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Doing Better: Closing the Commitment-Credibility Gap

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JCSP 48

Exercise Solo Flight

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CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE – COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES

JCSP 48 – PCEMI 48

2021 – 2022

Exercise Solo Flight – Exercice Solo Flight

Doing Better: Closing the Commitment-Credibility Gap

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DOING BETTER: CLOSING THE COMMITMENT- CREDIBILITY GAP

INTRODUCTION

To say that the last few years have been a challenging time for the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) as an institution and its membership would perhaps be an understatement. Recent dramatic and very public events include repeated announcements of investigations into senior leadership behaviour which coincided with the CAF/DND sexual misconduct lawsuit settlement, public scrutiny of the military justice system¹ and the scathing departure of a highly respected senior female officer in March 2021, LCol Eleanor Taylor². With the organization still reeling, apologizing and recalibrating, the very recently released final report by the Minister of National Defence (MND) that identifies continued systemic racism and discrimination in the DND/CAF environment, six years after the Deschamps report released its distressing findings regarding sexual misconduct, is yet one more indicator that something may not be working³.

The MND final report on systemic racism and discrimination within the CAF/DND environment suggests in its preamble that “it’s time to be uncomfortable”⁴. There are many for whom their state of comfort within the organization has been a result of ignorance of the origins of our collective racism and discrimination. There are others for whom their state of comfort and

¹ Canada. Morris Fish, C.C., Q.C. Report of the Third Independent Review Authority to the Minister of National Defence. June 2021. <https://military-justice.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Third-Independent-Report-Fish.pdf>. Accessed 22 April 2022.

² Scott Taylor. Esprit De Corps magazine. 22 March 2021. <http://espritdecorps.ca/on-target-4/on-target-senior-female-officer-quits-the-caf-in-disgust-lcol-eleanor-taylor>. Accessed 22 April 2022.

³ Canada. Minister of National Defence Advisory Panel on Systemic Racism and Discrimination Final Report. January 2022. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/mnd-advisory-panel-systemic-racism-discrimination-final-report-jan-2022.html>. Accessed 27 April 2022.

⁴ Ibid., 10.

defence of the status quo is related to their ability to wield power indiscriminately and inappropriately with no counterbalance or oversight⁵. Collective acknowledgement of just how deep-seated and systemic racism and discrimination is within the Defence Team is critical as this will force the uncomfortable change activity that is required. In the article “Changing the Way We Change”, Richard Pascale et al posit that slow or ineffective change is not the result of failed programs or initiatives to instill changes in corporate culture, it is often the result of too few people who assume the responsibility or burden of change, often due to the fear of having to give up power or control⁶. Others posit that slow institutional change is attributable to “second-generation” (or implicit) bias that continues to pervade many male-dominated institutions, resulting in minimal advancement or effective integration of women⁷.

Despite numerous theories and endless corresponding recommendations from experts in all fields, one cannot help but wonder why it is taking so long to effect meaningful cultural change and genuine integration of women into the CAF, despite having commenced efforts more than half a century ago. This paper will explore the question of whether the CAF is afflicted by a commitment-credibility gap: a stated commitment to changing its culture and becoming more inclusive but plagued by a credibility deficit due to ineffective attempts to change and progress. This is not to dismiss the numerous efforts by many within the organization to promote quality change but rather meant to be a conversation about whether we have allowed ourselves to become *uncomfortable* enough to truly let go of centuries of ingrained behaviours and beliefs. To focus the exploration, this paper will look at some residual barriers faced by women in the CAF,

⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁶ Richard Pascale, Mark Millemann, Linda Gioja. Changing the Way We Change. Harvard Business Review. Accessed 24 April 2022. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Richard-Pascale-2/publication/13122913_Changing_the_way_we_change/links/00b4953a3f861e4318000000/Changing-the-way-we-change.pdf

⁷ Cynthia S. Kubu, "Who does She Think She is? Women, Leadership and the 'B'(I)as Word," *Clinical Neuropsychologist* 32, no. 2 (2018), 242. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13854046.2017.1418022>

both structural and ideological, to full gender integration and culture reform. Limited by the scope of this paper, the examples are obviously not exhaustive but rather meant to emphasize the often overlooked and highly detrimental barriers that can reduce women's effectiveness in combat, their general health and well-being and their sense of belonging within the organization.

