects on the leadership environment. On the positive side, the documents are never static, and Marine Corps leadership can update and alter the message over time to reflect changes to culture and originate new leadership development priorities. Senior leadership can also address imminent interim leadership challenges using strategic communication, which research shows can have positive effects for combating microaggressions (McKenzie & Halstead, 2017), by rapidly distributing new policy to the entire military member population instead of waiting for doctrinal publication update cycles that are often years long. Additionally, the disparate publications are cohesive in nature, tend to reference each other, and present a unified, service-wide values-message about the importance of leadership development.

Unfortunately, the same elements which can make the publications positive—cohesion and flexibility— can also add negative aspects. A cohesive leadership strategy is ideal (Scandura, 2019), unless the cohesive strategy unintentionally marginalizes organizational members and induces bias. In cases where an entire organization relies upon strategic messaging and doctrine to define "good" or "normal" leadership and behavior, the presence of any microaggressions is magnified and easily spread throughout the entire population of documents. Equally as dangerous, the flexibility allowed commanders to use strategic messaging to influence their subordinates and change leadership cultures and/or goals development cultures allows space for individual personalities and priorities to potentially outweigh more inclusive messages established by the doctrine. Simply put, if a commander is an unconscious *microaggressor*, the effect can achieve normalization of biased behavior from the otherwise prejudice-free

doctrine because it will model the behavior for others to follow even if the publications suggest otherwise.

Power and Military Leadership Context

The topic of 'power' occupies a prominent place across academic disciplines. Scholars have tried to distinguish ways in which humans exercise power, including by controlling decision-making, clarifying the agenda for decision-making, or even influencing how others define their interests and goals (Lukes, 2005). In the context of microaggression research, Sue (2004) defines power as the ability to impose reality and beliefs upon others (p. 765). And although Sue was writing about the culture-leader connection writ large and did not specifically refer to military organizations such as the Marine Corps in his books, there is a logical connection between theory and reality. Simply put, if others must adjust to an individual's culture and the way of seeing and interpreting the world, that individual holds the power. And without active measures to prevent unconscious bias, that powerful individual's reality is likely to marginalize those who are different via unconscious, unrecognized microaggressions. In discussing environments where bias and microaggressions are more likely to occur, Sue (2010) speaks about power differential. The higher the power differential between individuals and/or cultures, the riper the environment for microaggressive actions.

The power to define reality is also the power to set normative behavior. By owning the power to define that which is normal, and punish those who are not, Commanders are legitimizing one culture and way of being over another (Schuman, 1995). In the case of the Marine Corps, which disproportionately skews towards white, heterosexual, male leaders, the "normal," (a.k.a. legitimized) culture the leadership

upholds will unconsciously reflect their white, male, and heterosexual identities to the detriment of inclusivity. Although limited in number, studies consistently show minority servicemembers suffer the negative effects of bias and prejudice from the white male-dominated culture of the United States military. Whether analyzing gender (Reis & Menezes, 2020), gender identity (Dimberg, 2020; Tucker, et al., 2019), sexual orientation (Livingston et al., 2019), race (Wallace, 2011), or alternative non-white cultures (Lara, 2015), minority members report widespread marginalization and difficulty adjusting to the white and male dominated leadership environment. The effects of the marginalization can manifest in varying levels of severity, from the arguably benign including reduced retention rates(Daniel et al., 2019) and lower job satisfaction (Ivey, 2018; Lara, 2015; Wallace, 2011), to more moderate including heightened emotional distress and depression (Dimberg, 2020; Elrod 2019), and finally to the potentially catastrophic with increased incidents of suicidal thoughts and actions (Tucker et al., 2019).

Yet despite the warning signs and consequences of unchecked bias, there is room for growth in existing military unconscious bias and microaggressions research. Despite DoD and USMC leaders seeking to increase their understanding of unconscious bias (USMC, 2019b; DoD 2020, Ottingen & Woodworth, 2021; USMC, 2021a) and spread microaggressions knowledge in other US military Services military services outside the USMC (AETC, 2020), mandatory USMC microaggressions education is still in its infancy and only recently achieving organization-wide recognition (USMC, 2021b). A better understanding by military leadership of the microaggression phenomenon in its context requires examining the role culture-defining artifacts such as doctrine and

institutional-wide leadership development texts play in sustaining marginalization. This
is especially true of the Marine Corps, whose leadership documents outwardly embrace
unity and have messages equal opportunity and an unbiased atmosphere (USMC, 2018a;
2018b; 2019a; 2019b; 2021a) but which researchers have not examined for
microaggressions which may undermine the documents' inclusionary intentions.

Dispersed Leadership and the USMC

In the United States Marine Corps context, the exercise of power has doctrinal
underpinnings in the publications *MCDP 1 Warfighting* and *MCDP 6 Command and
Control* (USMC, 1996; USMC, 2018c). These publications describe a methodological
approach to the exercise of authority, both positional and personal, in the conduct of
USMC leadership which tries to minimize prescriptive micromanagement in favor of
trusting individual subordinates to exercise the intent of the Commander. Analogous to
Dispersed Leadership described by Bryman (1996), this style resists centralized control
and decision making and trusts subordinates to self-direct their efforts based upon the
existing local situation to conduct the mission. Commanders publish a *Commander's
Intent* (USMC, 2018c) in their orders to subordinates which gives loose guidelines trying
to free up subordinates to make decisions based upon their individual situations. In the
absence of centralized decision making, for guidance subordinate commanders and
leaders rely upon the *Commander's Intent*, existing doctrine, and organizational
publications such as those which this study will examine. While this dispersed style can
produce results in an organization, there is danger with regards to increasing
microaggressions and biased behavior if the publications and communications from the
commander have hidden messages of microaggressive discourse.

To drive home the connection between Sue's perspective and the military, consider the dangers of an environment where the requirement to adhere to the existing culture is both encouraged by the leadership, and *required by law*. Common in Marine Corps parlance is the idea of "Good Order and Discipline," which is a general and intentionally vague principle (Everett, 1958) which asserts that activities which counteract a state of "good order and discipline" in the opinion of the Marine Corps' commanders are punishable under United States military law (United States House of Representatives, 2017). Designed to allow commanders the flexibility to manage culture, the law subjects any action believed prejudicial to the prescribed culture to scrutiny and reprimand. This is potentially perilous. What if a minimally diverse leadership defines and supports the culture in question? Is there likely to be inherent bias against persons who are different from the leaders? And could the interpretation of what constitutes "good order and discipline" hold bias against the misunderstood actions and cultural expression of marginalized individuals? Studies such as those of Van Dijk, et al. (2012b) suggest that a culturally dominant majority who hold the power of evaluation and judgment over others are likely to reinforce the existing cultural status quo. "Because majority members tend to have more voice in creating performance standards, it is likely that the performance standards will be more considerate towards majority members than towards minority members" (p. 80). In response to the tendency towards domination by the majority to reinforce their cultural norms, robust and organization-wide efforts to encourage diversity of identity and thought are needed to ensure continued innovation, enhanced organizational performance, and promote equitable service by all members.

Recent U.S. military Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives

As a hopeful sign of good things to come, following the initial and seminal report produced by the Department of Defense (DoD) Board on Diversity and Inclusion (DoD, 2020b) which recommended wide-ranging changes to improve overall racial and ethnic equitable treatment, the entire Department of Defense has been directed to focus on equality and eliminating bias in all of its personnel management in unprecedented ways. The report, which takes a holistic look at the entire DoD does not specifically recommend strategies for the Marine Corps, was written by a board which consisted of a diverse membership from all the military services and when combined with the accompanying Secretary of Defense's memorandum directing action of the military Service commanders (Miller, 2020), is considered a prescriptive call to action for Marine Corps leadership.

Akin to their counterparts in the other U.S. military services, the Leadership of the United States Marine Corps increasingly invests in diversity policies and realizes the power of a diverse force drawn from across the United States population (Esper 2020; USMC, 2019b; USMC, 2021a). To the Marine Corps' credit, prior to the 2020 report, the Marine Corps had already begun implementing minimal unconscious bias training (DoD, 2020b). They similarly made recent efforts to reduce prejudice in their promotion processes by removing pictures from their selection boards (USMC, 2020c) and via strategic communication such as the most recent Commandant's Planning Guidance (USMC, 2019b) which mirrored the prior Secretary of Defense (Esper, 2020) by mentioning the need to counter unconscious bias. These are small steps on a much larger journey towards fair service by all, but with a renewed and focused emphasis on diversity (USMC, 2021a) in Force building and continuous leadership learning as essential to

battlefield success (USMC, 2020e) suggests that the Marine Corps will be receptive to this study.

Current and former Marine leaders also show a willingness to discuss the state of bias and prejudice in the Marine Corps (Woodbridge, 2021) and to change and improve the USMC diversity record both in professional military education settings (Dunn, 2020) and the Marine Corps as a whole (Ottingen & Woodworth, 2021). This spirit of improvement and dedication to improving the diversity outcomes climate stems from the Commandant's directives, and has been formalized by writing from stakeholders such as The Deputy Commandant for Manpower and Reserve Affairs (M&RA), and the Director, Manpower, Plans and Policy within M&RA, two of the primary individuals who are responsible for advising the Commandant on organization-wide manpower issues. These two leaders produced an excellent summary of the status of organizational diversity relative to the United States as a whole (Ottingen & Woodworth, 2021) which covered how current initiatives in recruiting and retention can shape future diversity efforts, and why maintaining diversity is an important factor in the Marine Corps' future battlefield success (Ottingen & Woodworth, 2021). This article offers a glimpse into the minds of the USMC leadership on diversity and inclusion and reading such sentiment from generals is a welcome change from decades past, but more can be done by USMC leadership including moving diversity discussions beyond binary gender terminology, normalizing candid discussions of unconscious bias, and recruiting and retaining diversity of gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, to help actively challenge the dominant culture and status quo. A deeper discussion of these topics and practical suggestions for improvement appear in subsequent chapters.

Microaggressions Research Program

Analyzing a set of documents for bias using a microaggressions framework requires an understanding of the growing field of microaggressions research. This understanding comes from acknowledging both the field's history and growing scope. Understanding how microaggressions research started and has continued to grow more diverse over time is crucial not only to contextualizing the Microaggression Research Program (MRP) in a larger critical consciousness but also to imagining new ways in which microaggressions research can continue in the future.

Because microaggressions derive from and change along with culture, viewing the MRP as a continuously evolving intellectual journey in the context of United States society from the early 1970s until now helps to better understand the current disposition of the field. Likewise, by applying a constructivist viewpoint to the history of microaggressions and the associated research literature, we can better conceive of why microaggression-related writing is a contentious field and often at odds with the psychological medical sciences which birthed it. Therefore, to understand the MRP, simply knowing its history is not enough. As we embark upon an abbreviated discussion of the evolution of the MRP, I ask that you consider not only the positionality of the authors discussed here, but also the cultural context of why and when the research was published.

MRP Research History

Understanding how microaggressions research started and has continued to grow more diverse over time is crucial not only to contextualizing the MRP in a larger critical

consciousness but also to imagining new ways in which microaggressions research can continue in the future. Born of the civil rights movements of the 1960s and derived from research examining systemic racism, the concept of microaggressions attempted to make sense of previously unstudied manifestations of unconscious racial bias (Pierce, et al., 1978). Grounded in and referencing both critical race theory of the 1970s (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998; Pierce et al., 1978) and institutionalized racism research (Jones, 1997), the first microaggressions work approached the problem primarily in terms of naming and combating race-based microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007). And though some traction was made in applying the MRP to work beyond race (Capodilupo et al. 2010, Sue, 2010b), the preponderance of efforts in the years leading up to and immediately following Sue et al.'s seminal 2007 work continued to revolve around race and ways to hone racial microaggression measurements using improved data gathering techniques (Torres-Harding et al., 2012; Wong et al., 2014). Likewise, because the MRP originated in academia and specifically within counseling psychology education, surveys of early research reveal the location of the first microaggressions studies were based among higher education respondents and in educational environments (Wong et al, 2014).

As the MRP has matured, the prevalence of research in academic settings and for psychological purposes has not abated (Ogunyemi et al., 2020), but the conceptualization and operationalization of microaggressions has spread to areas beyond race, psychotherapy, and academia. The broadening understanding allowed for the conception of harm done by microaggressions beyond race to encompass other forms of bias such as

sexism, anti-religious bias (Husain & Howard, 2017), genderism, heterosexism (Vaccaro & Koob, 2019), classism (Gray et al, 2018; Smith et al, 2016), ableism, and intersectional combinations thereof (Lewis & Neville, 2015, Nadal, et al., 2015). Of equal significance, the locations of studies moved outside higher education settings and found evidence of widespread microaggressions in specific fields like medicine (Freeman & Stewart, 2018), the U.S. military (Dimberg, 2020) and in general workplace environments (Gates, 2014; Kim et al., 2019). Expanding research contexts and locations to more diverse locations have the dual benefit of adding more notoriety to the idea of microaggressions as a research field and allowing access to a vastly increased pool of respondents and social interaction situations to examine.

MRP Definitions and Increasing Scope

At the time of their creation as a subject in the early 1970s and up until the mid 2000s, microaggressions were considered "put-downs" and "subtle insults usually directed unconsciously by white individuals at people of color" (Solórzano, et al., 2000; Nadal, 2013). After the publication of Sue, et al.'s 2007 seminal work, the working definition came to encompass a broader form of bias beyond a racial context to include "verbal and nonverbal interpersonal exchanges in which a perpetrator causes harm to a target, whether intended or unintended" (Sue, et al., 2007; Sue & Spanierman, 2020, p. 7.). This recasting of the problem proved pivotal as it both specifically named non-verbal interactions as candidates for microaggressions and removed the specific mention of whites and people of color. In conjunction with increasing the scope of

microaggressions and how they apply to psychological diagnoses of interpersonal harm, Sue et al. recommended the creation of a specific line of research to further examine and counter microaggressions in all human interaction. This new field became what is today known as the *Microaggressions Research Program, or "MRP*." The "MRP" refers specifically to the overall study of microaggressions including actions taken to define, counter, or expand upon their effects (Wong, et al., 2014). While referring to the MRP is acceptable when discussing the overall study of the phenomenon, defining individual microaggressions or their constituent themes simply by saying "MRP" is not. In such cases, it is more proper to use the standalone term "microaggression." See table 1 below for a summary of the expanding definition of the term "microaggression."

