



CHANGING ALCOHOL CULTURE IN THE CAF

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Exercise Solo Flight

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The hard part is going against groupthink, the herd mentality of our alcohol-saturated culture. After all, alcohol is the only drug on earth you have to justify not taking.

— Annie Grace, *This Naked Mind*

INTRODUCTION

In January 2023, the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction published *Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health: Final Report*. Within its technical summary, the report declares that “To make more informed decisions about alcohol use, people living in Canada must be aware of important information about alcohol and health, assess their personal risk and consider reducing their alcohol use.”¹ As Canadian society evolves towards a healthier perspective of alcohol, it is time for the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) to modernize its approach. This conversation is both timely and relevant as the CAF seeks to create, repair, and maintain a healthy culture.² As indicated by the CAF's Chief, Professional Conduct and Culture (CPCC) in December 2022, “What resulted in success in the past will not be what makes us successful in the future.”³

The CAF's approach to alcohol is rooted in tradition and an outdated belief that drinking is synonymous with comradeship. On one hand, it encourages drinking as an acceptable component of military culture, while conversely, *drunkenness* is a chargeable offense under the National Defence Act.⁴ This paradox creates cognitive dissonance and places the focus of blame on CAF members. It stigmatizes those who may have developed a harmful relationship with alcohol. Defence Administrative Orders and Directives (DAOD) state that “The CAF recognizes that alcohol use exists on a spectrum, from healthy to debilitating”; however, the institution does not provide a modern strategy to foster a *healthy relationship* with alcohol.⁵ In its mission to achieve enduring culture change within the CAF, CPCC states “[a] shift is required to leverage the full potential of our people so we remain a force Canadians can rely on to protect their interests at home

¹ Paradis, C et al., *Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health: Final Report* (Ottawa: Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, January 2023), https://ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2023-01/CCSA_Canadas_Guidance_on_Alcohol_and_Health_Final_Report_en.pdf. 6.

² LGen M.A.J. Carignan, CWO Bob McCann, and Marie Doyle, *The Evolution of Culture: An Update from CPCC*, Defence Stories (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2022), <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/maple-leaf/defence/2022/12/evolution-culture-update-cpcc.html>.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Minister of Justice, *National Defence Act, R.S.C., 1985, c. N-5* (Canada, 2023), <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/PDF/N-5.pdf>. 62.

⁵ Government of Canada, *DOAD 5019-7, Alcohol Misconduct* (Ottawa, 2010), <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/defence-administrative-orders-directives/5000-series/5019/5019-7-alcohol-misconduct.html>.

and abroad.”⁶ Any shift towards culture change should include a change in alcohol culture within the CAF.

This paper was written by a serving member of the CAF who developed a harmful relationship with alcohol during the majority of their eighteen-year career. Upon personal assessment of the increasing risks associated with alcohol, this author decided to stop drinking and discovered the book, *This Naked Mind*. Through an alternative method of alcohol recovery, this author learned to make alcohol *small and irrelevant* in their life and has since been alcohol-free for over four years. This context is important, as it underpins the tone, authenticity, and focus of this research.

This paper will demonstrate that the CAF fosters a harmful culture of alcohol use within its ranks and a new strategy is needed to better educate members and encourage positive change. It will first provide the background context of alcohol culture in the CAF. By using Dr. Michael Frone’s research on *Work Stress and Alcohol Use*, this paper will explain how alcohol addiction can be nurtured by the work environment and culture within the Forces. It will then review the CAF’s current alcohol misconduct policy and its potentially harmful dependence on Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) as the primary treatment method for addiction. Next, this paper will examine the methods provided by author Annie Grace through her book *This Naked Mind*, to explore one alternative path to freedom from alcohol. Lastly, it will offer recommendations that can be immediately implemented in the CAF to confront the harmful culture of alcohol use in the workplace and provide viable options for its members. This paper will not call for the elimination of alcohol in the CAF. Rather, it will focus on changing perceptions and provide a potential pathway for the CAF to make alcohol *small and irrelevant* within its culture.

ALCOHOL CULTURE IN THE CAF

We are ashamed to question our drinking. We worry that by asking a question we may be forced to quit drinking and live a life marginalized from society.

— Annie Grace, *This Naked Mind*

The CAF introduces a culture of alcohol use early in a member’s career. This approach signals that drinking is acceptable in the workplace and an important component of military social activity. Michael R. Frone, PhD., is a senior research scientist at the Research Institute on Addictions, State University of New York. In his article, *Work Stress and Alcohol Use* he states that there are generally two causes for the use of alcohol in the workplace. “The first perspective views the causes of employee alcohol use as external to the workplace.”⁷ This refers to exterior factors such as relationships, family, financial issues, stress, etc. that may cause an individual to drink.