THE INTEGRATION OBSTACLE COURSE

In his 2016 article titled "*Biases of the Incumbents – what if we were integrating men into an all women's army?*", Col Karl Friedl (U.S Army, Retired) forces the reader to consider an alternate reality to demonstrate both the challenges still currently faced by women in the military and the benefits of investing in diversity. Perhaps the epitome of science fiction, he looks at the challenges of fitting male form and features into a hypothetical woman-shaped, woman-designed military institution. For starters, he identifies that more than half of male applicants would be deemed not be suitable for service "if they had to fit into equipment and crew compartments designed to accommodate the weight, height and sitting height of the 95th percentile woman."⁸. He continued with a tongue-in-cheek assessment the logistical challenges of planning for men's increased food consumption, the added consideration of their external (and therefore more vulnerable) reproductive organs during combat and in environments of extreme heat, and the costs associated with stocking a wider range of equipment sizes.

While this parody may seem comically absurd to half of the world's population (men), it is much less so to the other half (women) who still face similar barriers to full integration⁹. Friedl goes on to ponder whether the women's military should even be expected to manage the social behaviours that will inevitably surface, specifically incidents of sexual assault and sexual

⁸Karl Friedl. Biases of the Incumbents - what if we were integrating men into an all women's army? Accessed 27 April 2022. file:///Users/colleengrebstad/Downloads/MilReview2016BiasesoftheIncumbents%20(1).pdf

⁹ Ibid., 3.

harassment, by integrating men into the institution. He concedes that they should be barred from entry in this hypothetical scenario as it would just cause too much disruption to the established institutional cohesion and the status quo¹⁰. His work of fiction has a familiar ring to it.

This flipped script is certainly an entertaining read but it is also sufficiently injected with evidence-based data to make the reader think critically about the continued struggles experienced by many militaries trying to achieve genuine gender integration. In the CAF context, the challenges associated with recruitment and retention of women in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) are not new, nor are the efforts put forward by leadership to try and rectify what seem like recurring issues related to institutional culture and inclusion. For the better part of half of a century, the CAF has been making efforts to develop a more diverse workforce that better reflects Canadian society. At times, the requirement to change has been imposed on the institution, such as the recommendations in the Report on the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada in 1970¹¹ and the Deschamps Report of 2015¹². At other times the institution has expressed a desire for change from within as evidenced numerous internal departmental instructions and new policies such as *The Path to Dignity and Respect: The Canadian Armed Forces Strategy to Address Sexual Misconduct*, released in 2020 and identified as a longer-term complement to Op Honour¹³. However, despite a plethora of policy clarification, personnel

¹⁰ Ibid., 5.

¹¹ Canada. Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada. Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada. Ottawa: 1970. Accessed 23 April 2022. <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.699583/publication.html>

¹² Canada. Department of National Defence. External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces. Ottawa: Deschamps, External Review Authority, 27 March 2015, 102 p. Accessed 23 April 2022. <https://www.canada.ca/en/departement-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/sexual-misbehaviour/external-review-2015.html>

¹³ Canada. Department of National Defence. The Path to Dignity and Respect: The Canadian Armed Forces Strategy to Address Sexual Misconduct, (2020). Accessed 23 April 2022. <https://www.canada.ca/en/departement-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/the-path-to-dignity-and-respect.html>

instructions, public statements by leaders and mandatory training requirements, the CAF's culture and degree of diversity continue to be topics of discussion, media attention and concern. In an era where many militaries teeter on the edge of operational readiness due to recruitment, retention, procurement and morale issues, perhaps it is time to acknowledge that the comfortable responses to address culture change that we have heavily relied on in the past are simply not working. Inappropriate behaviour continues to plague the institution and the barriers to genuine integration of women into the CAF persist. These barriers are structural, as evidenced in building¹⁴ and equipment design¹⁵. They are ideological and rooted in a long-established culture bred from an environment of hegemonic masculinity, as evidenced by continued occurrences of inappropriate behaviour, destructive othering¹⁶ and biased messaging. As suggested by Buckle and Thomas, "while the historical dominance of men in organizations is no longer the case, the dominance of masculinity in most workplaces remains,"¹⁷. Research has demonstrated that this poses a unique barrier to women in highly masculine professional environments where masculinity and leadership are inextricably linked. Often referred to as a "double-bind" challenge, women are likely to experience bias when they fail to conform to stereotypical gender behaviours frequently associated with femininity, such as warmth, nurturing and kindness¹⁸. In this common scenario, women who demonstrate decisiveness or assertiveness are judged for