Table 1

Expanding Microaggression Definition Over Time

Author/ year	Substantive focus and shift	Definition
Chester Pierce, et al. 1978	Referring specifically to white Americans interacting with black Americans	"Subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges which are 'put-downs'"
Solórzano, et al. 2000	Retains focus on racism	"Subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously"
Sue, et al. 2007	Expands beyond focus on racism	"Verbal and nonverbal interpersonal exchanges in which a perpetrator causes harm to a target, whether intended or unintended. These brief and commonplace indignities communicate hostile, derogatory, and/or negative slights to the target"

Sue 2010	Retains 2007 definition, offers simpler overview, and adds caveats	"Brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership" "Can be linked to racism, sexism, genderism, heterosexism, classism, ableism, and other forms of oppression"

Evolving Taxonomy of Microaggressions

Efforts taken by researchers to improve upon the understanding of microaggression taxonomy is an important subset of the MRP literature. Also, for potential consumers of microaggression data, prior to fully understanding the MRP and gauging the quality of MRP-related research, deeper knowledge of microaggression taxonomy is important for context regarding MRP application to social justice causes and psychological trauma diagnosis. As a subjective experience and often individualized to the reality of the person(s) experiencing them, perceiving microaggression(s) depends upon the social context and the ever-evolving nature of American cultural bias. Thus, to both evaluate misdiagnosis of microaggression-related trauma in published research and/or mischaracterization of microaggressions by researchers, it is crucial to develop a basic and unified understanding of their definitions of MRP work.

Most current literature uses variations of Sue's (2007) definition of microaggressions. However, a fuller definition of microaggressions which eases research across multiple disciplines and bias categories runs deeper. Creating microaggression subcategories supplies the ability for thicker description and more precise wording when diagnosing and classifying trauma. Towards both these ends, one may think of

microaggressions in terms of *themes* and as separate from "macro" aggressions which are a subset of microaggressions MRP researchers removed from the umbrella "microaggression" term (Sue & Spanierman, 2020). Previously not explicitly differentiated from microaggressions as they relate to the MRP until Sue and Spanierman's update (2020), macroaggressions within the MRP are *institutional level microaggressions* stemming from policies, practices, and programs and "affect whole groups or classes of people because they are systemic in nature" (Sue & Spanierman, 2020, p. xiii). In a recent analysis of 20 years of MRP-related higher education research, Ogunyemi et al. (2020) found institutional-level aggressions in 27.5% of previously reported "micro" cases, implying there is a great deal of misunderstanding about the nature of microaggressions and bleed-over in microaggression identification within the context of the MRP.

Another issue to consider is that the term "micro" does *not* imply smaller or less important, but that the aggression falls within the context of interpersonal communications. Using a constructivist lens, keeping microaggressions in mind as a communication between two individuals with differing perspectives and contexts can help MRP readers to evaluate all research, education, contravention strategies, and critiques within the MRP with increased clarity. Because of the inherently subjective nature of how an individual can interpret a particular event, readers should view with skepticism any MRP research which tries to generalize findings to the macro-level outside of the research context or does not reference contextual subjectivity.

Microaggression Themes

To add further clarity toward recognizing distinct types of microaggressions, Sue and Capodilupo created 12 microaggression *themes* (2008). A brief definition of each appears in table 2, and their definitions continue to evolve over time (Sue & Spanierman, 2020). The *themes,* and the table in which they appear offer an element of precision and categorization of individual offenses. This clear cause-effect-solution and precise wording of the offense tailored to address a specific traumatic event not only allows for quicker resolution to problems associated with microaggressions but also fits more cleanly within the mold of typical Western psychological research and treatment (Lilienfeld, 2017). I discuss the importance of the themes to this research further in the Methods chapter.

Table 2
Microaggression Themes[1]

Theme	Description	Theme	Description
1) Alien in One's Own Land	When Asian Americans and Latino Americans are assumed to be foreign born	7) Myth of Meritocracy	Statements which assert that race or gender does not play a role in life successes
2) Ascription of Intelligence	Assigning intelligence to a person of color or woman based upon their race/gender	8) Pathologizing Cultural Values/ Communication Styles	The notion that values and communication styles of the dominant/white culture are ideal

[1] Sue (2010, pp. 32-34)

3) Color Blindness	Statements that indicate that a white person does not want to acknowledge race.	9) Second-Class Citizen	Occurs when a target group member receives differential treatment from the power group
4) Criminality/ Assumption of Criminal Status	A person of color is assumed to be dangerous, criminal, or deviant based upon their race.	10) Traditional Gender Role Playing and Stereotyping	Occurs when expectations of traditional roles or stereotypes are conveyed
5) Use of Sexist/ Heterosexist Language	Terms that exclude women and LGBTQIA+ persons (Note 1)	11) Sexual Objectification	Occurs when women are treated as though they were objects at men's disposal
6) Denial of Individual Racism/ Sexism/ Heterosexism	A statement made when bias is denied	12) Assumption of Abnormality	Occurs when it is implied that there is something wrong with being LGBTQIA+[2]

Social Justice/Research as Praxis

The most important aspect of the MRP's overall growth is the increasing body of research which suggests a direct link between microaggression contravention strategies and both increased workplace performance and an improved quality of life for minority groups. By suggesting this link between bias/prejudice reduction and improved quality of life, the work of the MRP moves beyond cataloging and exploration of the nature of microaggressions into a social justice realm. While there is still not enough research to offer conclusive evidence nor would a constructivist lens suggest that there is a "one-size fits all" prescriptive remedy to eliminate microaggressions, researchers do show that

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[2] Author's original text said only "LGB." Updated to include current terminology.

efforts to combat microaggressions increase gender inclusivity (Reis & Menezes, 2019)

and positive health outcomes (Nadal et al, 2016; Nadal et al., 2017), and enhance worker

productivity commensurate with the addressing and elimination of microaggressive acts

(Pitcan et al., 2018). I would agree with Sue and Spanierman (2020) that healing and

helping diverse people live together and understand their impacts on one another is the

primary aim of the MRP. This idea can and should be extrapolated to the United States

Marine Corps, historically a bastion for masculine, white, heterosexual norms.

Criticism of the MRP

As a sign of the continued growth of the field, the MRP has also engendered

continued scrutiny of the assertions of its most prominent researchers typically in the

form of peer review among psychologists. Appearing immediately after the

establishment of the MRP in 2007-2008, criticisms of the underlying MRP concepts

appeared and have shaped the development and overall perception of the field. A holistic

understanding of MRP literature therefore also calls for an overview of the two most

prevalent critiques: (1) a disagreement with the theoretical concept of

"microaggressions", and (2) the generalizability of mainstream MRP research. In

summarizing both critiques, it is important to acknowledge not only *what* the critics are

saying, but *who* is doing the critiquing.   A detailed analysis of *what* and *who* can help

MRP literature readers to evaluate the viability of any critic's assertions and assess

potential motives of the authors for viewpoints unfavorable to the MRP.

The "What"

To address the *what*, an important side of evaluating this body of literature requires noting that the MRP began in the mental therapy sciences (Sue, 2007) as a way of diagnosing trauma-inducing events to improve treatment for microaggression-related distress. Because psychology and psychiatry, their respective treatments, and the prescription medicines associated with psychiatric care in the U.S. are highly regulated, diagnosis of trauma and treatment for its effects require well-defined medical procedural care (Lilienfeld, 2017). This stands in contrast to the inherently subjective and still emergent understanding of trauma attributed to events such as microaggressions. Microaggressions challenge the positivist medical status quo and have caused controversy among people trying to counter their negative effects (Wong et al., 2013). The first and most cited criticism of the MRP focuses on conflicts between positivist western medical treatment sciences and the lack of measurable, quantitative psychological effects of microaggressions on the human psyche (Williams, 2019; Lilienfeld, 2017). Essentially, if you cannot define it or diagnose it clearly with measurable data, how can you treat it?

This argument ties in with another common theme: that the MRP has not been sufficiently subjected to scientific scrutiny and medical testing (Wong, et al., 2013; Lilienfeld, 2017; 2020). In this argument, the critics have employed terms like "rigor" to suggest that the findings of MRP research are not sufficiently generalizable to recommend therapeutic decisions. Retorts by Sue and others acknowledge this fact, embrace the constructivist nature of microaggressions, and suggest that denying the

existence of treatment for microaggressions may be a microaggression in and of itself.

As of the writing of this paper, this debate seems to be at an impasse with positivists and

conventional medical researchers on one end and the mainstream MRP on the other.

While a recommendation to fix this problem is beyond the scope of this discussion, a

practical solution may lie in the middle ground between the two positions (Williams,

2019). Also, as more data appears from MRP work, which includes deliberate attempts

to better understand the microaggression phenomenon, more exact ways of dealing with

the ill effects of microaggressions may emerge that come closer to meeting western

medical standards while remaining true to the spirit of the MRP.

The other primary *what* arguments center around the second-order ill effects of

researching microaggressions. Some critics say that trying to research and counter

microaggressions in turn suppresses the speech of non-minorities (Lukianoff & Haidt,

2015), others that it fosters excess political correctness in society (Sunstein, 2015) and

even some say that it can increase rather than decrease racism (Haidt & Jussim, 2016).

While these arguments are important to consider, they have not yet been sufficiently

supported by evidence from empirical research studies. So even though discussions

about microaggressions can be uncomfortable for all parties, the mounting research of the

positive social and psychological effects of the MRP suggest that any negative secondary

effects caused by investigation into microaggressions are minimal by comparison and

justified.

The "Who"

A consumer of MRP research must also consider *who* is contributing to the critiques. The growing body of literature recommending changes to MRP practices tends to originate with certain types of individuals—white and/or male with professional psychology backgrounds—therefore to not acknowledge the effects of their positionality and the possibility of unconscious bias on their behalf would be ingenuine. Very few of the critics specifically address their positionality with respect to gender, race, or sexual orientation, nor do they make adequate allowance for how their positivist perspectives can trivialize and add further harm to minority members who endure additional suffering beyond the original effects of the microaggressions (Williams, 2019) when the victims' reporting is scrutinized to the point of being called irrelevant for treatment purposes (Lilienfeld, 2017). And in a case of presenting an argument against the social justice theoretical underpinnings of the MRP, two researchers placed blame upon the MRP and minority microaggression reporters for encouraging an attitude of victimhood among the white majority claiming reverse racism (Campbell & Manning, 2014).

From my perspective, these critiques run the gamut from poignant to absurd. Making arguments demanding increased scientific rigor of the MRP are important to prevent misuse of prescription medicine in psychiatric care, but other critiques questioning the entire research program are both tone deaf and color blind. Credible critiques either focus on improving the MRP agenda or develop a compelling research program of their own. The MRP is a work in progress, to be sure, but overcoming systemic interpersonal bias will take demanding work and difficulty for all members of

society. Without a doubt, speaking truth to power and telling the majority they are

inflicting harm upon the minority via microaggressive actions will cause some

psychological impact upon the majority. However, results from the MRP help both

minority and majority in the long term so the existing critiques are not sufficient to stop

further MRP work.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a basic understanding of what were previously two

disparate bodies of literature and introduced important concepts which will be required to

understand the methods and findings chapters which follow. When combined, these two

literature bodies allow for the creation of novel research pathways to name and

characterize microaggressions and unconscious bias. The next chapter will show how the

research presented here will help to describe the ways in which this study uses MRP

concepts and military leadership doctrine to further the understanding of

microaggressions and unconscious bias in a new population.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

To describe the research methodology of this thesis, this chapter requires both a discussion of research design and specific methods used to create data. It will begin with the Design section, which describes the ways in which I sampled the population and then gives an overview of the conceptual framework that guided the theoretical application of the MRP to the sample. With theory and sample in mind, in the Methods section I will detail how the new Protocol Pattern coding process created for this document analysis originated and how it evolved following first use into a refined iteration which I used to generate data for the study of microaggressions in the remaining chapters.

Research Design

This section focuses on conveying how my proposed research design effectively answered the research questions by combining microaggressions research and USMC leadership writing. Reiterating, the questions were: 1) What types of unconscious bias are most common in United States Marine Corps Leadership writing? 2) What theory explains the unconscious bias pattern(s) in United States Marine Corps leadership writing? The two questions are not mutually exclusive; to address the second question, my research must sufficiently address the first. To sufficiently answer question one, a novel research design which weaves several proven yet rarely combined types of inquiry into a cohesive conceptual framework whole. But prior to discussing the proposed conceptual framework, it is necessary to briefly detail my reasons for choosing the document analysis method over other types of qualitative inquiry.

The Marine Corps as a Case

The Marine Corps was a difficult organization to study holistically due to several factors. Foremost, the Marine Corps is a globally dispersed organization with members continuously deployed around the world. The geographic dispersion means a wide range of contexts can influence how a respondent will react to research inquiry in a typical interview format used in qualitative research. A Marine in one location or context is potentially not useful for generalization purposes to the organization's larger whole. While I am not a positivist, and generalization is not the goal of my research, I do want my findings to potentially help the largest number of Marines in the widest possible array of contexts. This is only possible by finding contexts which unite Marines over time and place.

Similarly, as the youngest (by average age of members) of the U.S. military services and the one with the highest percentage turnover of personnel (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020)[3], capturing the leadership climate at a particular time by interviewing Marines can be highly transitory. A researcher who wants the findings to be applicable for more than one iteration of the Marine Corps' leadership climate needs to examine the least transitory data sets possible. Marine Corps Leaders, also understanding and embracing the temporary nature of their command structure (Reid, 2021), instead have created a rich, lasting culture partly via historical references and the leadership doctrine used to indoctrinate Marines to our culture.

Document Sampling

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[3] The most recent personnel management strategy (USMC, 2021a) may alter this trend towards reduced turnover, but as of the time of this writing the statement still applies and is unlikely to change substantially relative to the other military services.

For the purposes of this research, the entire body of Marine Corps leadership was relevant but not practical to code. I endeavored to choose documents for analysis which are both relevant and meaningful to Marine Leaders and have sufficient impact on Marine Corps leadership culture such that their analysis, critique, and/or updating to reduce unconscious bias will produce a positive change in the social justice climate of the organization. As introduced in the literature section, Marine Corps leadership development writing as a population from which to sample typically takes on two major forms: strategic communications, and doctrine. Sampling from this population which spans decades and numerous methods of storing and relaying data required careful consideration to select documents for relevance.