⁶ LGen M.A.J. Carignan, CWO Bob McCann, and Marie Doyle, *The Evolution of Culture: An Update from CPCC*.

⁷ Michael R. Frone, Ph.D, *Work Stress and Alcohol Use*, Alcohol Research and Health, vol. 23, no. 4, (1999), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6760381/>. 284.

These external factors are acknowledged by the CAF and resources such as the *Stress: Take Charge Course* are regularly provided to help members manage stress and mitigate external risks.⁸

The second reason for alcohol use in the workplace is often overlooked within the CAF. Michael Frone explains that “Although external factors clearly influence employee drinking habits, a second perspective views the causes of employee alcohol use as arising, at least in part, from the work environment itself.”⁹ He states that this perspective is influenced by three interrelated factors: social control, culture/availability, and alienation/stress.¹⁰ To understand how the CAF fosters a culture of alcohol use in the workplace, each of these factors will be expanded upon.

Social Control

Frone explains, “The social control paradigm suggests that alcohol use may be higher among employees who are not integrated into or regulated by the work organization.”¹¹ This paradigm is supported by the results of a Health and Lifestyle Information Survey of Canadian Forces Personnel, published in 2016. Upon reviewing the data of this survey, authors Isabelle Richer, Jennifer Lee, and Jennifer Born concluded that “regular binge drinkers and problem drinkers were characterized by the highest proportions of young, single, junior non-commissioned (NCM) males.”¹² This demographic accounts for most CAF recruits. Further, it aligns with alcohol use statistics within the recruit training system where CAF members have not been fully integrated into the institution nor educated on its policies.

A 2010 report by Chief Military Personnel (CMP) concerning alcohol use amongst recruits demonstrated that 78% of all CAF recruits consumed alcohol at least monthly and that 51.7% engaged in binge drinking monthly.¹³ In this report, binge drinking is defined as “5 or more drinks on one occasion.”¹⁴ This definition aligns with Canada’s updated 2023 Guidance on Alcohol and Health, which states “Binge drinking, usually defined as consuming five or more standard drinks in one setting for men, or four

⁸ National Defence, *Managing Stress in the Military* (Government of Canada, 2018), <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/benefits-military/health-support/staying-healthy-active/social-wellness/stress.html>.

⁹ Michael R. Frone, Ph.D., *Work Stress and Alcohol Use*. 285.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Isabelle Richer, Jennifer E.C. Lee, and Jennifer Born, Patterns of Alcohol Use Among Canadian Military Personnel and Their Associations with Health and Well-Being, *Health Psychology*, Vol 35, no. 7 (2016), <https://psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/2016-17148-001.html>. 692.

¹³ Jennifer E.C. Lee, *Temporal Trends in Body Mass, Health and Lifestyle in Canadian Forces Recruits*, Psychosocial Health Dynamics Personnel and Family Support Research (Chief Military Personnel, 2010), <https://sghrp.ca/reports/open-report.php?id=41>. 23-24.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

or more standard drinks in one setting for women, is a pattern of consumption that results in legal impairment for most people.”¹⁵

This alarming statistic amongst CAF recruits is aggravated by the prevalence and endorsement of drinking within the CAF training system. Alcohol is portrayed as the focus of social activity and is given a place of prominence within a recruit’s basic training experience. Upon arrival at the Canadian Forces Leadership and Recruit School (CFLRS), recruits undergo an indoctrination period of three weeks where training is scheduled on weekends. As per the CFLRS Joining Instructions for Basic Training “after this initial period, requests for leave on the weekend will be granted depending on your training performance.”¹⁶ During this indoctrination period, recruits are encouraged by their instructors to perform to a high standard and be rewarded with weekend leave in nearby Montreal. They are regaled by stories of drunken escapades, and it is implied that camaraderie can be developed through these shared drinking experiences. These stories shape their perspective and recruits can develop a casual culture of binge drinking at an early stage in their career.

The CFLRS Joining Instructions initially state that “Upon your arrival at CFLRS, possession and consumption of alcohol and cannabis is *prohibited*” but then follows up to include “more details regarding the *acceptable* use of alcohol and cannabis will be provided during the first days of your course.”¹⁷ While weekend furloughs in Montreal can be viewed as implicit approval for alcohol consumption, the explicit approval includes the use of military mess facilities and during graduation celebrations. These examples demonstrate how alcohol is introduced to susceptible CAF recruits who have not yet been integrated into or regulated by the organization. This aligns with Frone’s description of the social control paradigm while also indicating the constant availability of alcohol in the CAF work environment.