¹⁴ Matti Siemiatycki, Theresa Enright and Mariana Valverde, "The Gendered Production of Infrastructure," *Progress in Human Geography* 44, no. 2 (2020), 7. <https://doi-org.cfc.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0309132519828458>

¹⁵ Celeste E. Coltman et al. Are Female Soldiers Satisfied with the Fit and Function of Body Armour? *Applied Ergonomics* 89 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apergo.2020.103197>

¹⁶ Stephanie Paterson, "What's the Problem with Gender-Based Analysis? Gender Mainstreaming Policy and Practice in Canada," *Canadian Public Administration* 53, no. 3 (2010), 409. <https://doi-org.cfc.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/j.1754-7121.2010.00134.x>

¹⁷ Pamela Buckle and Janice Thomas, "Deconstructing Project Management: A Gender Analysis of Project Management Guidelines," *International Journal of Project Management* 6, no. 21 (2003), 434. <https://asset-pdf.scinapse.io/prod/2078501367/2078501367.pdf>

¹⁸ Cynthia Kubu, "Who does She Think She is? Women, Leadership and the 'B'(las) Word," 243. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13854046.2017.1418022>

being unfeminine but when women conform to socially expected behaviours, they are deemed not capable of leadership¹⁹. Not a visible or structural barrier but an ideological one that is unique to women and which has been demonstrated to negatively influence performance assessments, career progression and job satisfaction²⁰.

Barriers to integration do not occur in isolation nor are they simply random occurrences. They are the result of an institution that has only been required to understand, accommodate and employ one gender for most of its existence. While great strides have been made toward creating a more inclusive institution, the CAF is still in nascent stages of genuine change and cannot afford to assume otherwise. Collectively, we are still working our way through the integration obstacle course.

ONE SIZE FITS SOME

The earliest Canadian militia units date back to the 17th century in New France, comprised of adult males, for the purpose of defending the newly colonized territory from the Indigenous population or from American militia invasions²¹. Over the centuries since, Canada's military evolved into the institution we recognize today and it remains one that was designed for men, by men. In fairness, this is true of countless other social institutions. The result, however, of a world (or military) designed by men and for men is that women are left to assimilate.

In her book, *Invisible Women*, Caroline Criado Perez shines light on the myriad social inequities that result from a seemingly bottomless gendered data void that exists throughout modern society. Always frustrating and sometimes deadly, she expertly draws attention to the

¹⁹ Ibid., 243.

²⁰ Shelley J. Correll et al., "Inside the Black Box of Organizational Life: The Gendered Language of Performance Assessment," *American Sociological Review* 85, no. 6 (2020), 1044-1046. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0003122420962080>

²¹ Jason Ridler et al. History of the Armed Forces in Canada. The Canadian Encyclopedia. Accessed 21 April 2022. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/history-of-the-armed-forces-in-canada>

consequences of not considering women's needs, patterns, bodies and work in urban planning, building design, health care delivery, scientific research and public policy development²². She also brings statistical life to a hard truth that is often overlooked and undervalued – the extent of unpaid work done by women across all sectors of society, regardless of race, nationality, socioeconomic tier, education or age²³. Unpaid work includes anything from childcare to domestic work to eldercare. According to Criado Perez, two decades of studies have demonstrated that “75% of unpaid work is done by women” and this is irrespective of their contribution to household income – in other words, even if a woman is the primary income earner, she still completes more unpaid work than her partner²⁴. “Service before self” takes on new meaning in this light as data suggests that women tend to serve others before self at alarming rates and to the detriment of their own well-being. While not a gender issue expected to be solved by the CAF, it is a worthy statistic to at least acknowledge.