Commandant's Professional Reading Program

One way in which the sitting Commandant communicates their leadership vision to the organization is through a library of recommended professional readings consisting of various forms of educational material including books, doctrinal publications, periodicals, and podcasts known as the. Periodically updated with new titles and methods of grouping and presenting the material, the list reflects current organizational priorities and sitting Commandant's can shape the thinking of the Marine Corps via the messages, words, and ideas of the authors. With works spanning decades and including many subjects and authors from outside the military or DoD, this list should be considered alongside the aforementioned white papers and other forms of strategic communication throughout last changed in 2020 to "ensure the Commandant's Professional Reading Program (CPRP) remains relevant, current, and promotes professional discussions amongst all Marines." (USMC, 2020b). While each title in this

list is not reviewed here, some of the titles in the list are considered seminal to the USMC

and the general content of the list is examined for potential microaggression themes.

More importantly, this list can serve as a primer for the types of works the Commandant

considers important for Marines to read and, in the case of the doctrinal publications

which fall under the "foundational" heading within the CPRP *and* proscribe

organizational climate, will be examined in detail as part of this document analysis since

they form a basis for Marine Corps organizational culture writ large.

　　　With these factors in mind, I sampled documents from the overall population that

met one or more of the following criteria:

　　　1)　**The document is official, current doctrine and espoused by the Marine

Corps as foundational to organizational leadership culture**. These documents exist

on official USMC websites and libraries, are written and maintained by the USMC, are

updated on periodic cycles to maintain relevance, and are required reading by leaders

within the organization.

　　　2)　**The documents are culturally relevant due to their seminal nature**. If a

document, including historical texts, is referenced by the USMC in doctrine in criteria 1

or USMC leaders as an example of "good" leadership and/or required reading by all

organizational members such as the case for the CPRP, it will influence the leadership

culture and is relevant to this study.

　　　3)　**Strategic communication written or endorsed by the Commandant of the

Marine Corps (CMC), the senior USMC Leader**. While all leaders in the Marine

Corps may communicate via written means to their subordinates and all commanding

officers may define their individual local culture to some extent, only documents

pertaining to *all* organizational members written/signed by the CMC or equivalent will be included.

4) **The document defines or operationalizes "good" leadership for the purposes of selection or promotion**. The Marine Corps publishes official personnel evaluation guidance which allows members to assess quality of leadership ability. These documents define ideal leadership style and preferred traits for leaders to emulate.

The overall population of documents from which the sample is drawn numbers in the hundreds. But following application of the selection process to Marine Corps leadership doctrine and comparing the list to existing USMC publication sources such as the CPRP and the Marine Corps Publication Library to determine importance to organizational culture, currency, and open-source availability, 9 publications totaling 886 pages were selected for further analysis in this study. Each sampled publication is discussed in greater detail in the coding results section and table 3 below has a list with associated sampling selection criteria per document.

Table 3
Sampled Documents

#	Title	Subject	Criteria
1.	*MCDP 1 Warfighting*	Describes USMC warfare mindset and leadership thought processes	1, 2, 3
2.	*MCDP 6 Command and Control*	Describes common mindset and philosophy for command and control operations	1, 2, 3
3.	*MCDP 7 Learning*	Describes USMC learning philosophy	1, 2, 3
4.	*Marine Corps Manual w/Ch1-3*	Primary capstone document concerning policies for commanding Marines	1, 2
5.	*MCWP 6-10 Leading Marines*	Denotes what it means to be a Marine and how to lead Marines	1, 2
6.	*MCTP 6-10A Sustaining the Transformation*	Describes ongoing efforts to support indoctrination efforts	1, 2

7.	MCO 1610.7A Performance Evaluation System	Prescribes methods for evaluating performance of most organizational leaders	1, 2, 4
8.	Commandant's Planning Guidance	Direct communication from CMC to organization establishing leadership priorities	3
9.	Talent Management 2030	Directs changes to personnel recruiting, evaluation, and retention efforts	2, 3

Conceptual Framework

Framed within a Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) approach (Charmaz, 2011; 2006), this research combined both Protocol Coding and Pattern Coding (Miles, et al., 2020; Schensul, et al., 1999) as a form of document analysis via *abduction* (Peirce, 1955). The CGT frame guided me in approaching the sample and coding via a proven system while simultaneously limiting the influence of preconceived notions about what I will find. CGT helped to limit the influence of my own biases by requiring that I allow the data to drive the creation of any theories and subsequent recommendations. Equally, the use of abduction, and *abductive inferences* (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Kelle, 1995) during the research process provides a methodological framework which allows me to employ grounded theory in a manner which permits inferences based upon the coding results and a richer description of the data in ways which will be most useful to prospective consumers of the findings.

The coding process is explained in greater detail in the *methods* section below, but this "Protocol Pattern" solution (See figure 1) provided a unique opportunity to generate a novel theory from the patterns within the data while still offering protocol boundaries derived from widely accepted microaggression models. Using this method, text containing microaggressions became a unit of observation for finding bias. Searching for

microaggressions via Sue and Spanierman's (2020) protocol added focus to what could have otherwise been an overwhelming amount of initial thematic findings and the use of the initial protocol coding run before undertaking pattern coding will narrowed the scope of the data from which the theory or theories will be generated.

Textual Microaggressions as a Unit of Observation

As an identifiable phenomenon with known definitions, organizations can target microaggressions as a topic to help educate members about anti-bias cultures and can use their clear definition as metrics to evaluate communication of all types for unintentionally prejudicial messaging. However, using a potentially subjective topic such as microaggressions in text as the unit of observation for text requires more precise methods. As you recall from the literature review, Sue and Capodilupo broke microaggressive actions into the 12 *themes* (2008). The *themes,* and the table in which they appear, offer an element of precision and categorization of individual offenses. With a working knowledge of the *themes*, rather than only having a general feeling of trauma from a microaggression, individuals can experience the incident in question, describe it using the language of a particular *theme*, educate an offender about its nature and why it is harmful, and then apply a contravention which is targeted specifically to the individual act rather than having to address the general idea of microaggressions in more nebulous terms.

To clarify, imagine a consultant trying to improve an organizational culture asking a minority member if they experienced any microaggressions in their work environment. That question may garner an affirmative response but asking her the same question and supplying a list of microaggression themes and associated examples from

which to choose will provide better data clarity. This clear cause-effect-solution and precise wording of the offense tailored to address a specific traumatic event not only allows for quicker resolution to problems associated with specific microaggressions.

Microaggressions also often manifest with intersectionality (Nadal et al., 2015). Individuals can experience various microaggressions simultaneously and the effects can compound to create greater harm for the target (Sue et al., 2019; Sue et al., 2021; Torino, et al, 2018). So simply finding one microaggression within the data is not enough to develop and adequately characterize the types of bias present; they all must be considered as parts to a larger story and the ways in which they may intersect to affect marginalized groups. Being able to apply the *themes* to explain which types of microaggressions may be occurring concurrently can also help to address potential remedies or improvements in the most precise terms possible by allowing the addressing of each offense in a specific manner. Last, for leadership educators discussing the MRP with those not familiar with the program, supplying specific *thematic* examples makes the information more accessible and easily assimilated (Sue et al., 2021).

Returning now to the specifics of this proposed conceptual framework, the *themes* provided me with sufficient clarity to discriminate between types of microaggressions for the purposes of coding text. Using the themes as a protocol, I was able to analyze a sample, code the data against the definition of the theme, and find the frequency and/or scope of theme occurrence to determine which themes are most prevalent for future use in second-round pattern coding work.

Methods

My development of methods for this research required considering the material at hand and my intended audience. To present data in a more approachable way to Marine Corps leadership at all levels I modified the highly academic writing style of typical microaggressions research literature and qualitative coding work to better align with a style more common to Marine Corps leadership communications. Any research results could not be so esoteric that the results do not resonate with Marines, or worse, cause Marine leaders to tune out. This alignment included items such as an executive summary in addition to an abstract, the separation of findings into two smaller chapters, using wording and phrases typical of USMC literature, and providing recommendations based upon current USMC leadership paradigms. Finally, I have tried to present findings in a coherent manner and in a format consistent with the type of data consumption methods which Marine Corps leaders prefer which includes the executive summary in Appendix A of this document recommendation format for each of the findings which is similar to after action reports following operations and exercises.

Coding Process Part One

Via the document analysis described here, I sought primarily to create a simple overarching theory that encapsulated the presence and essence of unconscious bias in the documents. However, understanding the bias and creating a new framework first required a basic insight into the bias present in the documents I could only garner effectively via the Protocol Pattern (PP) process. As a novel concept I have created for this research, the PP method (see figure 1) was ideal for me to analyze the sample and produce rich, yet not overly complicated data that can translate to the needs of the Marine Corps. However, like any first use of a new method, I am constantly evaluating the

process for errors and seeking dissenting opinions to improve viability. Over time, my

method evolved, and I have since updated the process using knowledge gained from this

research process which I will detail here.

Figure 1
"Protocol Pattern" Coding First Attempt

"Protocol Pattern Coding"
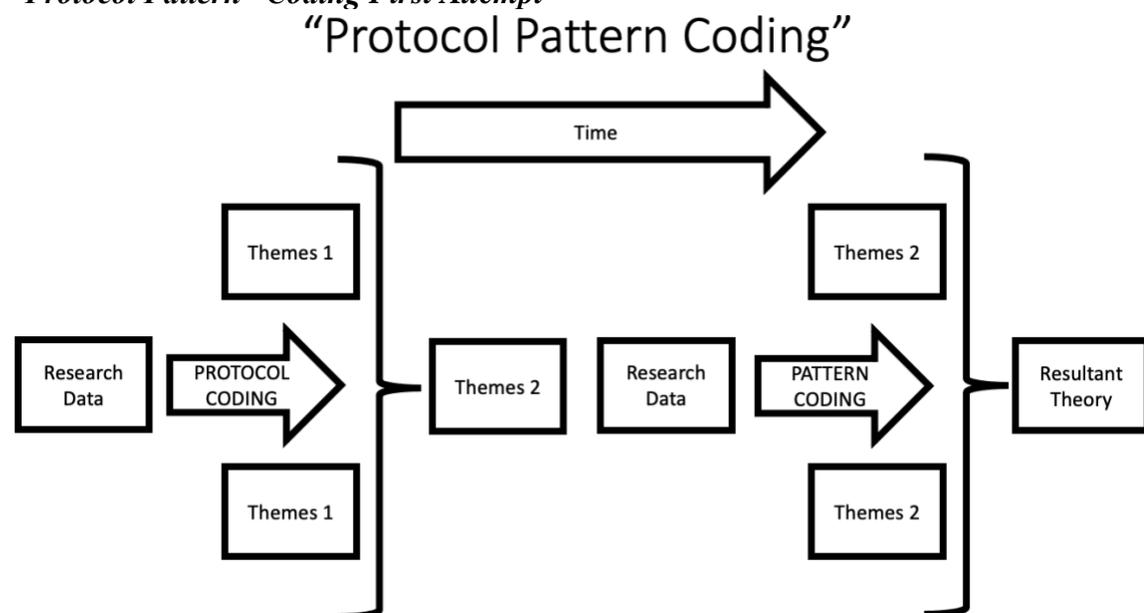
The PP method is not the simplest approach possible as it introduces another

round of coding compared to typical single-cycle qualitative document analysis

techniques. Yet the extra work required using PP coding produces two specific positive

effects beyond a single cycle strategy. First, I required the *reduction* of the large amount

of data within the sample to a more manageable size via an established coding protocol,

then the *precision* of a theory from the reduced data sets that only a pattern coding can

provide, and last a method of *triangulation* of the data to reduce the possibility of bias

introduced by using only a single coder.

To achieve *reduction*, I first *protocol* coded, which is a form of *a priori* coding

(Miles, et al., 2020). Each of the sample documents in table 3 were examined

individually against all twelve microaggression themes from table 2, and then, using the

qualitative coding software NVivo, I logged occurrences of the microaggressions to

determine which individual microaggression themes occurred most often across the body

of literature. From the *protocol* process, four codes (aka themes) appeared more often

than any of the others. In addition, one code emerged not based on text evidence, but due

to its consistent absence in an instance of omission/negation. Using these five themes, I

then began *pattern coding* work and aimed for increased *precision* by a second

examination of the body of literature to create a new framework for describing the nature

of the bias. This new framework offers the results and recommendations in ways which

should be readily accessible by USMC leaders who are typically non-experts in

microaggressions or unconscious bias terminology and can then help to *triangulate*

results via offering expert opinions on findings without requiring previous coding

experience.

Updated Methods and Protocol Pattern Coding Improvements

Concurrent with the findings produced by the document analysis, there is also an

ongoing effort to examine and refine the Protocol Pattern coding process which is being

used as a research method here for the first time. Finding microaggressions using the PP

system as originally designed depended upon searching for words or phrases that would

fit into one of the twelve themes and then finding trends using the data to make

meaningful conclusions. The original PP system worked during my first coding attempt,

and I partially used it to create the findings as discussed in the following chapters.

However, updating the process with a new paradigm supplied richer data overall.

The first iteration of PP that employed only a language analysis of the texts amounted to reducing the documents to snippets and sound bites as evidence of microaggressions which ignored another side of the story. While reading the documents I realized that microaggression-laced language is indicative of a problem, but I needed to add in a more holistic way of generating data to explain the problem while still not straying too far from the intended framework which I (or other future evaluators of documents) would employ. In this respect, I decided to consider all the documents from both a *macroanalysis* and *microanalysis* perspective. The *macro* perspective allows me two specific efficiencies. First, a macro examination in this case requires that I consider all the documents as one set of data and assess their place in the overall lexicon of USMC leadership texts. In doing so, I can better see how the documents address diversity measures and anti-bias themes as a body of literature. Second, I looked at the documents as senders of an overall message, and considered *what they said*, rather than just the exact way of *how they said it.* By looking at what was said—or not said in many cases—across the documents, meaningful macro-level conclusions appeared which may have otherwise been lost had I focused exclusively on language analysis or only what was written in Marine Corps publications. Plus continuing with the micro-level language focus as originally planned alongside the newer macro methods provided useful takeaways about the nature of USMC leadership bias in several important and nuanced ways, which the remainder of this chapter will begin to address. An updated version of the PP process appears in figure 2, with the additions inside boxes with a dashed outline.