Culture and Availability

Frone states, “The culture/availability paradigm suggests that work settings where alcohol is physically or socially available may promote alcohol use amongst employees.”¹⁸ Frone defines physical availability “as the ease with which alcohol can be obtained for consumption on the job, during breaks, and at work related events.”¹⁹ He then defines social availability as “the degree to which fellow workers support drinking either off or on the job.”²⁰ Alcohol is both physically available and socially acceptable

¹⁵ Paradis, C et al., *Canada’s Guidance on Alcohol and Health: Final Report*. 8.

¹⁶ National Defence, *Joining Instructions for Basic Training* (Government of Canada, 2023), https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/dnd-mdn/documents/military-benefits/QMB_QMBO_e.pdf. 8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 9.

¹⁸ Michael R. Frone, Ph.D., *Work Stress and Alcohol Use*. 285.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

within CAF workplaces. This is misaligned with Canadian society where substance use, including alcohol and drugs, in the workplace, is regarded as unacceptable.²¹

While society has evolved, the CAF continues to authorize alcohol consumption and make it accessible within the workplace. According to the Canadian Forces Personnel Support Programs (PSP) Policy Manual, the provision, serving, and consumption of alcoholic beverages may be authorized in specific locations by the Commanding Officer (CO).²² These workplace locations include but are not limited to “messes, CANEX lounges and restaurants, special interest clubs and facilities, social centres, Department of National Defence (DND) armories, unit dances, section parties, farewells, and other ad hoc occasions whether held on DND property or elsewhere.”²³ Through this description, it is easy to see how drinking is linked to social gatherings. This connection led authors Richer, Lee and Born to conclude that alcohol use in the CAF “possibly serves as a social function.”²⁴ Alcohol culture within the CAF makes booze synonymous with celebrations and events and the focus of most social activities.

Military messes represent the physical availability of alcohol in the workplace. The establishment of messes, canteens, and institutes is prescribed by the Chief of Defence Staff, as authorized by the King’s Regulations and Orders for the CAF.²⁵ The administration of messes in the CAF is also governed by the PSP Policy Manual. Chapter 9 of the manual states that the term *mess* is interchangeable with two definitions. First, it refers to a mess as “the organization, whose membership is related to an identifiable and specific rank structure formed for the purpose of building “*esprit de corps*” and *comradeship*.”²⁶ Next, it describes the physical structure as “the facility or facilities which provide space in which to carry out the functions of the organization and may include a wardroom, dining rooms, *bar* or anteroom, lounge, games room and other common rooms.”²⁷

Through these definitions, the CAF implies that the mess is the physical location where alcohol is available and approved for consumption while simultaneously

²¹ Brenda Baxter, Directorate General, *Substance Use in the Work Place, Canada Labour Code, Part II, IPG-080*, Employment and Social Development Canada - Labour Program (Government of Canada, 2015), <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/laws-regulations/labour/interpretations-policies/080.html>.

²² Director General Morale and Welfare Services, *Personnel Support Programs Policy Manual - Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services (CFMWS)* (Department of National Defence, 2016). 146.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Isabelle Richer, Jennifer E.C. Lee, and Jennifer Born, *Patterns of Alcohol Use Among Canadian Military Personnel and Their Associations with Health and Well-Being*. 692.

²⁵ Government of Canada, *King’s Regulations and Orders for the Canadian Forces*, Vol 1-Administration, Chapter 27, (2022), https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/dnd-mdn/migration/assets/FORCES_Internet/docs/en/about-policies-standards-queens-regulations-orders-vol-01/Volume%20-1.pdf.

²⁶ Director General Morale and Welfare Services, *Personnel Support Programs Policy Manual - Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services (CFMWS)*. 141.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

emphasizing the importance of the mess for building camaraderie. These factors align with the culture/availability paradigm presented by Frone. Further complicating this issue is the fact that all members of the CAF *must* belong to a mess and pay the associated mess dues.²⁸ This policy demonstrates the CAF's acceptance of an alcohol culture within the workplace while mandating that its members fund its continued existence.