In 2017, through the release of Canada's newest defence policy *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, the CAF was directed (in writing) to achieve a 25.1% target of women in uniform by 2026²⁵. While the number of women in the CAF appears to be increasing slowly and attrition rates remain steady²⁶, there is still reason to be concerned about meeting the target of 25.1% by 2026 despite the plethora of recruitment and retention initiatives both in existence and yet to come, as identified by LGen Lise Bourgon in a recent article exploring attraction and recruitment of

²² Caroline Criado Perez. *Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*. Abrams Press (2019), 70.

²³ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

²⁵ Canada, Department of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy*. (2017). <https://go.exlibris.link/39VFdhZJ>.

²⁶ House Committee on National Defence March 12 and April 6, 2021. Accessed 26 April 2022. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/proactive-disclosure/nddn-march-12-april-6.html>

women into the CAF²⁷. If Criando Perez's work tells us anything, it's that continued efforts toward this goal must incorporate the concepts of intersectionality through the meticulous use of GBA+ analysis and supported whenever possible with sex disaggregated data²⁸. Doing so will assist in creating policies and practices that move the organization in the right direction. Failing to do so may perpetuate the perception of commitment-credibility gap that will plague the CAF for years to come.

IT'S BROKE SO LET'S FIX IT

Gender traditionally refers to the social labelling or assigning of masculine or feminine characteristics to an individual in any given society²⁹. Because it is a socially designed concept, it is also influenced by hegemonic tendencies and power imbalances which result in inequalities especially when considered alongside other factors like age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and sexual orientation (to name a few)³⁰. When examined within the context of an institution like the CAF, that is purposely hierarchical and one that highly values masculine traits, the inequities are often amplified. Gender integration and diversity initiatives have the potential to promote transformational change within an institution such as the CAF. However, to do so, they require uncomfortable, introspective analyses and subsequent meaningful actions to understand and then dissolve the unhealthy and outdated institutional norms that have potentially played a key role in preventing genuine gender integration³¹. Numerous authors highlight the challenges and risks associated with institutions using diversity programs as a mechanism to publicly project an

²⁷ Lise Bourgon, "The CAF Path Towards its 25.1% Employment Equity Objective: A Look through the Lenses of Attraction and Recruitment," *Canadian Military Journal* 22, no. 1 (2021). <https://go.exlibris.link/4v7CDDFs>.

²⁸ Caroline Criado Perez, *Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*. Abrams Press (2019), 309.

²⁹ Rhoda K. Unger, "Toward a Redefinition of Sex and Gender," *American Psychologist* 34, no. 11 (1979), 1086. <https://doi-org.cfc.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/0003-066X.34.11.1085>.

³⁰ World Health Organization. Gender and Health. https://www.who.int/health-topics/gender#tab=tab_1; accessed 15 April 2022.

³¹ Erica Gabrielle Foldy, "'Managing' diversity: Identity and Power in Organizations," in *Gender, Identity and the Culture of Organizations*. Routledge, 2003), 108.

appearance of progressiveness by relying on (rather than dismantling) entrenched power imbalances and inherent privilege to maintain the status quo³². In their book, *Sexing the Soldier*, Woodward and Winter argue that the British Army's shift toward "diversity management" and embracing social differences only served to further conceal the underlying power imbalances and institutional inequalities that originally contributed to the disadvantaging of minority groups³³. In other words, they caution using gender inclusive practices or diversity strategies solely as a business case to increase operational effectiveness and improve public perception as this can shift "all attention away from the fact that the construction of difference is itself a social practice, rooted in unequal power relations and discriminatory practice", making it even more difficult to address the real sources of inequality³⁴.

Also highlighting the challenges of achieving deep and meaningful culture change, Brown and Okros suggest that the CAF has struggled to properly identify or accurately define the true "problem" associated with its current culture – focusing erroneously on the problematic individual rather than the institution as a whole³⁵. In other words, practices that target individuals and their behaviours will fall short in addressing the real pathology found within the DNA of the institution. They go on to identify that the comfortable response to address a behavioural issue within the institution has been to target the problematic member, with solution emphasis placed on updating and clarifying long-standing institutional policy, creating new policy, and/or providing more training opportunities designed for individual consumption in the hopes of

³² Ibid., 111.