Figure 2
Updated "Protocol Pattern" Coding

"Protocol Pattern Coding"
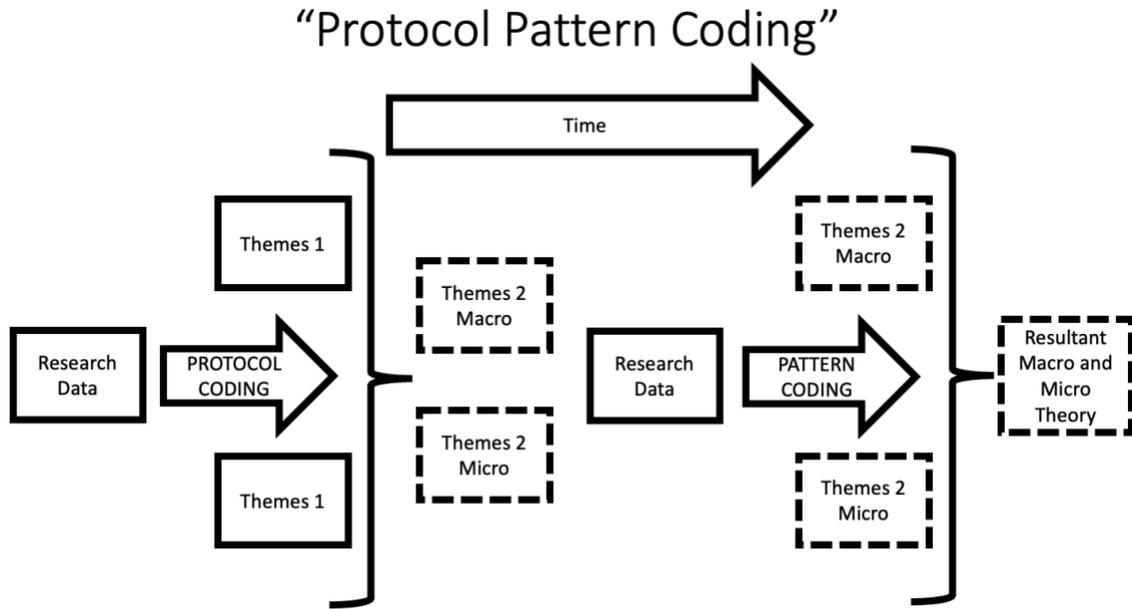
Conclusion

The updated coding process from figure two combined with the design elements presented in this chapter to produce a rich set of data which the following chapters will discuss in greater detail. The addition of macro data created a more comprehensive understanding of the state of bias in the sample and can be thought of as a separate but integral part of the overall analysis. The next chapter will discuss the macro-level findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

MACROANALYSIS OF BIAS FINDINGS

This chapter begins the discussion of the results of the coding process, and splits what would be a traditional findings presentation into two chapters to codify the difference between macro and micro results. In the case of the macro results, the discussion centers on the overall culture of bias created by the documents via microaggression themes in their subject matter, wording, and presentation. When the discussion moves into the micro results, a detailed analysis of the themes with regards to language use will help to understand how phraseology and word choice can contribute to a larger culture of unconscious bias via textual microaggressions.

Overview of Macro Findings

The documents examined in this work are similar in writing style; most follow a similar format, cross reference each other, and employ the same organizational lexicon. The documents also possess a similar intent in that they define and prescribe organizational culture and leadership. However, despite these similarities, the documents do offer a spectrum of perspectives regarding how the Marine Corps should address diversity themes and unconscious bias (see figure 3). On one end of this spectrum is a complete lack of mention of diversity or anti-bias initiatives and on the other are documents that address diversity but do so in an incomplete and potentially damaging way to marginalized groups.

Figure 3
Diversity Theme Use

Increasing themes of diversity and/or anti-bias
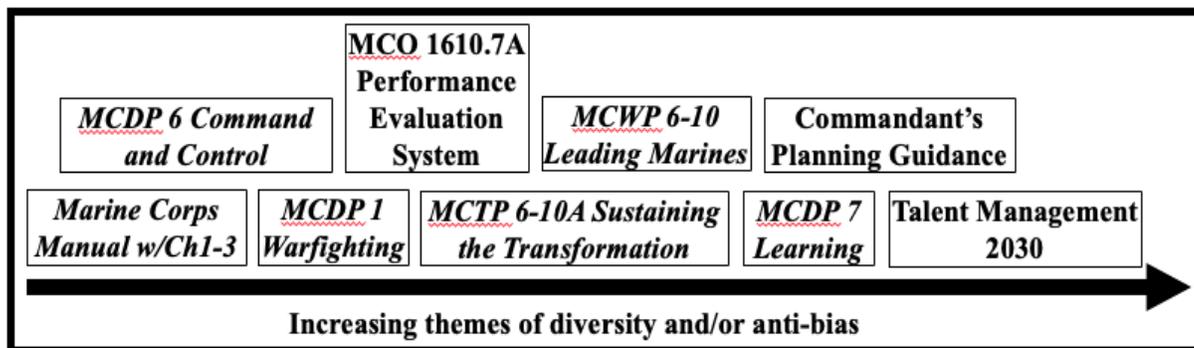
Also, the documents span several decades and make occasional reference to other historical written artifacts or events which are over a century old and contain more bias because of the historical context in which they were written. I have attempted not to judge the authors of the historical documents of that time for their own biases, but only to make suggestions to the current authors of these publications who continue to reference older biased examples as seminal for today's Marine Corps. Yet regardless of where documents land on the spectrum of embracing diversity, microaggression themes still run throughout all the publications, from the overt to the subtle, and there is work to be done to combat and address them.

Bias and the USMC Command and Control Philosophy

As mentioned briefly in the literature review, the Marine Corps espouses a philosophy of *decentralization* of Command and Control, which is a hallmark of the USMC theory of leadership (USMC 2018c; 2018d). In the words of *Warfighting, decentralized* means that "subordinate commanders must make decisions on their own initiative, based on their understanding of their senior's intent, rather than passing information up the chain of command and waiting for the decision to be passed down" (USMC, 2018d, p. 4-9). By passing on decisions to lower-level commanders who have the best understanding of the local situation, efficiencies are gained such as promoting

instinctive predilection towards action to solve problems in the absence of direct

supervision and allowing the individuals with the best understanding of a situation to act

in the manner they see fit. While effective, this method also depends upon a

subordinate's understanding of the *Commander's Intent*, a message from the leader in

charge of a mission which describes the purpose and context for the mission in question

(USMC, 2018d). The importance of a Commander's Intent message cannot be

understated in the USMC leadership system. The *Command and Control* (USMC,

2018c) publication says it best:

> In a decentralized command and control system, without a common vision there
>
> can be no unity of effort; the various actions will lack cohesion. Without a
>
> commander's intent to express that common vision, there simply can be no
>
> mission command and control. (p. 3-9)

Thus, under a decentralized system where the commander's intent is well understood and

acted upon with minimal confusion by all levels of an organization, subordinate leaders

would theoretically feel empowered to act to serve the intent of their leader and take

necessary action without direct supervision because they have been encouraged to solve

problems using their best judgment within the boundaries of the commander's wishes

without fear of reprisal or micromanagement.

Unfortunately, the inherent flexibility and empowerment of subordinates

generated by this system is also a perfect vector for pervasive and unchecked bias, as the

reliance on singular and unchallenged messaging like that present in a *Commander's

Intent* can also unintentionally instill or reinforce messages of bias to subordinates.

Phrasing that includes biased concepts within these messages can in turn lead

subordinates to, at best, are trying to make sense of the information in unbiased ways, or who at worst, will attempt to pass on the biased themes in order to win the approbation of their commander and meet the criterion for biased success the commander has set forth. Several of the documents examined here reference commander's intent and several of the documents themselves serve as a *Commander's Intent* from the commandant of the Marine Corps and will be examined for harmful bias themes which are endorsed by senior leadership and pervade the entire organization. However, the features which make commander's intent a dangerous vector for bias, also make it an ideal method to combat bias. A commander, by issuing a message which reinforces the power of embracing diversity in all its forms inherent in every *Intent* they publish, can establish and reinforce anti-bias messaging with each operation the USMC or its sub-organizations encounter.

Bias and Maneuver Warfare Concept

An adjacent philosophical topic that is similarly essential to the USMC leadership culture is the concept of *Maneuver Warfare* (USMC, 2018d). More than the physical movement of people or equipment that the name implies, Maneuver Warfare is also a way of thinking and acting to defeat an enemy and/or overcome adversity when faced with a challenging task. As *Warfighting* put it,

> The essence of maneuver is taking action to generate and exploit some kind of advantage over the enemy as a means of accomplishing our objectives as effectively as possible. That advantage may be psychological, technological, or temporal as well as spatial. (p. 4-4)

In an ideal situation, the Marine Corps practices the tenets of maneuver and decentralized leadership simultaneously to the greatest effect possible. Teams, tailor-

made for a situation and led by knowledgeable and skillful leaders who are well-informed of the commander's intent are spread out across a large area of operations. The teams are authorized and encouraged to act quickly without excessive oversight and focus efforts to unbalance the enemy, attack weaknesses, and prevent the enemy from gaining momentum to the contrary.

Historically, this system has worked well for what is typically a very geographically dispersed organization in the Marine Corps. But the overall system depends upon Commander's Intent, which in turn relies upon the leader and follower having a generally analogous way of understanding so that there is a unity of effort, and the subordinate accomplishes the mission per the wishes of their commander(s). Among a largely homologous Officer corps in terms of race, gender identity, and sexual orientation, the chances of shared understanding are more likely, and the reliance upon commander's intent alone would have been sufficient to accomplish the mission effectively. However, as the Marine Corps gains diversity amongst its ranks and the cultural background of Marines prior to joining the organizations continues to be more disparate, expressing commander's intent in clear and concise ways may become more difficult to ensure optimal results in the most diverse groups (Van Dijk, et al, 2012a). New strategies for relaying intent and ensuring the mission is accomplished in the best way possible without eliminating the positive outcomes typically associated with decentralized leadership will be required. Similarly, new methods of harnessing the power of diversity in such a manner that allows effective Maneuver Warfare at scale will only be possible when commanders encourage innovation and maximize new methods of solving problems that a diverse workforce can provide. This will be true even if allowing

more flexibility of action outside the comfort zone of the leadership may not fit with the norms of the previously established dominant culture's status quo.

Gender Bias and USMC Leadership Texts: Macro Perspective

We already know that the Marine Corps has a problem recruiting and keeping women and women-identifying individuals among its ranks, especially at the highest leadership levels (DoD, 2020b; USMC, 2021a). But the Marine Corps also has both a gender and gender identity bias problem in its leadership documents. Entire higher education courses, hundreds of books, and thousands of journal articles are devoted to the study of the concept of gender effects on leadership environments and I will not summarize the entire body of work here, but there are three areas of concern worth noting (see also table 4) to understand the bias situation revealed by this research. I will begin with gender as a binary male and female construct as it relates to leadership and the general concept of typical "masculine vs feminine" ways of leading. Meta analyses stretching back into the 1990s (Eagly & Karau, 1991; Eagly et al. 1995; Van Engen & Willemsen, 2004; Hoyt & Simon, 2017) show that there are quantifiable differences between typical masculine and feminine ways of leading–men tend to favor autocratic, transactional styles with negative assertion associated with aggression and hostility whereas women favor collaboration, participation, and positive assertion styles associated with self-expression and respecting the rights of others. There is also evidence of increased effectiveness in positive transformational leadership outcomes when embracing feminine methods. Yet when women are placed in a highly masculine dominated environment or organization such as the Marine Corps, the same studies show that women not only tend to conform to masculine ways of leadership and will receive

negative evaluations for not conforming but will also often receive evaluations stating

they have less success leading their fellow employees.

Table 4
Gender Bias in Sampled Documents -

Lens	Macro- What is said or unsaid	Micro- How it is said
Gender-related bias in leadership culture texts Overall	-The general theme of documents is associated with what are stereotypically masculine ways of leadership. -Task oriented vs interpersonally oriented. -Autocratic vs democratic -Leader and follower vs co-participants in a mission.	-Word choice is a problem. -Language suggests success is found by out-competing, out-working, or being more aggressive than an enemy or opposition. -Focus is on tasks assigned to sub-units or individuals and their ability to accomplish them rather than the ability to motivate and help a group do so.
Potential Microaggression: *Pathologizing cultural values* The notion that values and communication styles of the dominant/white culture are ideal	-Documents reflect that success is dependent upon conforming to the male-dominated culture to succeed. -They offer a one-size-fits-all culture to succeed as an organization. A culture defined and dominated by men. -Appropriately wielding power and positional authority are keys to success and promotion.	-Almost no mention of potential differences between masculine and feminine outside of physical characteristics. -Little encouragement of diversity of gender in success of organization -Awards system and leader promotion manual verbiage encourages transactional leadership, rewards in exchange for performance as graded by the majority.
Potential Microaggression: *Myth of Meritocracy*	-Little acknowledgement that succeeding in the organization is dependent in any way upon identifying as male.	-Numerous identifiers of sex or gender were removed from all MCDP texts and the following disclaimer was added: "This publication has been edited to

Statements which assert that race or gender does not play a role in life successes	-Actively taking steps to disregard different genders or gender expression.	ensure gender neutrality of all applicable and appropriate terms, except those terms governed by higher authority. No other content has been affected." But removing gender from the discussion actually further marginalizes the 9:1 gender minority by suggesting that one text mostly written by and for males can (or should) apply to all equally without major edits.

While these facts are problematic for the Marine Corps as a whole and have come to the attention of senior leaders (Ottingen & Woodworth, 2021; USMC, 2021a), researchers have not studied the effects of a hypermasculine environment with relation to USMC doctrine, unconscious bias, and writing style until now. Part of the problem may simply be a result of the system; limited studies suggest that leaders prefer masculine styles in highly hierarchical leadership environments such as the U.S. Military and feminine styles in more collaborative environments (Hoyt & Simon, 2017). This bias to masculine leadership styles creates an environment that sidelines and discourages feminine ways of leading among the organization. The results of this trend show up in both the conceptual framework of the Marine Corps' capstone leadership documents examined here and the language used to write them.