Alienation and Stress

Frone states that "employee alcohol use may be a response to the physical and psychosocial qualities of the work environment."²⁹ This paradigm considers how adverse work conditions and high-stress settings lend to a culture of drinking that is influenced by the workplace. These aspects can cause a member to feel alienated at work and/or by friends and family outside of the workplace. With compounding stress, the "demands and responsibilities in one role (work or home) interfere with meeting the demands and responsibilities in the other role (home or work)."³⁰

Stress is acknowledged within the CAF as an expected result of military service that must be mitigated. *The Health and Lifestyle Information Survey of Canadian Forces Personnel 2013/2014 – Regular Force Report* identified that "CAF personnel risk exposure to trauma and operational stress rarely seen elsewhere in Canadian society."³¹ The report also indicates mobility, separation, and risk as three factors contributing to stress in a demanding military lifestyle. The alienation/stress paradigm is amplified in the CAF as "Time away from home also creates stress for families and can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness."³²

The survey noted, "17.9% of Regular Force personnel reported that their days are typically quite a bit stressful or extremely stressful."³³ Consistent exposure to stressful environments and situations can lead members to resort to alcohol as a coping mechanism. This could be caused by the societal misconception that alcohol relieves stress, as it is essentially a "central nervous system depressant and slows down the brain."³⁴ Author Annie Grace notes that this is only a temporary numbing of pain, and in the long term "alcohol makes you less capable of dealing with stress and anxiety."³⁵ The CAF agrees with this opinion and states that "a consistent use of alcohol to reduce stress

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 142.

²⁹ Michael R. Frone, Ph.D., *Work Stress and Alcohol Use*. 285.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 289.

³¹ Barbara Strauss et al., *Health and Lifestyle Information Survey of Canadian Armed Forces Personnel 2013/2014 - Regular Force Report*, Canadian Forces Health Services Group HQ (Ottawa, Canada: Department of National Defence, 2016). 23.

³² *Ibid.*, 221.

³³ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁴ National Defence, *Alcohol, Addiction Awareness and Prevention* (Government of Canada, 2022), <https://www.canada.ca/en/departement-national-defence/services/benefits-military/health-support/staying-healthy-active/addiction/alcohol.html>.

³⁵ Annie Grace, *This Naked Mind, Control Alcohol. Find Freedom, Discover Happiness & Change Your Life* (London: Harper Collins Publisher Ltd, 2019). 108.

does not reduce the feeling of being stressed and can ultimately lead to a drinking problem.”³⁶ These statistics demonstrate that CAF personnel experience high levels of stress and alienation as a result of their occupation. In some cases, these members resort to alcohol in a misguided attempt to relieve this stress, resulting in the development of long-term addiction.

Through Michael Frone’s research, it can be determined that alcohol use in the CAF is, at least in part, enabled by the work environment itself. Social control, culture/availability, and alienation/stress are all factors that are present in the CAF and increase the potential for alcohol addiction amongst its members. Mindful of this perspective, the next section of this paper will examine alcohol misconduct policy and the stigma associated with alcohol addiction recovery in the CAF.

ALCOHOL MISCONDUCT AND ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Drinking, or wanting to drink, does not make you weak. You may find it hard to believe, but an inability to control how much you drink is not a sign of weakness. So let’s stop any self-loathing right now.

— Annie Grace, *This Naked Mind*

The previous section of this paper described the many ways that the CAF enables the use of alcohol within the workplace. From Basic Training onwards, CAF members are taught that alcohol is a component of military culture and that drinking is an acceptable social activity within the CAF. Despite this cultural practice, the institution also recognizes that “Alcohol is one of the most commonly used drugs, with over 95% of CAF members consuming alcohol at least once in the past year.”³⁷ To mitigate this hazardous statistic, the CAF enforces strict policies to respond to any alcohol misconduct within its ranks.

Alcohol Misconduct

The CAF defines alcohol misconduct as:

*Any conduct, other than a conduct deficiency involving alcohol, that is an offence under the Criminal Code or a service offence under the Code of Service Discipline that includes the consumption or influence of alcohol as an element of the offence or as a contributing factor.*³⁸

Despite the acknowledgment that “alcohol use may lead to behaviors that can impact morale and public perception of the CAF”, the institution continues to promote a culture

³⁶ National Defence, *Alcohol*.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Government of Canada, *DOAD 5019-7, Alcohol Misconduct*.

of drinking.³⁹ This creates a paradox and adds additional stress and contradiction for service members. The policy protects the CAF by placing the focus of blame on its people, despite in many cases, the institution being the originating cause of alcohol addiction in their lives.