³³ Rachel Woodward, Trish Winter. *Sexing the Soldier: The politics of gender and the contemporary British Army*. Routledge, London (2007), p. 52.

³⁴ Ibid., 52.

³⁵ Vanessa Brown, Alan Okros. *Shifting the Spotlight: Institutional and structural contributors to unprofessional conduct in the military*, pg. 11. In "Team Diversity and Inclusion in Defence and Security: International Perspectives". Barbara T. Waruszynski, Yantsislav Yanakiev, Daniel P. McDonald Eds. Springer Publishing (TBD).

altering individual behaviours rather than the archaic institutional norms³⁶. Opportunities that foster deeper learning through group discussion, self-reflection, and sharing of personal experiences should be prioritized, forming part of daily work schedules as opposed to being added or squeezed into them.

A PATH TOWARDS INCLUSIVITY

The MND's 2022 final report on Systemic Racism and Discrimination in DND/CAF explicitly identifies the importance of a defence team that is representative of the diversity seen in the Canadian population throughout all level of the organization³⁷. Given the rapidly evolving demographics of the Canadian population, it is critical that citizens are able to personally relate to the public image projected by the CAF to foster both faith in the institution and public legitimacy³⁸. However, enhancing the diversity of an organization doesn't end with a successful recruiting campaign. Inclusion must follow and it must persist. Inclusion involves celebrating differences and ensuring they become part of the fabric of the organization, not defaulting to assimilation or the more comfortable homogeneity of days gone by³⁹. Once enrolled, the CAF must ensure that members do not face barriers to genuine integration throughout their careers. Yet despite numerous advances and efforts to integrate women into the military environment over the past several decades, there remain numerous structural, institutional and ideological barriers to genuine integration. Any military institution is one that has been designed by and for men. From infrastructure to equipment to operations to education, every aspect of a military's physical

³⁶ Ibid., 3.

³⁷ Canada. Minister of National Defence Advisory Panel on Systemic Racism and Discrimination Final Report. January 2022. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/mnd-advisory-panel-systemic-racism-discrimination-final-report-jan-2022.html>. Accessed 27 April 2022, p. v.

³⁸ Rupinder Mangat, Momani & Edgar. *Unpacking Diversity and Inclusion*. In Strengthening the Canadian Armed Forces Through Diversity and Inclusion. Alistair Edgar, Rupinder Mangat and Bessma Momani (eds). University of Toronto Press: Toronto, Canada (2020). E-book. Pg.28.

³⁹ Ibid., 38.

environment and culture took root from a highly gendered perspective – a perspective that designed the institution around the typical male body and male needs. While policy and regulation gradually removed *occupational* barriers for women in the military, women are still trying to fit their bodies and minds into a male-shaped institution. The following examples demonstrate the importance of using gender-based frameworks for policy development, procurement and health care to avoid the perception of a commitment-credibility gap by the CAF.

For well over a century, women have been active, uniformed members of Canadian militias and the Armed Forces, initially recruited to serve as nurses on the front lines during the Northwest Rebellion in 1885⁴⁰. This paved the way for continued enlistment opportunities during both World Wars, typically serving as nurses, cooks and clerks⁴¹. Although not permitted to participate in direct combat roles for most of the 20th century, women in uniform still faced great danger with more than sixty nurses killed in action during the First World War alone⁴². Despite this extensive history of dedicated service, women still face challenges integrating into a military designed for the male form. Considering the CAF's stated intention to "do better"⁴³, the following are three examples of areas that could add credibility to that commitment and elevate public statements from rhetoric to meaningful action.

A repeatedly identified source of concern and frustration among women in most militaries is ill-fitting uniforms and personal protective equipment. Not only does poor fitting

⁴⁰ Barbara T. Waruszynski et al., "Women Serving in the Canadian Armed Forces: Strengthening Military Capabilities and Operational Effectiveness," *Canadian Military Journal* 19, no. 2 (2019), 25.