Gender Identity Bias and the USMC Leadership Texts

One important caveat to note before continuing the analysis is that some microaggressions are present without being directly mentioned in the text of documents. Acts of omission constitute a central tool in wielding power to establish a particular

biased system of leadership (Lukes, 2005). Simply put, because an identity group is specifically not mentioned in laws deciding how they may serve, they are *de facto* prohibited from service unless the individuals choose to conform to the established norm. For example, themes 5, 6, 10 and 12—which deal generally with the existence of gender-related bias and with respect to the microaggression of assuming abnormality for individuals of non-binary gender expression—are likely still present throughout all levels of the United States military due both to recent drastic changes in United States Government policy (President of the United States, 2017; President of the United States 2021; DoD, 2021) and the absence of language permitting genderqueer service.

To the first point, the two separate policies under subsequent presidential administrations first prohibited transgender service in 2017 and then re-permitted transgender servicemembers to both serve openly and seek assistance with gender transition from the military medical and leadership establishment in 2021 (DoD, 2021). This complete reversal of policy created a mixed culture among the organization on attitudes towards transgender individuals. To the second point, current military policy is still to consider individuals as either male or female and evaluate their fitness for duty and competence accordingly. Non-binary, genderqueer, or genderfluid identities do not have a classification within the military personnel lexicon and still cannot serve openly unless in transition from one gender to another. However, as of the time of this research in the Spring of 2022, there are reports that the DoD is studying ways to allow their inclusion (Kheel, 2022). But, until such time that United States law or DoD policy allows for addressing gender norming-related microaggressions directly, they will be difficult to evaluate via this document analysis method. Thus, for the rest of this

document, any references to microaggressions pertaining to sexism and/or heterosexism are made with the understanding that there is inherent and legislated bias against some servicemembers of marginalized gender expression which can and should be corrected.

Race Awareness Bias and the USMC Leadership Texts: Macro Perspective

A final macro topic to discuss before moving to micro analysis of document results in the next chapter is another example of bias by omission. The documents sampled by this research are almost entirely devoid of discussion of race as a relevant factor for leadership and unconscious bias reduction. An ever-present variable that permeates American society in multifaceted ways, racism and race relations are an intractable part of American societal interaction (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998) and are often associated with microaggressions (Pierce, 1978; Sue & Spanierman, 2020). Also, any organization that does not address racism nor try to address racism's impact as a bias generator within leadership culture will likely be committing several microaggressions against its minority members (Pérez & Solórzano, 2015; Sue & Spanierman, 2020). Thus, while the detailed analysis of the language used within these documents in the next section may not show many instances of race-based microaggression themes such as theme 3 (color blind sentiments) or 6 (denial of individual racism), it is because the subjects of race and critical race theory as a leadership topic in the texts is largely ignored. Like the gender discussion, removing the mention of different races and their respective experiences may seem like an act of establishing a cohesive command climate, but in reality, is simply marginalizing the minority members who feel like they have to act and speak like the majority.

Confusing Messaging and the Documents

I introduced the idea of assessing the sampled documents as a whole with respect to their historical context briefly in the previous chapter. A few more words are called for here regarding the findings. It is important to note that when considered as a holistic attempt to shape leadership culture in the organization, the documents contain a confusing message for Marines because they do not represent a unified message on combating bias and promoting diversity. While the older documents have an already discussed bias towards omission of important topics regarding critical race and gender diversity awareness, the documents authored and/or approved after the 2020 DoD Statement on Diversity and Inclusion (DoD, 2020b) should have embraced more diversity measures. In the more recent USMC messaging, diversity is a priority (USMC, 2021a), but in others (USMC, 2019b; 2020d; 2020e), the word "diversity" does not appear, and "unconscious bias" only appears once in several hundred pages of writing. This macro-level analysis provides a general framework for understanding the subsequent micro-level analysis. The microaggression themes that appear in the codes are only part of the overall story. What matters is who is doing the writing and deciding what words are chosen, or not chosen, and why. Macro and micro analysis of bias and prejudice in the USMC system combine to paint the complete picture.

CHAPTER FIVE

MICROANALYSIS OF TEXTUAL MICROAGGRESSIONS IN SAMPLED

DOCUMENTS

This chapter examines more closely the sampled USMC documents with respect to the coding analysis by viewing each artifact as stand-alone perpetrators of microaggression/bias themes. Each publication which was sampled for individual language is discussed individually, in an executive summary style, with additional info in the form of anti-bias improvement possibilities or individual microaggression themes also provided as appropriate. That said, some of the information here also delves back into macro themes when required on a document-by-document basis to build a more coherent picture which will inform the eventual overall theory of USMC document bias presented in the next chapter.

Microanalysis Overview

Before discussing each document individually, the following overview trends are important to understand (see table 5 for overall results). During the first coding process using the 12 microaggression themes from table 2, five themes appeared more frequently than the others: theme number 3, color blindness, number 6, denial of individual racism/sexism/heterosexism, number 7, myth of meritocracy, and number 8, pathologizing cultural values and number 10, traditional role playing and gender stereotyping.

Table 5
Incidence of Microaggression Themes per Code

Codes	Number of Instances per Code	Number of Documents with Code

1) Alien in One's Own Land	0	0
2) Ascription of Intelligence	0	0
3) Color Blindness	7	3
4) Criminality Assumption of Criminal Status	0	0
5) Use of Sexist or Heterosexist Language	14	6
6) Denial of Individual Racism, Sexism, Heterosexism	9	4
7) Myth of Meritocracy	17	6
8) Pathologizing Cultural Values or Communications Styles	75	9
9) Second-Class Citizen	1	1
10) Traditional Gender Role Playing and Stereotyping	98	9
11) Sexual Objectification	0	0
12) Assumption of Abnormality	0	0

In each case, the frequency of the appearance is attributable to microaggression themes which permeate the entire sample. I attribute the bias both to incorrect or incomplete addressing of the issue and an absence of awareness of how the current phraseology could potentially advance bias and prejudice toward marginalized organizational members. Briefly discussing how each of the 5 most prevalent themes manifested in the codes will help to enhance understanding as we move to individual document analysis later in this chapter.

What About the Other Themes?

Before discussing the most prevalent five themes in greater detail, an important question to discuss here is why the remaining seven themes either did not appear in the coding process or were not included in the results. The reason for their exclusion

typically falls into one of two categories. First, five themes did not appear due to either the context of the writing, the organizational culture, or both. There was no evidence of themes 1, alien in one's own land, 2 ascription of intelligence, 4 criminality, or 11 sexual objectifications. Substantiation of these themes would require discussion of the minority groups to which the themes apply, but as the Marine Corps writing style tends to be both color and gender blind, the writing omits phrasing which would typically fall into these categories. In simple terms, it is hard to note specific bias towards people of color if they are not mentioned specifically. However, this does not suggest that the microaggressions are not present in the USMC in more traditional verbal and interpersonal exchanges. Such microaggressions simply would not appear in the documents that were analyzed for this study.

In the second category, two themes did appear in certain instances, but their appearance was either infrequent enough not to be significant for the overall findings or they were part of another, more encompassing theme. Themes 5, use of heterosexist language and 12, assumption of abnormality, do exist in certain cases and are noted when egregious in the discussion later in this chapter, but the themes are occluded by facts mentioned in the macro discussion of legal issues regarding gender and gender identity in the previous chapter. Further micro-level discussion of these two themes is not needed until the law allows open discussion of all gender and sexual orientations in the doctrine. The final theme, 9: second-class citizen, is arguably present via omission as an underlying problem in some of the incidents described here, but theme 9's presence is largely attributable to the overriding presence of theme 8. Theme 8 is the most prevalent theme and causes the majority to inflict other microaggressions when trying to enforce

conformity to the dominant culture. Logically, theme 9, which describes differential treatment given to less powerful group members would have to be present for any majority group to force conformity to their norms. But the presence of theme 9 is caused, in this case, by theme 8 and has therefore been omitted in an effort to better understand the nature of the bias in the following discussions.

Color Blindness

Theme 3 or being "Color blind," borrows a term which was popularized in academic contexts by Critical Race Theory (Dixson and Rousseau 2006) and the flawed idea that racism does not exist if individuals ignore skin color, denies the racist reality of people of color in American society (Essed, 1991; Crenshaw, 1997; Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Following the same line of reasoning, any leadership policy that assumes that it is possible to end racism or suggests that racism simply should not be allowed within the organization is committing the color blind microaggression. MRP scholars suggest that it is more appropriate to admit that racism exists, at the very least unconsciously, and to address its effects rather than minimize or ignore the experience of minority individual(s). This theme also occurs often in terms of negation or omission, meaning authors write to their audience as if they are all the same race or identity rather than tailoring messages to reach and recognize a diverse audience.

Denial of Individual Racism/Sexism/Heterosexism

Theme 6 suggests a similar attitude to theme 3, whereby leaders from the dominant culture or group function as if bias and prejudice does not exist or that environments without bias are possible in organizations where diversity is not present. In its purest form, theme 6 means an individual person is claiming not to be biased. In the

case of the USMC, the issue is that an organization claiming to stand for American society that is skewed in terms of demographics toward men overall and towards white men at the top is an inherently biased organization. And while, in certain cases, the physical, mental, or volunteer requirements create bias towards applicants with qualifications that are not attainable by all members of American society, the skew towards white males is also partially attributable to policy and doctrine as we will see in this chapter. Not addressing the bias inherent in the system is a theme 6 microaggression.

Myth of Meritocracy

Theme 7 refers to the misperception often held by a dominant majority that race and gender do not play a role in an individual's success in life despite marginalized groups' experience to the contrary (Sue, 2010; Dijk, Engen, & Paauwe, 2012). History and current USMC demographics of its officer leadership cadre show that you are more likely to attain positions of power in the Marine Corps if you are a white male, so any document(s) that do not take this phenomenon into account are either naive or actively delegitimize the struggle of minority organizational members. Until leadership culture documents address how to give marginalized minorities an equal chance at promotion, retention, and reaching the highest overall ranks within the service, theme 7 microaggressions are present.

Pathologizing Cultural Values

Finally, theme 8, which is the least difficult to detect in USMC publications yet also the most insidious of the five most prevalent themes, manifests when marginalized individuals with diverse cultures from the majority are required to deny their own uniqueness and conform to the values of the dominant white male culture in order to

succeed. Conforming is an important feature of joining an organization and learning to adapt to its culture, but *conformity* does NOT mean the simple act of indoctrination into military life, as that is a culture shock for most individuals regardless of background and will always require a minimum of personality and identity shift to become part of a new larger whole. No, in this case, theme 8 microaggressions are present when values, personnel evaluation criterion, communication standards, or organizational ways of knowing such as the doctrine we examine here are: 1) skewed towards white male culture 2) embrace a time in the organization's history when white male culture was more dominant or 3) when current leaders continue to espouse ways of conforming that were created by and since reinforced by white males without input from the marginalized minority.

Traditional Gender Role Playing and Stereotyping

As previously discussed, gender equality with respect to leadership culture in the United States military is an issue for all the services, and especially for the USMC (Ottingen & Woodworth, 2021; USMC 2021a) which has the fewest number of women or women-identifying leaders (DoD, 2020a; DoD 2020b). In one respect, this microaggression theme is built into the military via government regulations, as U.S. law and DoD policy still considers the military to be a binary male or female experience. An individual can be male, female, transgender, or transitioning. A more fluid state of gender is not recognized withing the DoD (DoD, 2021), so until laws or policies change which allow non-binary, genderqueer and/or genderfluid individuals to serve, theme 10 with respect to these types of gender stereotypes will always exist. Thus, with respect *solely to binary gender*-related microaggressions, theme 10 is not as relevant in this

chapter as the other four themes because my goal here is to note microaggressions or bias

in the documents which can theoretically be addressed by their authors. These authors

have little control over statutory compliance with the laws created by the Legislative or

Executive branches of our government. However, there are still elements of theme 10

which are extremely important in this microanalysis and examples of gender

discrimination will be discussed when called for later in this chapter.

Analysis Across Sampled Documents

This section will discuss each of the documents individually, with a focus on

prominent microaggression themes discovered by the analysis. When appropriate, this

section will assess potential causes of the themes peculiar to the context of the document

in question and/or ways in which the documents subject matter interrelates to other

sampled documents.

Table 6
Number of Codes per Document

Sampled Document	Number of Coded Items	Number of Themes
1. MCDP 1 Warfighting	16	3
2. *MCDP 6 Command and Control*	19	4
3. *MCDP 7 Learning*	33	5
4. *Marine Corps Manual w/Ch1-3*	20	5
5. *MCWP 6-10 Leading Marines*	41	3
6. *MCTP 6-10A Sustaining the Transformation*	48	3
7. MCO 1610.7A Performance Evaluation System	17	6
8. Commandant's Planning Guidance	10	4
9. Talent Management 2030	17	5

Table 6 shows the total number of coded items per document and number of

different codes found, but as a reminder, the data does not show bias by omission nor

consider instances where codes may be indicative of a larger bias problem explained by a

more encompassing code. In those instances, the individual document discussion will

cover relevant points.

MCDP 1 Warfighting

Table 7
Warfighting Codes

Code	Instances
10) Traditional Gender Role Playing and Stereotyping	9
8) Pathologizing Cultural Values or Communications Styles	5
7) Myth of Meritocracy	2

This document was first published in 1989 to describe a shift in doctrinal culture

in the Marine Corps[4]. Numbering 109 pages, its most recent update was in 2018.

Warfighting's (USMC, 2018d) place at the top of the list of examined documents is

intentional because, by its own admission, it is the primary document which describes the

USMC philosophy and way of thinking (p. 5). Any discussion of organizational climate

within the Marine Corps should start with *MCDP-1*. Most of the other documents on this

list are shaped by or directly reference *Warfighting* both as a culture setter and because it

establishes several key ideas that define how the USMC conceives of itself as an

organization.

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[4] See forewords written by former USMC Commandants Krulak and Gray for a clearer picture of shift.

Due to *Warfighting*'s preeminence as a seminal culture-building document and status as required reading by all Marines, any bias or microaggressions will have an outsized effect compared to other sources. I have already covered the potential bias associated with the macro themes originated by *Warfighting,* but unfortunately, the microanalysis does also show evidence of potential microaggressions in *MCDP 1*'s text which have spread to the other publications (see table 7). And while I am not intending to minimize the themes which are present both here and in the other publications, for brevity's sake, if the bias themes discovered in *Warfighting* repeat in several other of the examined publications, I will mention the commonness of the microaggression here, but not repeat the same critique in each follow-on write-up of the other documents. For example, the next two sections "Glorifying the Cultural Majority" and "Removal of Gender" apply both here and in every other MCDP artifact.