If a CAF member develops a harmful relationship with alcohol that leads to alcohol misconduct, they are “liable to criminal, disciplinary and administrative action, including release.”⁴⁰ Amplifying the stigma associated with addiction, the member’s CO is required by DAOD 5019-7 to “refer the member to a CAF medical care provider in accordance with CFAO 34-56, *Mental Disorders*.”⁴¹ Once diagnosed with a *disorder* the member may be recommended for treatment through various inpatient or outpatient care depending on severity. Under the CAF Registry of Approved Treatment Modalities, dated February 2023, Alcoholics Anonymous is listed as the Recommended Psychological Treatment for outpatient alcohol addiction recovery.⁴² This faith-based program is rooted in an antiquated doctrine that may clash with a CAF member’s sense of self-worth and pride.

Alcoholics Anonymous and Recovery

Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) is the only resource specific to alcohol addiction that is listed in the CAF mobile application (app) under Addiction Awareness and Prevention. The app directs members to a Government of Canada website titled *Get Help with Substance Use* and describes A.A. as “Free meetings and support for people who come together to solve their drinking problem.”⁴³ According to A.A., these meetings are available to military members across the United States or Canada, and “your chaplain or your medical officer may be able to tell you whether there are civilian A.A. groups nearby and will certainly be familiar with any armed forces group at or near your base.”⁴⁴

A.A. is a program of recovery, following twelve steps through a spiritual process to obtain sobriety from alcohol. The first of these steps require the member to state “We admitted we are powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable.”⁴⁵ This concept is difficult for members of the CAF to accept, as any connotation of powerlessness is in confrontation with their CAF Ethos. Specifically, it challenges the

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Directorate of Mental Health, *Registry of Approved Treatment Modalities* (Ottawa: Canadian Forces Health Services Group, 2023). 10.

⁴³ Government of Canada, *Get Help with Substance Use*, Healthy Living, (13 March 2023). <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/get-help-with-substance-use.html>.

⁴⁴ A.A. General Service Conference, *A.A. and the Armed Services* (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc, 2017), https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/assets/p-50_AAandtheArmedServices.pdf. 52.

⁴⁵ A.A. Grapevine, Inc., *This Is A.A. - An Introduction to the Recovery Program* (New York, New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Service, Inc., 2017), https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/assets/p-1_thisisaa1.pdf. 18.

professional expectations of Fighting Spirit and Discipline. Trusted to Serve states, “People who embody fighting spirit push past their own perceived limits, they always take on tasks no matter how challenging they might appear, they remain calm, confident and demonstrate resolve in the face of extreme adversity...”⁴⁶ About discipline, it states that those who are disciplined “...demonstrate self-control in the face of adversity.”⁴⁷ As a member of the CAF, it is difficult to identify as an alcoholic who is powerless against alcohol and also as a professional soldier who faces adversity with self-control and confidence. This creates cognitive dissonance and can push members away from A.A. as a viable method of treatment for their addiction.

An additional obstacle may be A.A.’s reliance on religion to achieve sobriety. Of the twelve steps, half of them refer to God, with Step 11 stating that “[we] Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.”⁴⁸ For CAF members who do not hold religious beliefs, this can further deter them from the program.

Lastly, A.A. describes alcoholism as “a progressive illness which can never be “cured”, but which, like some other illnesses, can be arrested.”⁴⁹ This connotation implies that alcohol is a disease that addicts will suffer from for the remainder of their lives. Each time a member introduces themselves at an A.A. meeting they must identify as an alcoholic, further engraining a belief that they are broken. This practice places the focus of blame on the CAF member and stigmatizes their relationship with alcohol. This description is in confrontation with the career they chose within the CAF. A career that their ethos states “demands an unwavering will to succeed, requires grit and the will to fight against adversity.”⁵⁰

The CAF’s current approach to alcohol misconduct and alcohol addiction demonstrates a practice that blames the member. Its over-reliance on A.A. as the primary outpatient treatment method is potentially detrimental to the member’s mental health and conflicts with the CAF Ethos. To provide alternative options, the CAF should explore methods that empower their people to confront alcohol within their lives without fear of social stigma, exclusion, and shame.

⁴⁶ Department of National Defence, *Canadian Armed Forces Ethos: Trusted to Serve* (Canadian Defence Academy, 2022). 36.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ A.A. Grapevine, Inc., *This Is A.A. - An Introduction to the Recovery Program*.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Department of National Defence, *Canadian Armed Forces Ethos: Trusted to Serve*. 35.

CHANGING THE PERSPECTIVE

Do you want freedom from alcohol without having to ‘get sober’ or call yourself an ‘alcoholic’? Do you want to have more time for the things and people you love? A greater sense of being in control in your life and self-respect? A thriving social life that does not consistently produce awful hangovers?