⁴¹ Women in the Canadian Military. Canadian War Museum. Accessed 25 April 2022. <https://www.warmuseum.ca/learn/women-in-the-canadian-military/#:~:text=Women%20have%20served%20in%20the,of%20Canadian%20Armed%20Forces%20personnel>.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ CDS Message to the Defence Team. 25 November 2021. <https://www.canada.ca/en/departement-national-defence/maple-leaf/defence/2021/11/cds-message-defence-team.html>. Accessed 26 April 2022.

clothing and equipment represent a challenge to comfort, range of motion and efficiency, it can prove harmful or even lethal⁴⁴. Brown and Okros define “assimilation” as one group of individuals demonstrating most of the effort to fit into the larger system while the second group make little adjustment whatsoever⁴⁵. Having no other option but to wear whatever men’s size fits best is one of the more obvious examples of women being forced to assimilate. In examining the effects of ill-fitting protective equipment from a biomechanical perspective it quickly becomes evident that women are at greater risk of significant musculoskeletal injuries and decreased operational effectiveness when wearing ill-fitting equipment⁴⁶. This is an issue across many militaries attempting to recruit and retain more women. In Australia, a 2020 study found that 68% of female Australian Defence Force (ADF) soldiers reported having to wear ill-fitting equipment which resulted in increased musculoskeletal pain, repetitive strain injuries as well as challenges in carrying out essential operational tasks⁴⁷. Similarly, a study conducted by the UK Ministry of Defence in 2012 surveyed 150 female soldiers issued the Osprey body armour while on operations in Afghanistan and found that discomfort related to fit, challenges performing certain movements and inability to access other necessary equipment (pockets, pouches, etc.) were experienced⁴⁸.

In February of 2017, an inspiring young female Officer Cadet (OCdt) from the Royal Military College of Canada was provided the opportunity to bring this concern directly to the

⁴⁴ Barbara T. Waruszynski, "Women Serving in the Canadian Armed Forces: Strengthening Military Capabilities and Operational Effectiveness," *Canadian Military Journal* 19, no. 2 (2019), 32.

⁴⁵ Kellie Wilson-Buford, *Culture and the Soldier: Identities, Values, and Norms in Military Engagements* (Vancouver; Toronto: UBC Press, 2019), 37. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/culture-soldier-identities-values-norms-military/docview/2476868627/se-2?accountid=9867>

⁴⁶ Department of National Defence. 5th International Conference on Soldiers’ Physical Performance (Book of Abstracts 2020), 90 & 306.

⁴⁷ Celeste Colman, Celeste E et al. Are Female Soldiers Satisfied with the Fit and Function of Body Armour? *Applied Ergonomics* 89 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apergo.2020.103197>

⁴⁸ James Ian Davis, E. Lewis, J.R. Ellett. A Fit and Function Analysis of the UK OSPREY Body Armour System for Female Users. *BMJ Mil Health*. 2020; 0; 1. Epub ahead of print. Accessed 13 April 2022.

then-Chief of Defence staff, General Jonathan Vance. While her question was eloquent, direct and accurately reflective of this ongoing problem, the response she received from the CAF's most senior leader at the time was less than eloquent and arguably bordering on patronizing⁴⁹. Five years later, women in the CAF still patiently wait for a wider range of sizing options for the most basic of protective equipment. To that young OCdt, the commitment may have sounded genuine as the then-CDS acknowledged her concerns, told her she was right and then directed the Chief of the Army who was in the audience to "do better"⁵⁰. Five years later and now a Captain, perhaps she is questioning the credibility of that commitment to "do better".

A second opportunity to demonstrate a credible commitment to the genuine integration of women into the CAF could present itself in a closer evaluation of the CAF medical specialist occupation. Around the globe, health care is also inflicted with gender biases⁵¹ and a health care system designed to operate in a military environment is potentially even more prone to gender inequities. Not only do men and women have different health care needs, but they will also present with different symptoms for the same illness, they will experience different challenges in accessing care and they may even prioritize their health needs differently⁵².

Currently, the CAF trains and employs specialized medical officers from approximately seven areas including orthopaedics, radiology, anesthesiology, psychiatry, general surgery, internal medicine and physiatry⁵³. While these specialties certainly augment health care services

⁴⁹ CBC News. Canada's top General is asked about getting equipment fitted especially for women. 17 February 2017. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/vance-conference-question-sanfacon-1.3989588>. Accessed 15 March 2022.

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Caroline Criado Perez. *Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*. Abrams Press (2019), 196.