Glorifying the Cultural Majority

An example of microaggression theme 8, a common characteristic to USMC publications is the use of historical examples and quotes to serve as tone setters for the desired mindset of readers. In Marine Corps writing, the individuals referenced or quoted in these examples are predominantly white and male, and often not from the United States[5]. This trend suggests a world view in which individuals from other countries and their military services' thoughts on warfare and the USMC mindset are more valuable than examples drawn from either a cross reference of the Marine Corps' own membership. Similarly, the over-reliance on men, and white men in particular for

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[5] *Warfighting*'s quotes and leadership examples are 100% male and there is only one nonwhite individual among them, the ancient Chinese general and philosopher Sun Tzu.

examples suggests women and people of color have nothing quote-worthy or exemplary to reference on the subject. Also serving to reinforce the face of the majority, the foreword to the publication includes two introductions signed by former white male Commandants directing Marines to read and internalize the messaging present in Warfighting. While as Commandant they had the right to send such strategic messaging to their organization. But maintaining their words at the beginning of the document for over two decades without caveats or revision to match contemporary diversity and inclusion efforts is a regrettable oversight.

Removal of Gender

Another theme that is common to the publications studied here, *Warfighting* has as part of its foreword an unnumbered page stating that in 2018 the publication was "edited to ensure gender neutrality" which is accompanied by the additional assurance that "no other content has been affected." As several other publications also have the same verbiage, I am assuming that a direction to "neutralize the gender" of all MCDP publications was started in the Marine Corps in 2018. On the surface, such an action may seem like an intuitive attempt to add inclusivity to USMC doctrine. Many of the artifacts, like *Warfighting*, have remained unchanged for decades and originally held many references to "he" or "him" when referring to individual Marines. Assuming that all Marines are a "he" is indeed a theme 5 and 10 microaggression, and it is good to end such male-focused bias. However, going gender neutral potentially makes the problem worse by implying falsehoods like ignoring gender or pretending that gender does not exist can alleviate the problems of sex and gender-related bias in the USMC culture. Equally troubling, eradicating reference to gender implies a denial of gender bias, theme

6, and a presumed myth of meritocracy, theme 7, that all Marines of all genders are equal in the eyes of the publications when the dominant culture does not treat them equally. As long as the gender disparity exists both by law and in practice within the USMC, gender can ever be a "neutral" concept in publications or elsewhere.

MCDP 6 Command and Control

Table 8
Command and Control Codes

Code	Instances
10) Traditional Gender Role Playing and Stereotyping	9
8) Pathologizing Cultural Values or Communications Styles	8
9) Second-Class Citizen	1
5) Use of Sexist or Heterosexist Language	1

MCDP 6's *Command and Control*, (USMC, 2018c) a 153-page document last updated in 2018, intends to "describe how we can reach effective military decisions and implement effective military actions faster than an adversary in any conflict setting on any scale" (foreword). As such, it is crucial to understanding the mindset of leaders in the USMC. And as much as *Command and Control* references *Warfighting* (USMC, 2018d) as its philosophical guide, I would consider the former much more the science of leading Marines and the latter the art of controlling *Maneuver Warfare* via *decentralization*. Combined, the two documents provide a close-to holistic picture of how the Marine Corps approaches organizational leadership at all levels. Command and control as described in this document is analogous to leadership in ways wherein the

effective employment of a person or group of persons is dependent upon their

interactions and specifically the actions of the commander. However, some of the

intricacies of setting up command and control with respect to processes prescribed by this

manual are less relevant to the general discussion of leadership intended by my study

because they focus on the logistic mechanics of establishing command and control rather

than the theoretical underpinnings of commanding and controlling effectively. Thus, I

have focused on the chapters and sections which discuss command and control

thematically as a means of influencing and/or leading others effectively.

There are concepts in this document that are beautifully executed from a diversity

mindset standpoint. Human cultural and physical identities are a complex subject and

require many of the tenets present in *Command and Control* such as the idea that

leadership should be a flexible process that is responsive to feedback and any form of

input that may strengthen its execution. An example:

> Command and control are thus an interactive process involving all the parts of the
>
> system and working in all directions. The result is a mutually supporting system
>
> of give and take in which complementary commanding and controlling forces
>
> interact to ensure that the force as a whole can adapt continuously to changing
>
> requirements. (USMC, 2018c, p. 1-9)

Establishing such a flexible mindset not only provides a more resilient organization but is

also imperative to meeting the Commandant's new vision (USMC, 2019b; 2021a) of a

force ready to meet the myriad threats facing the nation in the next decade while

embracing diversity and inclusion efforts.

Command and Control is not perfect. I will not re-hash the potential pitfalls with

decentralized command and control and diversity initiatives from the macro chapter here. But even if the focus remains at the micro level, there are a couple of things to address. From a verbiage microaggressions standpoint (see table 8), the biggest source of bias comes from the introductory vignette entitled "Operation VERBAL IMAGE," which serves as an example of USMC command and control tenets in execution. While the story itself avoids mentioning specifics about the location in which the operation occurs and has the Marines facing off against a faceless enemy, the authors describe the Marines and their motivations in sufficient detail for a reader to understand their mindset and see their use of decentralized command and control leads to a successful mission. All good, right? No, unfortunately the authors committed several acts of marginalization within the vignette including: making most of the major characters white and/or male with typically western European heritage names (Miles Bishop, Jim Knutsen, Perry Gorman, Hannah Vanderwood), making the only character of presumed Hispanic descent (Roberto Hernandez) an enlisted Marine instead of an officer, having the only Marine who openly has thoughts of dissent towards authority (Rachel Connors) be a woman, and giving the only officer with a non-European last name a European first name ("Ed" Takashima), as if he had perhaps assimilated to the dominant USMC white European culture. I do not claim to have knowledge of why the characters were chosen in this vignette; perhaps it was done knowing their potential biased appearance. But when considering the name choices as part of a larger bias picture, they appear to be unconscious bias toward diversity and reinforced the cultural norms.

A last item I would like to discuss here is a reference *Command and Control* makes in its Leadership section when discussing the ideal approach to leading

subordinates under the USMC paradigm (p. 2-21). This section suggests an either/or

summary of potential leadership styles that recommends moving away from

authoritarianism and towards a delegating and persuasion-oriented style. The document

cites older leadership theory and a theory on organizational leadership by McGgregor

(1960). While the work was seminal, he was writing at a time when organizations were

more homologous and dominated by white men than today. Similarly, prescribing a

delegating and persuasive style as McGregor suggests may alienate some

servicemembers who are not acculturated to such methods and contradict the rest of the

publication which suggests a more flexible, follower-based, and situational leadership

style akin to the *Dispersed* methods mentioned in the introductory chapters of this study

(Bryman, 1996).

MCDP 7 Learning

Table 9
Learning Codes

Code	Instances
10) Traditional Gender Role Playing and Stereotyping	13
8) Pathologizing Cultural Values or Communications Styles	10
7) Myth of Meritocracy	4
3) Color Blindness	3
6) Denial of Individual Racism	3

On the shorter side of MCDP publications at 81 pages and in its first version

published in 2020, from both a historical and pedagogical standpoint, *MCDP 7 Learning*

(USMC, 2020e) is a welcome addition to existing doctrine. First, the Marine Corps had

never written a service-wide doctrinal manual expounding solely upon the importance of

creating a culture of learning as essential to personal and professional success. Second,

Learning's attention to education as a collaborative, continuous, and imperative effort to

the success of the organization is a mindset that easily translates to the recent diversity

and inclusion efforts which require novel ways of updating the current personnel

management status quo (USMC, 2021). Third, and most importantly, *Learning*

emphasizes the need to think critically and question situations to maximize critical

thinking skills. Critical thinking and the questioning of the status quo are imperative to

seeking out and countering unconscious bias and microaggressions.

Unfortunately, *Learning* does not go far to highlight USMC diversity themes and

encourage learning in a way which embraces servicemembers with marginalized

identities' potential contributions. Many microaggressions exist within the document's

wording (see table 9), and they center on pathologizing the status quo culture. This

paragraph, which is indicative of the sentiment throughout the publication, illustrates the

point.

> Social and interpersonal factors, such as effective communication, group
>
> cohesion, and trust, all influence learning. When these factors are positive, they
>
> facilitate the learning process and create strong relationships. Marines should
>
> actively seek to understand human and environmental factors that influence
>
> learning while avoiding thoughts and behaviors that can negatively affect learning
>
> and cohesion. (USMC, 2020e, p. 1-16)

I do not know the Marine who wrote this passage, but I agree with them wholeheartedly,

and I believe many of the preeminent scholars in contemporary adult education would

also (Mezirow, 1991; Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Brookfield, 2017; Daffron & Caffarella, 2021). However, the same scholars might question the way the USMC leadership paradigm, which *Learning* establishes, cites regularly from common adult education practices.

We saw during the literature review chapter that barriers to building organizational trust and cohesion issues in less diverse organizations such as the Marine Corps span from marginalization of minorities. Adult education practitioners also note the possibility that minimization of diverse perspectives can lead to an inability to establish a critical learning environment (Mezirow, 1991; Brookfield, 2017). *Learning* speaks about adult education and the learning process in terms which suggest that an individual or their teacher/mentor can seek out their own "knowledge gaps" or areas of weakness (p 2-11, pp. 3-7-3-8). This perspective is invaluable when speaking of the conscious mind with respect to an individual's ability to understand the amount of knowledge they do or do not have, but the idea of self-assessment being able to judge potential biases in the unconscious mind is insufficient and dangerous. A powerful theme 8 microaggression is present here that erroneously suggests white and male leadership who make up the preponderance of the senior leaders responsible for deciding which organizational knowledge gaps exist in the USMC will be able to assess their unconscious knowledge and bias. Biased individuals assessing bias will pathologize current cultural norms and prevent the candid discussions about diversity which are essential to adult education effectiveness (Brookfield, 2017). *Learning* tells Marines to learn to succeed, but when not embracing diversity in learning, the marginalized will be expected to learn to learn, think, and act like the majority they see reflected in their senior

leadership.

Marine Corps Manual w/Ch1-3

Table 10
MCM Codes

Code	Instances
5) Use of Sexist or Heterosexist Language	7
10) Traditional Gender Role Playing and Stereotyping	6
8) Pathologizing Cultural Values or Communications Styles	3
3) Color Blindness	2
7) Myth of Meritocracy	2

As the oldest document on this list, the Marine Corps Manual w/Ch1-3 (MCM) (USMC, 1996) first appeared in its current form in 1980 and underwent small but not substantive changes three times, with the last official update occurring in 1996. Although 126 pages in length, substantial portions of the document are not directed to the establishment of leadership culture, while some passages carry great relevance to this study. Intentionally referential to a different era in the Marine Corps—earlier versions of the Marine Corps manual date back over a century—the subject matter exists to set up a primer for those outside the Marine Corps, particularly United States Navy officers to understand the culture and baseline operational principles of the USMC. An unchanging document written decades ago when the Marine Corps was less diverse in all respects than it is now does not require a detailed breakdown to understand why the most recent version of the MCM may harbor themes of bias or microaggressions, even though they

do exist (see table 10). Instead, I would like to point out a problem that permeates all the documents but is acute here in the MCM.

The Marine Corps references its rich history both on and off the battlefield as examples of how to behave and cites the examples as the paradigm for development of leadership culture. As a general principle, I agree that there should be nothing to stop organizations from using their rich history to supply motivational examples for their current membership. But authors must use the past with a lens reflecting current societal norms because individuals and publications from historical sources often have the same biases and prejudices that permeated U.S. society in their time. In the documents considered here, the publications refer to historical events and/or leaders and incorporate those examples as part of the messaging for current generations. This can be good from the perspective that learning about the past is an essential element of leadership, but this trend can also turn negative if the individuals and events used as examples perpetuate a culture of bias. As an example here in the MCM, one section is entitled "Military Leadership" (pp. 11-21-11-23), and one-third of the information is a cut and paste of the words of a former USMC Commandant, Major General John A. Lejeune's, and his 1920's-era writing of an strategic message entitled "Marine Corps Order Number 29" to all Marines on the subject of the preferred relationship between enlisted Marines and officers[6].

Major General Lejeune is something of a mythical person in Marine Corps lore. Serving in the Marine Corps for over 40 years including two consecutive terms as CMC

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[6] An earlier version of the MCM mentioned here largely attributed to Lejeune is over a century old but served a similar purpose to the contemporary version.

during a time of great transition after World War I, Lejeune was a prolific writer and shaper of the Marine Corps' follower-focused leadership culture as it exists today. Referred to by the USMC as the "greatest of all leathernecks" (USMC, 2022), his name adorns important institutions in the Marine Corps including one of the largest bases and the USMC Leadership Institute. That Major General's Lejeune's writing and example would be used to instruct current and future Marines in not surprising, but taking the words *verbatim*, of someone who had served at a time when segregation of both racial minorities and women in the organization was normalized and openly serving as anything but a heterosexual was against the law is potentially problematic from a microaggression standpoint. As expected, Major General Lejeune's words hold sexist undertones in the MCM, referring to all Marines as men and equating their ideal relationship to that as between "father and son" (p. 1-22). Using such terminology, a document which purports to describe how leaders should exercise command over Marines not only perpetuates the myth that the USMC is for men first, but also a host of other potential microaggressions against those Marines who do not identify with Gen Lejeune's terminology. We will revisit other uses of General Lejeune's words and continue the discourse started earlier in this document on the careful use of historical examples as paradigms of modern expectations in later documents.

MCWP 6-10 Leading Marines

Table 11
Leading Marines Codes

Code	Instances
10) Traditional Gender Role Playing and Stereotyping	27

8) Pathologizing Cultural Values or Communications Styles	13
5) Use of Sexist or Heterosexist Language	1

A 135-page document first published in 1995 and updated to its current form in 2019, *Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 6-10, Leading Marines* (*Leading Marines*) (2019a) is a document which speaks about leadership as the "soul" of the Marine Corps (p. vi). Not merely about leadership development, *Leading Marines* also serves as a guide for the ways in which organizational leaders want all Marines to conceive of the act of leading. A stirring mix of battlefield valor stories, examples of personal sacrifice, and poignant words about the immense effort, care, and self-awareness needed to lead Marines effectively, the document has the power to establish a mindset of diversity, inclusion, anti-bias, and anti-microaggressions as cornerstones of the USMC leadership culture, but falls short, especially regarding culture norming and gender stereotyping verbiage (see table 11).