— Annie Grace, *This Naked Mind*

There are countless options available for members who do not want to rely on A.A. to achieve sobriety. These include many evidence and science-based recovery methods, health and wellness treatments, and holistic therapies. The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction provides various screening and treatment resources to guide members and healthcare professionals in treatment options.⁵¹ This paper will highlight the This Naked Mind process as an example of an effective alternative to A.A. It will describe how the process may be implemented into the CAF’s existing Total Health and Wellness Strategy and used to educate and challenge entrenched perspectives surrounding alcohol and alcohol culture.

This Naked Mind

This Naked Mind was written in 2018 by author Annie Grace, who at the age of 26, was the youngest vice president in her multi-national marketing company. Within this role, she was immersed in a culture where drinking was synonymous with networking and alcohol was a socially accepted component of the workplace. After nearly a decade in this environment, she realized that she had developed a harmful relationship with alcohol and was no longer in control of her drinking habits. She states that “she knew alcohol was no longer serving her. Yet, she didn’t want to suffer through life in a daily battle for sobriety, feeling deprived and constantly trying to avoid temptation.”⁵² With this motivation, she commenced extensive research to understand the science behind alcohol and how it affects the human body. Through this study, she developed a process that uses a science-based, compassion-led methodology to “reverse years of unconscious conditioning.”⁵³

The mission of This Naked Mind is to “change how our society views alcohol, to expose the truth, and to provide tools to change our direction.”⁵⁴ The process declares that it will “put you back in control by removing your desire to drink.”⁵⁵ It challenges deeply rooted, subconscious beliefs and provides examples of how society promotes alcohol as the focus of social activity. It lays bare the risks to physical, mental, and

⁵¹ Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, *Canada’s Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines*.

⁵² Annie Grace, *Meet Annie Grace*, This Naked Mind - Control Alcohol, (2023), <https://thisnakedmind.com/annie-grace/>.

⁵³ Annie Grace, *This Naked Mind*. 1.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 189.

⁵⁵ Annie Grace, *Our Strategy*, This Naked Mind - Control Alcohol, (2023), <https://thisnakedmind.com/strategy-process/>.

spiritual health and helps the reader visualize the exhilarating freedom of a renewed life without alcohol. The This Naked Mind process provides a proven strategy to confidently confront peer pressure, experience social activities without drinking and realize the truth that “every aspect of your life is better without alcohol.”⁵⁶

Applying the Process to the CAF

Aligning with its ethos, the CAF could benefit from a program that focuses on empowering the individual through education and self-development. This method would provide a stark contrast to A.A. as a recovery program. Where A.A. focuses on sobriety, abstinence, and facing life as a recovered alcoholic, This Naked Mind restores the subconscious and takes it back to a stage before alcohol held any power. It teaches the member that they are not the problem and that “alcohol, like any drug, is addictive and dangerous.”⁵⁷ This shift in perspective places the focus of blame on the substance, and not the individual while revealing an attainable future where alcohol no longer holds power.

To challenge alcohol culture within the CAF, the This Naked Mind process could help prompt a different approach towards alcohol. From a total health and wellness perspective, it teaches that a member does not have to be an alcoholic to stop drinking. Of particular benefit to CAF members is how the process demonstrates that an individual can stop drinking without the worry of shame, blame, and stigma that is associated with any connotation of being a recovering alcoholic. It allows members who may have developed a harmful relationship with alcohol to confront the drug without abandoning their identity within the Profession of Arms. Further, the process assures that they do not have to risk alienation from their social network when deciding not to drink. As Annie Grace notes, “Deciding not to drink will be a pleasure, so you will not suffer by being out at a bar or around your friends who are still drinking, and you will not have to avoid situations that you enjoy.”⁵⁸

Through a reinvigorated education strategy, the CAF could provide this new perspective to its people using the existing framework of the Addiction Awareness and Prevention program. Annual briefings, seminars, and resources could be offered to all members in a holistic effort to shift the culture surrounding alcohol in the CAF. Coupled with this potential change to perception, the CAF could also implement tangible changes that would further demonstrate its commitment. *Trusted to Serve* notes “As members of the Profession of Arms, we can shape the institution’s future and help create a culture that embraces everyone within the Defence Team”.⁵⁹ A CAF that makes alcohol *small and*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Annie Grace, *This Naked Mind*. 31.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 172.

⁵⁹ Department of National Defence, *Canadian Armed Forces Ethos: Trusted to Serve*. 51.

irrelevant within its culture is better positioned to demonstrate credible change to its people and Canada.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

This is a journey, not a destination. It is a road that no one can walk but you. These are the choices that no one can make but you. But know that by committing to a different future, no matter how many battles you have ahead of you, the war has already been won.