⁵² Lauren Suchman et al., "Bridging the Gap with a Gender Lens: How Two Implementation Research Datasets were Repurposed to Inform Health Policy Reform in Kenya," *Health Policy and Planning* 35, no. Supplement_2 (2020), ii66-ii73. <https://doi-org.cfc.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/heapol/czaa117>

⁵³ Canada. Health Services Attraction & Recruitment. Accessed 27 April 2022. <http://cmp-cpm.mil.ca/en/health/attraction-retention/ar-beta.page>

to members both at home and on deployment, there is perhaps one glaring omission for an institution striving to make itself more reflective of modern society – obstetrics and gynecology (OBGYN). It is a specialty that extends far beyond the birthing process and encompasses a wide variety of health care offerings such as pelvic and reproductive health, pre- and post-natal care, menopausal care, breast health and numerous other concerns frequently experienced by women. Consideration should be given to expanding the specialist cadre of medical officers to better reflect the (slowly) growing number of women in uniform. Not only would this potentially produce tangible benefits such as faster access to specialized care for uniformed women and less reliance on civilian health care systems but more importantly, it would demonstrate that women's health issues matter enough to have employable and *deployable* women's health specialists. Given that research has shown that sex differences exist in virtually “every tissue and organ system in the body”⁵⁴, ultimately affecting diagnosis, treatment and outcomes of patient care, uniformed OBGYNs would lend significant credibility to the CAF's stated commitment to culture change and increased representation and integration of women.

A recent report from the US military examined women's health care in the deployed setting between 2013 and 2020. Evidence from numerous studies collected over this timeframe strongly pointed to a need for US servicewomen to have “continuous access to gynecologic care during deployment”⁵⁵. The same report identified incidences of delayed notification of abnormal cervical screening results resulting in delayed treatment, often due to frequent postings, deployments and training missions where access to gynecological services was insufficient or

⁵⁴ Caroline Criado Perez. *Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*. Abrams Press (2019), 198.

⁵⁵ Lynette Hamlin and Amanda Banaag, "Women's Health Care in the Deployed Setting 2013-2020: A Health Services Research Approach," *Military Medicine* (2022), 2. <https://doi.org/10.1093/milmed/usac025> Accessed 27 April 2022.

absent altogether⁵⁶. Highly pertinent 2019 research by Trego and Wilson (US military focus) argues that “military culture influences women’s health status and health behaviours”⁵⁷. They contend that the personal identities of women who join the military are modified because of assimilating into military culture⁵⁸. They suggest that through assimilation, values such as commitment, loyalty and service before self, while critical elements of unlimited liability, can also negatively affect personal decisions related to health care by influencing servicewomen to put the needs of the organization or the mission before their own⁵⁹. Given that the majority of serving women in most militaries are of childbearing age, reproductive and female-centred health care availability, both domestically and in deployed settings, are important elements of force protection, operational readiness and wellbeing⁶⁰

Another (perhaps more unpopular or contested) area for culture reform would be a critical look at how the CAF communicates, internally to its members and externally to the public. Recent research has suggested that the not-so-subtle messaging that has long been the foundation of military indoctrination and continued professional development may be in tension with both society’s and uniformed members’ personal and professional expectations. The concept of “boss texts”, as proposed by Nancy Taber in 2009, suggest that there are highly gendered, biased and proscriptive messages forming the basis of many influential CAF documents and policies⁶¹. The messaging contained in some CAF communication serves, often unknowingly, to reinforce the image of the idealized warrior whom all members should strive to

⁵⁶ Ibid., 2.

⁵⁷ Lori L. Trego and Candy Wilson, "A Social Ecological Model for Military Women's Health," *Women's Health Issues* 31 (2021), 11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.whi.2020.12.006>. Accessed 27 April 2022.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 14.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 14.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 12.