Unlike the newest communication from the Commandant (USMC, 2021a) and key USMC leaders (Ottingen & Woodworth, 2021), *Leading Marines* does not mention the terms diversity nor inclusion, nor address their importance to the long-term success of the organization. A microaggression by omission, these missing concepts do not arm the readers of the document with valuable concepts required to address and lead diverse groups of humans. The lack of appropriate diversity subject matter coupled with the almost exclusive use of leadership examples referencing heroic white men with European heritage last names doing great deeds in the Marine Corps' past combine to reinforce the

cultural values that the white male is the ideal form of leader and success depends upon conforming to that ideal.

Central also to how *Leading Marines* describes the "soul" of leadership are references to the same "Marine Corps Order No. 29" (Order 29), referenced in the *Marine Corps Manual*. The key premise of Order 29 is that the relationship of Marine leader to Marine subordinate should be akin to the nature of the relationship between father and son. The intent behind this statement is powerful and positive; Marine leaders should treat their subordinates as part of their family and care for each other accordingly. But what of marginalized groups or diverse ways of understanding? The reprinting of Order 29's here which only mentions males has the reader assume that the relationship between father and son does not include mothers, daughters, and non-binary individuals. Also, relevant here is the possible perception of perceived required conformity to the cultural norm for how a family should interact by suggesting the father/son dynamic.

This wording does not mention the possibility that a family which does not function as the Marine Corps describes such as a mother/daughter, grandmother/son, or uncle/niece sister parental relationship can still be worthy models for leadership in the eyes of the dominant majority. Likewise, regardless of gender omissions, it is not a stretch to suggest that not all cultures have the same conception of the relationship between father and son, and much has changed since the time of Order 29. Plus, we discussed how in 1920, when Lejeune wrote Order 29, the Marine Corps was segregated and overwhelmingly white and male, so the Marines who were told to lead each other as "father and son" looked, spoke, and thought more like each other than the Marines of today. Times and demographics have changed. Now, when asking a person of color or a

non-male-identifying Marine to consider themselves the "son" of their mostly white and

male organizational leadership introduces a cognitive dissonance based on their self-

described identity and could force them to assimilate to the dominant culture to succeed.

MCTP 6-10A Sustaining the Transformation

Table 12
Sustaining the Transformation Codes

Code	Instances
8) Pathologizing Cultural Values or Communications Styles	23
10) Traditional Gender Role Playing and Stereotyping	22
7) Myth of Meritocracy	3

Written in 2018, *Marine Corps Tactical Publication 6-10A Sustaining the*

Transformation (*Sustaining the Transformation*) (2018a) has 78 pages intentionally

designed to be complimentary to *MCTP 6-10 Leading Marines* (see foreword paragraph

3). It speaks both to the transformative learning experience of the Marine Corps training

process and the ways the Marine Corps wants to support the transformation over the long

term through effective leadership. As such, the document perpetuates numerous

microaggression themes, many of which center on perpetuating the dominant culture (see

table 12).

Sustaining the Transformation makes references to how individuals change in

positive ways in response to entering the Marine Corps and undergoing the mandatory

indoctrination process[7]. *Sustaining the Transformation* characterizes indoctrination as a continuum spread out over five sequential phases which center upon phase two, Recruit Training, the seminal event of the 12-week "Boot Camp" for enlisted personnel and phase three, Cohesion, the variable time period immediately after boot camp and through follow-on schooling where Marines are "assimilated" into the overall organization (p 6-4). The manual describes the end state of transformation—a permanent change in in the individual reflective of the organization's values— in a way that is akin to the concept of *transformative learning* (Mezirow, 1978, 1991) in which learning is of such quality or pedagogical impact that it alters psychological, behavioral, and belief systems of an individual (Clark & Wilson, 1991). Although typically indicative of a positive educational outcome (Mezirow, 1978), that is not always the case. What if the transformational learning that the Marine Corps is trying to sustain with this publication are in fact a continuous microaggression? Becoming a theme 8 microaggression here, if marginalized individuals are expected to transform into representations of the existing dominant culture and then are evaluated on their ability to deny their earlier culture and keep their new organization-friendly identity, they are increasingly likely to feel like outsiders.

Continuing theme 8 microaggressions is a phrase in chapter 5 which espouses a "subordination of self" (p. 5-1). Marine Corps indoctrination schools such as Boot Camp and Officer Candidate School teach new members how to act like the majority, following established culture, rules, and regulations, which often reflect the dominant majority's

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[7] See the foreword by former CMC General Amos on page 6 of the PDF document for an example of the general idea, if desired.

established norms as we have discussed thus far. However, intentional subordination of self could be highly toxic if applied to deny expression of minority beliefs, identities, or ways of expression in favor of pathologizing the norm. *Sustaining the Transformation* makes few mentions of the need to protect diversity if the transformative process, only that the end state of the phases is increased cohesion to the overall whole via "peer pressure, mentoring, and leadership." (p. 5-2)

Finally, in the naming of factors which might prevent sustaining the transformation, the document names a range of issues with negative impact including lack of good order and discipline, deficient physical fitness, poor appearance, fraternization, sexual harassment, sexual assault, hazing, and substance abuse (p. 2-4). As a former military officer I cannot dispute this list, but conspicuously absent here are many of the concepts mentioned in new USMC personnel management doctrine (USMC, 2021a) such as the equally serious effects of microaggressions like unconscious bias and prejudice, or the acknowledgement that the unconscious bias and discrimination present in American society are likely to also exist in the proportionately less diverse Marine Corps leadership culture. What is a Marine leader who is reading *Sustaining the Transformation* to think if they are trying to determine ways to help a marginalized-identity subordinate who was struggling to adapt to the Marine Corps and the manual as currently written would only suggest that the logical conclusion was that failure is due to either poor leadership of choosing from an incomplete list of items replete with examples of a Marine's personal shortcomings or disciplinary problems rather than the possible existence of microaggressions and an unconscious denial of their identity in favor of cultural norming.

MCO 1610.7A Performance Evaluation System

Table 13
PES Codes

Code	Instances
8) Pathologizing Cultural Values or Communications Styles	6
10) Traditional Gender Role Playing and Stereotyping	4
3) Color Blindness	2
6) Denial of Individual Racism	2
7) Myth of Meritocracy	2
5) Use of Sexist or Heterosexist Language	1

Marine Corps Order 1610.7A Performance Evaluation System (PES) (2018b) is

unique among this group because it delineates how to evaluate a Marine's performance in

their individual billet/assignment.   The current edition was most recently updated in

2018 from its 2015 original, and of the 159 pages in PES, many are dedicated to the

description of administrative functions of filling out and filing of evaluation forms and

are minimally relevant to this study. However, some portions of PES, like chapter four

which delineates evaluation criterion and how to conduct a detailed assessment of a

Marine's performance for awards and promotion are supremely important for this

research. The verbiage in PES encourages evaluators to judge the "whole" Marine (p. 4-

29), using five major categories and 14 individual attributes including areas such as

leadership, judgment, wisdom, and communication skills. There are few statements

within the PES manual that suggest verbal microaggression, but they do exist and take

the form of requiring conformity to the cultural majority via theme 8 and a denial of those of minority identities' inherent experiences of bias via themes 3 and 5 (see table 13).

Concerning ourselves primarily with leadership culture, bias themes in PES may be better understood by examining two sentiments designed to define optimal leadership: First, leaders "set the tone and must foster a climate of 'equal opportunity' within their units by optimally integrating all members of the team to accomplish the mission regardless of race, religion, ethnic background, or gender" (p. 4-33), and, second, leaders show commitment to "train, educate, and challenge all Marines regardless of race, religion, ethnic background, or gender" (p. 4-34). That the term "equal opportunity" is used in this way both implies that all Marines have the same opportunity to succeed in the dominant white male culture and denies the potential impact of race, religion, ethnic background, or gender on an individual's evaluation and ability to carry out the mission while conforming to dominant cultural norms. Suggesting that an evaluator should be unbiased in these categories is admirable, but naive, and does not deal plainly with the inherent unconscious biases that permeate large organizations with minimal cultural diversity.

Another example of bias that requires conformity, the PES also evaluates leaders on their ability to "set the example" and be something other Marines want to emulate. While "setting the example" mostly refers to comportment in the manual, the underlying microaggression here is that if most Marines leaders are white, heterosexual, and identify as male, does that allow space for diverse ways of being? Should leaders expect all minority subordinates to truly be able to follow the example of white male leaders? Or if a leader is nether white, heterosexual nor male identifying, will they be able to set the

same example as those who are different in the eyes of their evaluator(s)? Instead of the current wording, author(s) could add the ability to recognize and champion diversity and counter unconscious bias and those skills would become hallmarks not only of the leadership evaluation process but of the depiction of comportment for what a "whole" Marine should be.

A final relevant concept about PES is that it is currently in a state of review for potential updating as part of a larger review of the USMC personnel system (USMC, 2019b. 2021a). The commandant noted several facets of the current system which are outdated and require review to better align the Marine Corps with industry best practices and against current threats (USMC, 2019b, p. 8). Noteworthy in the case of this research is the nature of the recommended update. The eight primary recommended changes focus on flexibility and will help to remove inefficiencies in the system, but they address neither the vectors for potential unconscious bias and inequality in the current system nor the reliance upon evaluators to prepare reports that are unbiased and fair to all individuals. The update therefore does little to address the continuing enforcement of adherence to dominant cultural values and continued bias in the form of microaggression theme 8.

Commandant's Planning Guidance

Table 14
CPG Codes

Code	Instances
8) Pathologizing Cultural Values or Communications Styles	4
5) Use of Sexist or Heterosexist Language	3

6) Denial of Individual Racism	2
10) Traditional Gender Role Playing and Stereotyping	1

Upon assuming his current role as the CMC, General Berger published a 25-page vision statement called Commandant's Planning Guidance (CPG) (USMC, 2019b). The CPG is an organizational guide that explains both the CMC's concept for how the Marine Corps should run and delineates wide-ranging priorities for how the Marine Corps can succeed as an organization in the future. The CPG is short compared to the other publications considered here, but nevertheless it is seminal with regards to this study for two important reasons and the microaggressions present (see table 14) can have an outsized effect. First, one of Gen Berger's five stated priority focus areas is "core values", and within that section is the first known use by a Marine Corps commandant of the term "unconscious bias" in strategic communication to the organization. Although the terminology is in reference to sexual assault prevention (p. 21), its appearance brings awareness of the phrasing to all Marines since it is used by the head of the organization. Second, the CMC's final priority focus area in the CPG is a section titled "command and leadership", and within that section, printed in bold font, is the following paragraph:

> There is no place in our Marine Corps … for those who are intolerant of their fellow Marines' gender or sexual orientation; no place for those who engage in domestic violence; and no place for racists – whether their intolerance and prejudice be direct or indirect, intentional, or unintentional. (USMC, 2019b, p. 22)

Both instances are potentially hugely important in the fight against unconscious bias, but there are serious issues at play here with each instance that have the potential to reinforce, rather than reduce microaggressions.

Let us start with the first reason this document has extra import to this study, the appearance of "unconscious bias" from a USMC Commandant used in the same paragraph which describes the focus on a renewed organization-wide fight against sexual assault. Point one, assaulting another person cannot and should not be attributable to unconscious bias. Unconscious bias is attributable to subtle, often unconscious stereotypes held by one person or person(s) against others (Greenwald & Banaji, 1996, Sue & Spanierman, 2020). And although all individuals will hold implicit biases due to their socialization and personal beliefs (Sue 2020), associating the act of assaulting someone with unconscious bias in this paragraph without further mention of the complicated scientific fields of study related to understanding implicit and explicit bias regarding learned gender discrimination is potentially misleading as a subject easily studied and or understood by the average reader without expert instruction. Point two, placing the term unconscious bias in the same paragraph as sexual assault implies that unconscious bias links only with sex-related themes, whereas we know that implicit bias permeates other areas of society and applies to numerous identity groups (Huhtanen, 2020).

We move now to the second reason this document is important, the paragraph I quoted from the CPG. The paragraph sets an important tone decrying bigotry and discrimination, and its boldface font supplies the needed emphasis for the subject matter. However, the last sentence which says that there is "no place for racists – whether their

intolerance and prejudice be direct or indirect, intentional or unintentional", is indicative

of a larger *color blind* and *denial of racism* microaggression themes present within the

USMC. The literature review showed that unconscious racism and racial

microaggressions permeate United States society and that individuals of color experience

routine race-related unconscious bias. Therefore, suggesting that an organization will not

allow racism implies that they can end unconscious racism with the same method used to

combat overt racism or that they can examine the unconscious of individuals before

allowing entry. This marginalizes the experience of minority individuals who experience

the microaggressions rather than the organization coming to grips with racism's inherent

existence in the unconscious and having the difficult discussions about race and bias that

will help to confront and mitigate the problem.

Talent Management 2030

Table 15
Talent Management Codes

Code	Instances
10) Traditional Gender Role Playing and Stereotyping	7
7) Myth of Meritocracy	4
8) Pathologizing Cultural Values or Communications Styles	3
6) Denial of Individual Racism	2
5) Use of Sexist or Heterosexist Language	3

As the final and most recent document on this list, Talent Management 2030

(Talent Management) (USMC, 2021a) gives detailed guidance about the holistic review

and update of the personnel management process of the Marine Corps first mentioned in

the CPG (USMC, 2019b, p. 8) and the USMC recently mandated a Service-wide cultural

awareness education program (USMC, 2021b). A metaphorical "breath of fresh air" in

terms of bias mitigation measures, this new guidance discusses wide-ranging changes to

education, recruiting, retention, and assignment practices aimed to eliminate previously

ineffective anti-bias policies. And while the overall document still contain some biased

themes (see table 15) such as: Binary gender thinking "I have the deepest respect for the

hard-working men and women" (USMC, 2021a, p. 2), perpetuating of a myth of

meritocracy, "our talent management system should create a level playing field allowing

all Marines an equal opportunity to succeed", (USMC, 2021a, p. 5) or suggesting that

bias can be eliminated in the talent evaluation process (USMC, 2021a, p. 10), there are

also statements like this:

> The Corps benefits when it attracts, and remains attractive to, Marines from a
> range of backgrounds, and thus, diverse perspectives and talents. Research in
> behavioral economics illustrates that teams with diverse perspectives and modes
> of thinking solve problems faster and more creatively. In this way, diversity
> provides us a competitive warfighting advantage over our adversaries, particularly
> those who place a premium on uniformity of thought. (USMC, 2021a, p. 5)

Such sentiments are certainly in keeping with the ideals of the MRP which also looks to

maximize the power of diversity and inclusion by reducing microaggression-related bias.