— Annie Grace, *This Naked Mind*

As discussed previously in this paper, it is evident that the CAF promotes a culture of alcohol within the workplace. This lifestyle is introduced early in a member's career. Due to external societal norms and customs, it is not reasonable to believe alcohol can be completely eradicated from the lives of CAF members. However, a culture shift can occur internal to the system to better educate the Force and mitigate the harmful influence of alcohol in the workplace. This shift could drive immediate changes in how the CAF approaches alcohol and perceives alcohol addiction. Any change should also include a general rebranding of the military mess so that it provides a renewed purpose for the CAF.

Investment in Education Programs

The CAF should explore different options for educating its leadership and people towards a fresh perspective on alcohol. The predictable, annual PowerPoint briefings highlighting drinking statistics and addiction resources are both unrelatable and uninspiring. Further, they do not expose the prevalence of alcohol within military culture nor provide a strategy to operate alcohol-free within that environment. The pamphlets available in the workplace and PSP facilities across the CAF merely state "Drinking is a personal choice. If you choose to drink, these guidelines can help decide when, where, why and how."⁶⁰ With the publication of *Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health*, the conditions are ripe for meaningful change to this standard. A new, comprehensive education plan should provide modern resources and services in an accessible, visible manner across the Force.

For example, *This Naked Mind* offers programs that are immediately available to the public and may be integrated into the CAF Total Health and Wellness Strategy. Alongside other services, *This Naked Mind* could be featured within the registry of approved treatment modalities. Capitalizing on growing awareness in Canadian society, the CAF could seize the opportunity for a renewed communication campaign highlighting these additional resources. Providing a viable alternative to the alienating,

⁶⁰ Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, *Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines*, Health Promotion in the Canadian Forces - Strengthening The Forces (Ottawa: National Alcohol Strategy Advisory Committee, 2013).

tradition-filled church basements of A.A., additional treatment options could be accessed through Quick Response (QR) code-enabled apps, podcasts, and audiobooks made readily available to CAF members through the Canadian Forces App.⁶¹

These programs could also be provided with a Military Individual Training and Education (MITE) code to ensure that all professional development is captured on a Member's Personnel Record Resume (MPRR). This information could then be considered within an annual Performance Appraisal Report (PAR). Further, they could be harmonized with the CAF's current health incentives program. "The FORCE Rewards Program is designed to recognize Canadian Armed Forces personnel who achieve high levels of Health-Related Fitness and Operational Readiness on their Force Fitness Profile, as part of their annual Force Evaluation."⁶² The Rewards Program could be expanded from a narrow focus on physical fitness to a more holistic approach to health and wellness.

To provide an example of how an alternative treatment method could be integrated with the FORCE Rewards Program this paper will use the This Naked Mind process as a case study. By pairing approved courses with existing rewards in a progressive, incentivized manner, the CAF may be able to gain greater exposure to the harmful effects of alcohol and entice members and leadership to invest in education.

Expanding FORCE Rewards – A Case Study

The Alcohol Experiment

The Alcohol Experiment is a free 30-day online challenge provided by This Naked Mind. It is marketed as "An effortless way to interrupt your patterns, give you control and put you back in touch with that version of yourself that didn't need alcohol to relax or enjoy life."⁶³ This challenge could be promoted and encouraged as professional development for all members of the CAF. It could be aligned with the silver-level FORCE Reward.

100 Days of Lasting Change

This program is focused on creating lasting change in individuals who want to remain free of alcohol. It is an online community-based program that reinforces the concepts of *This Naked Mind* while challenging members to reflect on their progress through daily journals and discussions. This program is designed as "[the] consistent touchstone that keeps you focused on imprinting these new habits deep into your psyche

⁶¹ Annie Grace, *Our Programs*, This Naked Mind - Control Alcohol, (2023), <https://thisnakedmind.com/programs-training/>.

⁶² Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services, *Force Rewards Program*, (2023), <https://cfmws.ca/sport-fitness-rec/fitness-testing/force-rewards-program>.

⁶³ Annie Grace, *Our Programs*.

and creating lifelong change so you don't have to rely on willpower.”⁶⁴ This program could be funded by the CAF and offered to those who have already completed The Alcohol Experiment. It could be aligned with the gold-level FORCE Reward.

