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Recruiting Women into the Canadian Armed Forces: We Can Do Better

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**ISSUES RECRUITING WOMEN INTO THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES:
WE CAN DO BETTER**

By Major Allan Manley

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Issues Recruiting Women into the Canadian Armed Forces: We Can Do Better

The Government of Canada has committed to participation in The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, Women, Peace and Security¹. It has also committed to raising the percentage of women in the CAF to 25% by 2026. This is a problem, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) has current statistics posted on the federal government's website² state that as of February of 2020 women make up 16% of the Regular Force and Primary Reserve. Increasing the percentage of women in the CAF by 9% in five years will require the organization to overcome some steep obstacles. This paper will look at some of the biggest hurdles in achieving the goal and offer some suggestions that might help close the gap. The challenges in attaining 25% women in the CAF are complex involving both internal and external factors; without understanding the depth of the issues inherent in the CAF and without the will to adapt to a changing social demographic that goal will not be achieved.

This paper will look at three main issues affecting recruiting women into the CAF. These include a failure to coordinate and disseminate recruiting material relevant women in today's social climate, a failure to address the perception that justice is not being served in relation to sexual misconduct and enticing a changing workforce into an organization that is not designed to embrace change. Failure to understand the

¹ NATO. (2015). UNSCR 1325 Reload. Madrid: NATO.

² Government of Canada. (2021, April 15). Women in the Canadian Armed Forces. Retrieved from Canada.ca: <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/women-in-the-forces.html>

demographic you are looking to attract, failure to show Canada that as an institution it believes in showing justice for sexual assault victims and failure to adapt to changing workplace culture will result in just plain failure.

“Amazing things happen when you listen to the consumer” Jonathan Midenhall.

As Canada’s population ages and the baby boomer generation finally makes its way out of the work force there is an ever-increasing scramble to lure talented people into every workspace in the country. In addition, statistics and reports are ever increasing in singing the praises of working in diverse environments increasing the difficulty in recruiting in general let alone women. To attract people to join the CAF it needs to entice potential soldiers and remove obstacles to employing them.

While this paper discusses recruiting women to achieve 25% by 2026, it is important for effective marketing to narrow the target demographic down from 50% of the population. As younger people have more free time to participate in training and are more mobile the age demographic should realistically be between 18–25-year-old women. Meaning that the CAF should be directing messaging to women born between 1991-1998. This would make the target audience for messaging a combination of Millennials and Generation Z to a lesser extent.

Reginald Bibby conducted market research on millennials and posted his findings in an article *Canada’s Emerging Millennials*³ which looked at their opinions of themselves, others as well as their inter-personal and personal relationships with others. The article provides a well of useful information that allows us to see where the values

³ Bibby, R. W. (2009). Canada's Emerging Millennials. Transition 39, no. 3

the CAF promotes as an institution align and where the realities of the institutions conflict. Using these we can more accurately identify targeted messaging to promote employment in the CAF and identify hurdles that need to be addressed or mitigated.

The table below provides insight into what matters most to female millennials during the publication of the article.⁴

Table 1. Valued Interpersonal Characteristics of Teenagers

% Viewing as "Very Important"

	NATIONALLY	MALES	FEMALES
Trust	84	76	90
Honesty	81	74	87
Concern for others	65	56	73
Politeness	64	57	70
Forgiveness	60	53	66
Cleanliness	59	56	62
Working hard	55	52	58

Source: Bibby, *The Emerging Millennials*, 2009:10

Clearly the main value that needs to be illustrated by the CAF to be successful in improving the recruitment of women is to show that the CAF is a place they can work and trust that their wellbeing is important. Later in this paper the importance of the perception that justice exists for those who suffer sexual assault within the CAF will be addressed. For now, it is important to recognize that to attract women the CAF must sell itself as a place where women can trust the institution, to believe that it is being honest in its actions and that it is an organization designed to assist others. So how does this compare with the Ethical Principles of DND and the CF?