⁶¹ Nancy Taber, "The Profession of Arms: Ideological Codes and Dominant Narratives of Gender in the Canadian Military," *Atlantis (Wolfville)* 34, no. 1 (2009), 27.

emulate – whether that image is truly reflective of military members’ reality or aspirations⁶². Dissecting terms such as “duty”, “honour” and “service before self”, she explores the impact of such messaging which serves to create a single shape (or uniform size) into which all should strive to fit, or else be deemed different or “unfit”⁶³. The language or narrative of an institution is deeply linked to its history, its culture and its values. Although actions are believed by many to speak louder, words still matter. The health care sector has become more cognisant of this in recent years, with much analysis surrounding unconscious bias in patient hospital records due to common but stigmatizing phrases like “drug-seeking”, “homeless”, “non-compliant” or “frequent-flyer”⁶⁴. Given that health care providers are expected to do no harm, it is not surprising that the once seemingly harmless language historically used in patient documentation and clinician education is gaining attention. Similarly, Taber’s analysis scrutinizes the publicly stated commitment by the CAF to recruit and integrate more women while questioning its credibility when viewed alongside the multitude of boss texts embedded within the day-to-day communication⁶⁵. It is not to suggest that the notion of a highly dedicated officer or soldier be tossed aside but in an era where service couples and dual-income families (often blended) form a substantial proportion of the CAF population, even subtle messaging that family comes second seems dangerously antiquated and makes for a less-than credible recruiting pitch.

CONCLUSION

With the face of operations, both domestically and abroad, shifting dramatically in the 21st century, it is more important than ever to ensure that employment opportunities remain

⁶² Ibid., 29.

⁶³ Ibid., 34.

⁶⁴ Anna Valdez. "Words matter: Labelling, bias and stigma in nursing." *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 77, no. 11 (2021): 34. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/jan.14967>. Accessed 28 April 2022.

⁶⁵ Nancy Taber, "The Profession of Arms: Ideological Codes and Dominant Narratives of Gender in the Canadian Military," 27

equitable, accessible and free from barriers to integration. If the CAF wishes to entice and retain a more diverse population of recruits and increase its numbers of women in uniform, continued focused efforts on eliminating all barriers to genuine integration must continue. It is not enough to simply say we must “do better”, there must be corresponding actions in the form of equity practices, equipment design, gender-sensitive services, inclusive communication and policy development to help dismantle the barriers to full integration that continue to exist within the institution. Failing to do so risks adding the perception of a commitment-credibility gap to the ever-expanding list of challenges currently faced by Canada’s military. Great strides have been made with respect to the integration and employment of women and diverse groups in the CAF. There is no doubt that a genuine desire to advance culture change and equity within the institution exists among many members. Many senior leaders as well as new enrollees demonstrate daily their commitment to this endeavour. However, culture change is not easy and for it to occur, it requires uncomfortable conversations and a permanent undoing of the status quo.

In writing this essay, I was privileged to speak with several CAF/DND employees who are deeply devoted to addressing culture change and assisting the institution to become a better reflection of Canadian society. Significant strides have indeed been made as evidenced by the numerous policy changes and updated personnel instructions over the past five years such as hair and dress policy revisions, the facilitation of breastfeeding and breastmilk pumping in the workplace, and significant research proposal initiatives, such as the Women Wellness Research Program that hopes to generate women’s wellness programs that span a woman’s entire career in the CAF, from recruitment to pregnancy to menopause⁶⁶. The institution is fortunate to have

⁶⁶ Tara Reilly and CFMWS. Women Wellness Program Research Proposal. 2022.

their insight and passion. In his address to the Defence Team in November 2021, General Wayne Eyre (CDS) spoke of the continued “crisis of confidence in leadership” because of the numerous failed attempts to affect culture change within the institution⁶⁷. This crisis of confidence is suggestive of not just an *existing* but a *growing* commitment-credibility gap, one that has the potential to reduce the institution to an ineffective, unhealthy and irrelevant state. Will better-fitting equipment, a more robust cadre of health care specialists or more inclusive language fix what ails the institution? Likely not. But ignoring things that demonstrate credible commitment will not help either. Ultimately, the CAF will survive its current crisis and women will still be gainfully employed in all areas of the institution when the storm subsides. What remains to be seen is how credible the numerous and explicit orders to “do better” truly are and whether we are ready to embrace the uncomfortableness of genuine change.

⁶⁷ CDS Message to the Defence Team. 25 November 2021. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/maple-leaf/defence/2021/11/cds-message-defence-team.html>. Accessed 26 April 2022.

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