This Naked Mind Institute Coach Certification

This Naked Mind Institute provides a 6-month coaching certification program. This program could be an additional resource for those in leadership positions or CAF members who want to mentor others struggling with alcohol addiction. It teaches “theory, tactics, frameworks, processes, science, personal growth, coaching ethics, relationship skills, communication skills, inspirational skills and much more.”⁶⁵ This program could be offered to CAF members through an Individual Learning Plan (ILP). ILP is in place so that “Eligible members, including Primary Reservists, may claim full or partial reimbursement of certificates, single courses, diplomas, or degrees.”⁶⁶ This certification could provide additional education points on a CAF member's Scoring Criteria (SCRIT) for promotion boards and career progression. It could be aligned with the platinum-level FORCE Reward.

Rebranding the Mess

It is time for messes to be reintroduced as much more than an approved place to drink. The CAF can make alcohol *small and irrelevant* within its mess facilities without sacrificing esprit de corps and comradeship. To do so, non-alcoholic options must be carefully researched, seamlessly integrated and promoted with the same imagination and vigor that has been afforded to alcohol. The mess can be rebranded as an informal club that its members can take pride in being associated with, rather than being viewed solely as a drinking establishment.

Fueled by the release of *Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health*, the rising demand for alcohol-free beverages is becoming more prominent. A Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) article published in March 2023 stated “Globally, the alcohol-free market surpassed 11 billion US in 2022. In Western Canada, that translates to a 20 percent growth in market share.”⁶⁷ Closely resembling the CAF paradox, the article notes that “customers want to moderate or even give up alcohol altogether for their

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Annie Grace, *Become a This Naked Mind Certified Coach - Where a Deep Purpose and Profitable Business Meet*, (This Naked Mind Institute: 2023), <https://learn.thisnakedmind.com/tnmi-coaching-certification-detail>.

⁶⁶ Government of Canada, *Education Reimbursement in the Canadian Armed Forces*, Public Service and the Military, (8 November 2023), <https://www.canada.ca/en/departement-national-defence/services/benefits-military/education-training/reimbursements-allowances/education.html>.

⁶⁷ Jennifer Wilson, ‘B.C. Bars Adapt to Meet Demand for High Quality, Alcohol-Free Drinks’, CBC News, 26 March 2023, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/b-c-bars-go-alcohol-free-1.6790661>. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/b-c-bars-go-alcohol-free-1.679066>.

health, but...they also want to maintain the social ritual of drinking with friends in bars, and they expect the same taste and quality from booze-free drinks.”⁶⁸

CAF messes should offer and visibly promote high-quality alcohol-free beverages for their members. It is no longer acceptable to only provide sugar-filled soft drinks and water as the alternative to alcohol. CAF members may want to feel fully included in a mess gathering by enjoying a high-end, non-alcoholic craft beer as opposed to a soft-drink or sparkling water. Or they may wish to appropriately recognize traditional toasts with quality dealcoholized wine rather than humiliating grape juice. As *This Naked Mind* notes “Many readers report that alcohol free drinks really help them. They help them bridge the gap between drinking and not drinking.”⁶⁹

An additional opportunity for CAF messes to attract members and provide options other than alcohol is to consider offering premium coffee and tea. The mess could be marketed with the same style and sophistication as a trendy coffeehouse or an upscale tearoom. Messes could hire baristas to provide professional-level specialty beverages as an option for mess members. At a minimum, CAF messes could invest in commercial-level coffee machines in each of their locations. This shift in focus could provide a reinvigoration of the mess as an informal club that its members can uniquely access and enjoy. It takes the focus away from alcohol while maintaining the sense of camaraderie expected and appreciated within the Profession of Arms.

CONCLUSION

This paper demonstrated that the CAF fosters a harmful culture of alcohol use within its ranks, and a new strategy is needed to better educate members and encourage positive change. By comparing CAF culture to Michael Frone’s research on *Work Stress and Alcohol Use*, this paper determined that alcohol use in the CAF is, at least in part, enabled by the work environment itself. Through a critical assessment of CAF alcohol misconduct and addictions treatment policy, this paper revealed the stigma and isolation associated with the CAF’s over-reliance on A.A. as a recovery program. Further, this paper explained how alternative methods such as the This Naked Mind approach could provide more appropriate options for members of the Profession of Arms to confront alcohol. Lastly, this paper offered recommendations to achieve an immediate shift in alcohol culture within the CAF. This shift is necessary to make alcohol *small and irrelevant* in the lives of its members and within the Profession of Arms.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Annie Grace, ‘EP 198: Reader Question - Alcohol Free Drinks? Are They Ok?’, *This Naked Mind - Control Alcohol*, 2023, <https://thisnakedmind.com/ep-198-reader-question-alcohol-free-drinks-are-they-ok/>.

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