⁴ Bibby, R. W. (2009). *Canada's Emerging Millennials*. Transition 39, no. 3, p. 3

The answer is that they align quite well. In looking at the Ethical Principles of DND and the CF published on the Federal Governments website⁵ we can see the following:

Table 1 - Ethical principles of DND and CF

Ethical principles	Expected behaviours
1. Respect the dignity of all persons	<p>At all times and in all places, DND employees and CF members shall respect human dignity and the value of every person by:</p> <p>1.1 Treating every person with respect and fairness. 1.2 Valuing diversity and the benefit of combining the unique qualities and strengths inherent in a diverse workforce. 1.3 Helping to create and maintain safe and healthy workplaces that are free from harassment and discrimination. 1.4 Working together in a spirit of openness, honesty and transparency that encourages engagement, collaboration and respectful communication.</p>
2. Serve Canada before self	<p>At all times and in all places, DND employees and CF members shall fulfil their commitments in a manner that best serves Canada, its people, its parliamentary democracy, DND and the CF by:</p> <p>2.1 Making decisions and acting at all times in the public interest. 2.2 Performing their duty or their responsibilities to the highest ethical standards. 2.3 Avoiding or preventing situations that could give rise to personal or organizational conflicts of interests. 2.4 Providing decision-makers with all the information, analysis and advice they need, always striving to be open, candid and impartial.</p>

From this we can clearly see that the posted principles align quite closely with those of the females questioned by Bibby. By illustrating how the CAF achieves these ideals in recruiting messaging it follows that the CAF would be more appealing to work for. To do this it must develop a marketing strategy that emphasizes these values and promotes them using mediums and in locations that will be visible to the target audience.

To look at the existing marketing strategy of the CAF it is worth reading an article published by The Royal United Services Institute of Nova Scotia produced a paper

⁵ National Defence. (2021, 05 25). Department of National Defence and Canadian Forces Code of Values and Ethics. Retrieved from Canada.ca: <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/benefits-military/defence-ethics/policies-publications/code-value-ethics.html>

*Recruiting and Retention in the Canadian Armed Forces*⁶ that assessed the current recruiting strategy of the CAF. While the paper has its flaws, it does identify two key points that are relevant to the discussion. The first discusses the difference between marketing and advertising while the second identifies a significant hurdle in recruiting.

“Marketing is usually defined as everything an organization does to facilitate an exchange between itself and its clients, (i.e., the sum total of all impressions of the organization), and advertising is just one part of the impressions that must be managed.”⁷ This quote emphasizes what must happen to reach the recruiting targets. The CAF through policy initiatives outlined in Strong Secure and Engaged⁸ shows that it is putting money and resources into making the CAF more family and soldier friendly; however the CAF fails in advertising in a way that promotes these policies and relies on a more passive approach. While the old attitude of placing a recruiting centre in a well populated area and wait for people to walk in the door may have worked in the past it does not work now. The CAF needs to be more proactive in targeted recruiting, as an example, inviting females from the local Cross Fit gym to the CAF fitness test would be a fun group activity that would illustrate that they are physically capable of joining.

In regard to the old recruiting office, this brings us to the second notable point in the article where it states “It is interesting to note that the hours of operation of most Recruiting Centres are 0900 – 1600 hours Monday to Friday.”⁹ The paper points out that

⁶ Young, E. (2021, 05 25). Recruiting and Retention in the Canadian Armed Forces. Retrieved from The Royal United Services Institute of Nova Scotia: <https://rusi-ns.ca/recruiting-and-retention-in-the-canadian-armed-forces/>

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Department of National Defence. (2017). Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy. Ottawa: Department of National Defence.

⁹ Young, E. (2021, 05 25).

the CAF recruiting centres make convenient hours for those that work there but fail to accommodate those people in school or who work during the day. This rigidity in accommodating applicants reduces access, further diminishing access to potential recruits.

In summary for this section, it is important that the CAF develop and implement a proactive marketing strategy that uses targeted advertising to promote shared values with millennial women. In addition, recruiting options must be easily accessible, removing existing hurdles to enrollment.

“Law is not law, if it violates the principles of eternal justice.” Lydia Maria Child

Currently the CAF is awash in scandal concerning senior leaders and allegations of sexual misconduct.¹⁰ Sadly sexual misconduct is not new to the CAF, however it has never been so visible. Understanding sexual misconduct within the CAF and putting it into context would require more space than this paper will allow. For the purposes of this paper, it is important to understand that sexual misconduct occurs within all levels of the CAF, that the CAF has had limited success in addressing this misconduct and that to change the perception that there is no justice for those guilty of sexual misconduct the CAF needs to take certain steps.