Yet these newer sentiments of attracting and retaining diversity may prove ineffective if

the organization does not provide a culture in which diverse individuals feel welcome.

Microaggressions, such as assuming that a color and gender-blind meritocracy exists in

the Marine Corps or that racism is not inherent to the system will perpetuate the bias and slow diversity efforts. I am optimistic about the tone of this final document and that it is a harbinger of things to come, and I do hope that all the publications here are updated to reflect this new sentiment. The success of the talent management update as a mitigator if unconscious bias will depend on a holistic effort of doctrine update, leadership education, and recruiting and retention efforts.

Conclusion

The data in this chapter added to the overall understanding of microaggressions and unconscious bias from the previous chapter via a microanalysis of individual sampled documents and the most prominent microaggression themes. Data shows that the bias permeates throughout the sample and gives a picture of bias that centers around gender, meritocracy, and a systemic pathologizing of cultural values borne of the requirement to conform to the existing white and male culture. The following chapter will summarize the overall bias culture by completing the PP coding process with a coherent description of macro and micro considerations and then offer anti-bias recommendations specific to the USMC as an organization.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Now armed with the joint macro and micro data, let us look at results from the

document analysis from a holistic perspective and return to the second research question

and the Protocol Pattern (PP) process theory generation stage. If you recall, PP involves

first coding the documents to find out which microaggression themes occur and why, and

then trying to discern patterns or commonalities in the first set of data via second-round

coding as needed. Following the first coding efforts, we saw that at the macro level of

analysis, several overarching commonalities appeared including a confusing set of

diversity messages sent by the doctrine, a tendency towards both gender and racial bias

by omission, and the assumption that all Marines should conform to the tenets of

Maneuver Warfare by learning to embrace a prescribed way of thinking created by the

dominant white, heterosexual male majority. In the micro chapter, in addition to seeing

more bias-by-omission, we also saw the emergence of five microaggression themes.

These themes occurred the most, and, although I did not solely associate the frequency of

a code's appearance in the texts as equal with importance, the amount of times codes

appeared gave me a baseline from which to develop potential theories in the second stage

of pattern analysis in the PP process.

Research Question #2 and Theory

The second research question I attempted to answer with this study was "what

theory explains the unconscious bias pattern(s) in United States Marine Corps leadership

writing?" If there is a predominant trend associated with my coding efforts that could

help to understand how bias exists and is affecting USMC leadership practices, it is that

the Marine Corps leadership is in a philosophical trap of its own making. A concept which explains this phenomenon I have dubbed the *Conformity/Diversity Conflict Dilemma* (CDCD). CDCD helps to explain why the examined leadership culture documents evidence inherent and repeating cognitive conflict. Per USMC doctrine, winning in battle and achieving professional success as a Marine relies upon conformity into a shared organizational culture and mindset created by the dominant, white, heterosexual, male majority. However, the same conformity to the cultural majority conflicts with initiatives embracing diversity and perpetuates microaggressions against organizational members of non-male gender, non-white race, and non-heterosexual identities. The results of the analysis conducted for this study show that the publications celebrate one-ness and cohesion of effort, especially when it comes to the mindset with which the organization approaches its primary mission sets. Yet the documents contain little mention of how to create a unity of effort from a diverse organizational membership. Of course, the "conformity to the dominant culture" referenced here is in no way entirely negative. Indoctrination and ongoing education efforts undertaken by the Marine Corps for its members produce a commonality of purpose and problem-solving mindset that allows a Service-wide warfare method when confronted with conflict and competition. Such assimilation to a common warfighting ethos at the expense of diverse ways of being has been equated to winning in past battlefield conflicts, but at what cost to the Marines? And could embracing diversity in addition to conformity enhance battlefield success?

As we have seen from the review of the literature, demanding integration of diverse minorities to a dominant culture creates documented negative health and

performance outcomes. This means that the authors of USMC leadership and culture development doctrine such as the documents I examined here owe it to their junior Marines to walk a fine line of encouraging diversity within the ranks and supporting an ever-increasing diverse workforce while discouraging disunity of effort that could lead to failure on the battlefield. CDCD is a paradoxical problem that this chapter will try to unravel, and which USMC leadership must understand and address in a rapid, holistic manner. The good news is that the basic elements of the CDCD paradox is known to the highest levels of both DoD and USMC leadership who are actively wrestling with the problem and looking for ways to meet both goals (USMC, 2019b; 2021a; 2021b; DoD, 2020b; Esper, 2020).

New Theory?

So where does that leave the search for an answer to research question two in terms of generating a new theory? The simple answer is the research is not yet comprehensive enough to support a theory. A more detailed explanation is that CDCD demonstrates several important trends indicative of unconscious bias issues in the USMC which must be addressed per the recommendations in the following section, but there is not enough evidence to suggest that future USMC leadership documents will continue to follow a predictable bias model for two reasons.

First, the bias noted in this study is likely to manifest in new and changing ways. Most of the sample documents examined by this study were written several years ago before the culture shift regarding unconscious bias recognition and mitigation in recent USMC policy (USMC, 2019b; 2021a; 2021b). And while it is likely that the new culture will still continue to manifest some type of unconscious bias while the senior leadership

demographics are still disproportionately white and male, the new education efforts will skew the bias in a yet to be determined way.

Second, the updated personnel model suggested by the Commandant in Talent Management 2030 (USMC, 2021a) recommends a shifting of USMC demographics towards an older, more experienced workforce to leverage benefits of age and experience over the typical difficulties associated with a younger population (p.7). While this strategy may prove effective at realizing the intended efficiencies of workforce productivity and reducing disciplinary issues, taking steps to mature what was previously the youngest U.S. military service may hinder the ability to increase overall diversity by preventing younger, more diverse U.S. citizens from joining the USMC at previous rates. Similarly, Talent Management 2030 focuses on recruiting and retaining "talented" individuals but if "talent" is evaluated per what has been a personnel evaluation system containing unconscious bias, the culture of bias may be perpetuated and will be reflected in the leadership documents generated by the new workforce.

In both cases, a longitudinal study of the unconscious bias and microaggression phenomena that examines future iterations of the documents would provide more data to allow for a better predictive theoretical model. Seeing how the documents are updated or replaced to reflect ongoing diversity efforts and what effect(s) the new personnel management initiatives have on overall culture will be crucial to understanding how the USMC evolves.

Recommendations for USMC Leadership

I am cautiously optimistic of the potential good that can come from this study; however, I worry because any efforts to change the culture of a military service,

particularly one as steeped in tradition as the Marine Corps, must be done carefully and deliberately. We know from research that groups often react poorly when perceived to be under attack (Volkan, 2014), and I know from first-hand experience and personal pride that any suggestion that the Marine Corps needs to adjust their ways of leading because they are wrong or failing is likely to be received poorly if not accompanied by widespread education about the problem and why addressing written bias can prove beneficial to the Service.

As I am now a retired Marine and never reached the rank of General officer nor Sergeant Major, I will not presume to make exact prescriptive recommendations for the senior leadership of my former Service. Doubtless, they can read the information here and decide its relevance to their continued diversity improvement and bias reduction goals. Instead, I will make four broad suggestions based upon my knowledge in the adult education and leadership fields that I hope will resonate with my intended audience. It is also important for me to note that I see it as an overwhelmingly positive sign that some of the newest documents sampled here, the strategic communications written by the current CMC (USMC, 2019b; 2021a; 2021b), while not flawless from the perspective of this research, are excellent examples of senior USMC leaders embracing diversity, anti-bias, and inclusion efforts. If the Marine Corps follows through with the initiatives laid out in General Berger's new strategic communication and embraces his vision, I think the eventual results will be a much more diverse and inclusionary workforce. Additional recommendations are as follows:

1. *Continue and/or start microaggression education as part of all diversity and anti-unconscious bias initiatives.*

A characteristic of the Marine Corps is youth and high turnover rate. It is the youngest service, and while new directives may change this to an undetermined extent (USMC, 2021a; 2021b), the Marine Corps will always have an influx of new Marines from American society who bring new and fresh ideas with which to work when harnessing our diversity. This means leadership can rapidly spread innovative ideas through these individuals and use the growing anti-unconscious bias trends within U.S. society to help organization climate initiatives. But to keep the potential strength of youth and turnover from becoming a weakness, the USMC created institution bulwarks to keep its unique warfighting culture including a robust indoctrination for new members, a mature turnover process among all ranks and positions, and a strong organization-wide education effort about adherence to traditions and corps values. Modifying these bulwarks to ensure the system harnesses the Commandant's new talent management anti-bias initiatives, the Marine Corps must ensure that all processes, traditions, and indoctrination methods are updated to have a comprehensive approach to diversity and countering unconscious bias. This will serve the dual efforts of creating a better organization while also training the authors of future leadership doctrine to write more inclusionary versions of the documents examined here.

2. *Reassess all doctrinal publications for existence of biased themes and/or eliminate potentially biased themes during scheduled update cycles*.

Talent Management (USMC, 2021a) says this the best: "While our service never seeks change for change's sake, we have always embraced it when change had the potential to improve our lethality and effectiveness" (p. 2). I am just one person and do not claim to have all the answers about updating the publications examined here.

However, as these publications are subject to mandatory periodic review, I recommend changing the review process of these and all future publications to not only ensure diversity of review board membership, but to include a method to examine the language and subject matter for potential incidence of unconscious bias. I would recommend particular attention to *Warfighting* due to its seminal nature and the PES. Bias in selection processes exists now and can prevent selection of the most diverse, talented workforce possible. The protocol coding process here can serve as a guide to unconscious bias reduction, as can the CDCD.

3. *Reassess the concepts of mission command and control and decentralization about their reliance on a singular statement like the Commander's Intent.*

How a commander conceives of and writes their Commander's Intent is of the utmost importance for the Maneuver Warfare method. Commander's Intent, and other culture-defining documents such as diversity statements have the power to shape actions and climate. As both a perfect vector for perpetuating *and* combating bias, all commanders must scrutinize messaging like their intent statements to convey diversity and inclusion themes while not perpetuating microaggressions. Commanders and key leaders should also receive periodic education on typical verbiage-related pitfalls when crafting Commander's Intent statements to avoid alienating or prejudicing marginalized organization members.

4. *Update Command Climate Surveys, education, and survey debriefs to address unconscious bias themes.*

As tools used to assess an the climate of an organization, the Command Climate and Equal Opportunity Survey processes can be an ideal method to determine the

incidence of unconscious bias themes within the Command, check knowledge within the

Command of what unconscious bias is and how it can affect readiness, and give

commander's an understanding where to begin education process regarding the creation

of a more diverse and inclusionary culture in their Units. Updating these surveys to

better assess microaggressions and unconscious bias and then having survey debriefs

reflect modern anti-bias training including microintervention strategies can give

commanders at all levels more information about the state of their unit(s) from which to

plan targeted education efforts.

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APPENDIX A

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In keeping with the United States (US) Department of Defense (DoD) 2020 directive to expand diversity and inclusion efforts, this document analysis explores the existence and nature of microaggressive language in the US Military's leadership development doctrine—documents which define leadership culture, training, and education processes in a military service. Using the assumption that these documents shape and legitimize behavior, this dissertation describes the incidence and nature of unconscious bias in military leadership written artifacts and then suggests a theory which describes the unconscious bias in an effort to help with future mitigation efforts. Focusing on the United States Marine Corps (Marine Corps or USMC), which is the military service with the least diverse officer cadre in terms of sex, gender identity and race, this dissertation employed a document analysis format to examine Marine Corps leadership education doctrine for microaggressions. Using a two-cycle coding process combining pattern coding and protocol coding--explained here as "Protocol Pattern" coding—the study conducted an assessment of the documents for biased language using the definitions of microaggression "themes" as named by the foremost researcher in the field, Columbia University professor Dr Derald Wing Sue. The results from the coding process helped to develop a unifying theme describing the nature of the bias.

The coding results suggest repeated unconscious bias-related trends within the Marine Corps' documents at the potential cost of minority members in terms of health, acceptance, and performance within the organization. The results also suggest there is an

overriding bias-culture which puts Marine Corps leadership in a difficult dilemma of trying to encourage conformity to traditional organizational cultural identity while embracing a new future of a more diverse and flexible workforce. This is the "Conformity/Diversity Conflict Dilemma," or "CDCD" dilemma that can be described at both macro (or the cultural context) and micro (or study results about microaggressions in Marine Corps publication) levels.

CDCD, the Macro Context: The Marine Corps' warfighting philosophy endorses *Maneuver Warfare* which relies upon a decentralized command structure with subordinates free to act under guidance given by a "Commander's Intent" mission statement. Subordinates require implicit understanding of the commander's intent statement to ensure unity of effort, but because the Marine Corps is also now encouraging diversity of thought and the recruiting and retaining of a more diverse workforce, the likelihood that implicit understanding of a commander's intent is achievable decreases under the current leadership paradigm.

CDCD, Micro-level Findings: Five of twelve microaggression-related themes that emerged during the document analysis appear more often than the other seven in the publications analyzed. They are colorblindness racism, denial of individual bias, bias against non-male gender and non-traditional gender expression, sustaining inequality with a myth of meritocracy, and pathologizing dominant historical white male cultural values in the name of organizational harmony. The themes are present in both words and by omission, i.e., when authors deny diversity by using a one-size-fits-all approach to culture-building.

Recommendations: The USMC should update publications to reflect a way of writing Commander's Intent and using decentralized leadership which harnesses diversity of differences in thought, communications styles, and ways of cultural knowledge rather than encouraging conformity to a singular mindset to achieve success. Education efforts on unconscious bias and microaggressions must continue and become normalized. Similarly, the publications should remove biased language including bias by omission or negation.