The Deschamps report *External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harrassment in the Canadian Armed Forces*¹¹ laid bare the issues the CAF were having

¹⁰ Ljunggren, D. (2021, 05 25). A few good women: Canada taps female generals amid military misconduct cases. Retrieved from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/few-good-women-canada-taps-female-generals-amid-military-misconduct-cases-2021-05-19/>

¹¹ Deschamps, M. (2015). External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harrassment in the Canadian Armed Forces. Ottawa: External Review Authority.

in regards to sexual misconduct within the CAF. Marie Deschamps was explicit when she wrote "...there is an underlying sexualized culture in the CAF that is hostile to women and LGBTQ members, and conducive to more serious incidents of sexual harassment and assault."¹² In placing this front and centre of the executive summary she took the first big step in dealing with any problem, identifying that there is a problem.

Since the report was published it has been the driving force of change within the CAF with mixed results. Within the report are 10 recommendations that were meant to address the issue and changing the culture as it was. Also included in the report was the warning "It is not enough to simply revise policies or to repeat the mantra of "zero tolerance". Leaders must acknowledge that sexual misconduct is a real and serious problem for the organization, one that requires their own direct and sustained attention."¹³ The recent sexual misconduct allegations illustrate how well leadership within the CAF heeded that warning.

This is relevant to this paper as the report and subsequent actions have all played out in the public sphere and greatly affect peoples perceptions of the Canadian Armed forces. More specifically women's perceptions of the CAF and its reactions to the report. Since the report the general public has seen news headlines concerning misconduct but much less focus of initiatives such as Operation Honour¹⁴ and little to no visibility on accountability for those of have been found guilty of sexual misconduct.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 1

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Vance, G. J. (2015, 08 14). CDS Op Order - Op HONOUR. CDS Op Order - Op HONOUR. Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: Department of National Defence.

The combined impact is that the CAF is not living up to those vaunted ethics mentioned earlier in the paper. Canadian women are not seeing the CAF as a place they would feel safe and comfortable working in. This is a pivotal time for the CAF and how it reacts will determine whether or not the CAF will be able to reach 25% by 2026.

To make it through and enact the change the CAF needs in order to become better it should consider the following suggestions; own the issue, re-visit the 10 recommendations from the Deschamp report and use targeted peer pressure to affect social norms.

Marie Deschamps first recommendation was “Acknowledge that inappropriate sexual conduct is a serious problem that exists in the CAF and undertake to address it.”¹⁵ The CAF acknowledged the issue however it did not internalize and address the issue as it should have. This was recently elaborated on by DND Deputy Minister Jody Thomas when she stated "It was not given the oversight it needed by the civilian part of the department, so my side of the department in terms of monitoring".¹⁶ This was further reinforced by the quote ““I think that as little was done as possible to make it look like the report had been responded to without any real change. No structural change, no legislative change, no outside the department, outside the Canadian Armed Forces reporting — those kinds of things that Madame Deschamps emphasized.”¹⁷ The CAF does not appear to be contrite in the eyes of the public. In order to really take the first step it must in a sincere way acknowledge and own the issue.

¹⁵ (Deschamps, 2015) p. ix

¹⁶ Burke, A. (2021, 05 25). Ottawa failed to properly implement sexual misconduct report, top Defence civil servant says. Retrieved from CBC: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/dnd-deputy-minister-sexual-misconduct-report-1.6037364>

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Once the CAF recognizes that it must act in a meaningful and transparent way then it needs to enact the rest of the recommendations and ensure that the process is integrated within the system. Creating the oversight and avenues of support is required and with that comes the responsibility to educate the soldiers beyond a PowerPoint on a training night for reserves or a once a year briefing for the regular forces. Soldiers must have a constant reminder of the tools available. This will be a benefit two fold, the first is to let people know what supports and processes are available and the second is to let the CAF as a whole know the importance of this stronger new stance. The topic of education introduces the final suggestion in how to address the public perceptions concerning justice in the CAF with regard to sexual misconduct.

In her article *Peer pressure against prejudice: A high school field experiment examining social network change*¹⁸ Elizabeth Levy Paluck studies the effects of peer pressure as it relates to social change. It illustrates the social change that can take place by targeted peer pressure. Using Paluck's findings and combining them with lessons learned from Alan D. Berkowitz and his paper *An Overview of the Social Norms Approach*¹⁹ the CAF with assistance could develop a policy that would encourage social pressure to enact real change as in regards to attitudes towards sexual misconduct.

Cultural change is required and it will take more than mandatory briefings and the establishment of toothless departments to enact it. In this section the key points include understanding the importance of acknowledging that sexual misconduct is a real issue

¹⁸ Levy Paluck, E. (2011, 03). Peer pressure against prejudice: A high school field experiment examining social network change. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, pp. 350-358.

¹⁹ Berkowitz, A. D. (2005). *An Overview of the Social Norms Approach*. In L. S. L. Lederman, *Changing the Culture of College Drinking: A Socially Situated Prevention Campaign* (p. Ch 13). New York: Hampton Press.

within the CAF that is not going away, that Marie Dechamps 10 recommendations need to be embraced and that there exists frameworks that will assist in enacting real cultural change.

“When we strive to become better than we are, everything around us becomes better too.” Paulo Coelho

In the first section of the paper the topic of messaging was discussed to entice millennial women to join the CAF. Emphasis was placed on understand the values of the desired recruits and ensuring advertising illustrated how values within the CAF aligned. This section addresses the work cultural within the CAF to see what elements align and what elements might need to evolve in order to recruit not only women but more people into the CAF.

As with the first section it is important to understand what millennials are looking for, in this section that is as it relates to a workplace culture. Reading Karen K. Myers and Kamyab Sadaghiani article *Millennials in the Workplace: A Communication Perspective on Millennials’ Organizational Relationships and Performance*²⁰ provides good insight into this very topic. Specifically the section on “Millennials’ Expectations, Communication, and Team Relationships”. There are three expectations that should be understood.

The first concerns expectations in regard to relationships, “Millennials expect close relationships and frequent feedback from supervisors”²¹ aligns well with rank

²⁰ Karen K. Myers, K. S. (2010, 03 05). Millennials in the Workplace: A Communication Perspective on Millennials’ Organizational Relationships and Performance. Journal of Business and Psychology, pp. 225-238.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 229

structure and professional development review (PDR's) embraced by the CAF. Anyone who has served can not deny that shared hardship through training or deployment tightens relationships. These close relationships and teamwork provide supervisors with information to provide constructive feedback verbally or through the PDR process. While the PDR process is not perfect and can sometimes be treated as an exercise in using formulas it provides a tool to engage in the types of feed back that is of importance to millennial women as identified by Myers and Sadaghiani.

The second identified key is in regard to communication "A second important communication issue for Millennials entering the workplace is their desire for open communication, and lots of it—again, more so than newcomers from previous generational cohorts..."²² This is an issue that requires further study to determine a way to evolve the CAFs preferred method of communication is more "need-to-know basis" [22]. Sharing of information within a sub-unit wouldn't be an issue, however questioning a superiors reasoning and justification for any given action is not something the current structure is built to support.

Finally the last key according to the article is that "Millennials prefer to work in teams, in part because they perceive group-based work to be more fun, but also because they like to avoid risk."²³ As millennials enter the CAF this aligns very well as it is not until they are several years in do they start being counted on for any leadership role, even then there are peers to lean on and work with. This appears to be a sure fit, however it is important to understand that until we embrace cultural change in the CAF as it relates to

²² *Ibid.* p. 229

²³ *Ibid.*

sexual misconduct this ideal will not match the reality that female soldiers currently face in the CAF.

In this section it is important to understand that workplace expectations of female millennials do not differ greatly from the existing work place culture within the CAF and that they will only be improved by embracing the cultural shift identified in the second section of this paper.

“Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.” James Baldwin

The topic of this paper ‘Recruitment and retention of women in the CAF’ is broad and deserves in depth study and discussion at all levels. This paper has identified three key issues that exist and need to be addressed if the CAF is to achieve the Federal government’s goal of comprising 25% women by 2026. The identified issues included a robust marketing strategy that aligned with female millennials, addressing the current public perception of the CAFs attitude towards sexual misconduct by embracing Marie Deschamps 10 recommendations and ensuring that the CAF provides a workplace culture that resonates with millennials. None of the issues will be easy to resolve.

Realistically it is unclear if the CAF will meet the desired recruiting targets, however, in trying to enact these changes it will become a better institution. Failure to understand the demographic you are looking to attract, failure to show Canada that as an institution it believes in showing justice for sexual assault victims and failure to adapt to changing workplace culture will result in just plain failure.

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