



Master Sailor Rebecca Gallant, Port Inspection Diver from Fleet Diving Unit (Atlantic) stands on parade during the closing ceremonies for Phase 1 of Exercise TRADEWINDS 15 in St Kitts and Nevis on June 9, 2015.

“The View Looking Up: A Junior NCM Perspective on Culture Change”

by Emily Caroline Reiman

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Introduction

In 2020, international protest movements such as “Black lives matter” and #MeToo, brought awareness to systemic issues such as racism and misogyny serving as a call for change. People were no longer willing to stand by and observe social injustices in relation to patriarchy, colonialism, heteronormativity or any other form of discrimination and violence. During this time, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) also emerged as an internationally recognized series of practices that are critical to an organization’s success and sustainability.¹ DEI can help frame an important

dialogue for employers to create strategies to foster significant and sustainable workplace change.²

Similar to other governmental and public sector organizations, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) was suffering from its own organizational problems stemming from severe instances of sexual misconduct and discrimination against women and members of the LGBTQ2+ communities. To confront and respond to the organizational problems, the CAF has begun to employ DEI strategies. DEI recognizes that beyond diversity, organizations must also attend to systemic and structural power inequities. Thus, a focus on equity seeks out policy, procedural and structural injustice, while inclusion focuses on normative, cultural and social ways to increase acceptance, recognition and feelings of belonging.

Addressing the culture of the CAF is inherently an interdisciplinary problem and also, a “wicked problem”.³ Theorists Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber introduced the term “wicked problem” in 1973 as a way to understand complex social problems. Unlike scientific problems that can be solved and have a definitive end, which Rittel & Webber coined as “tame problems”, “wicked problems” do not have a definitive or objective answer.⁴ Policies

on implementation of DEI to encourage the CAF to become more inclusive often fail to address the systemic barriers of the military organization.⁵ It is not enough to simply propose changes within policy, we must critically evaluate the social environment and culture of the CAF. As illustration, scholars from political science, sociology, and gender studies have identified covert barriers within the military that normalize misogynist and racially charged forms of militarized masculinity which in turn has led to inequality and a resistance to change.⁶ Applying the theoretical frameworks of masculinity studies, hegemonic masculinity and social systems of power all offer explanations towards why changing the culture of the CAF is a complex problem.

The Problem with Implementation – From the Lens of a Junior NCM Woman

The complex task of implementing DEI and dismantling the systemic barriers within the culture of the CAF is often organized and implemented from the top down. In this way, the voices and perspectives of junior ranking members are often overlooked. As a serving junior non-commissioned (NCM) woman, my experientially and academically informed perspective can illustrate the contributions that the lesser heard demographic of the CAF is able to offer. The CAF has failed to see and acknowledge the reactions and responses from Junior NCM's, despite the fact that implementation of policy is critical to modification of behaviours and shattering systemic issues of misogyny, racism and heteronormativity. The use of autoethnography is a helpful way to frame my personal experience and thoughtfully investigate policies and social practices within the CAF.⁷ This methodological approach of institutional ethnography was developed by Dorothy Smith and 'explicate the actual social processes and practices organizing people's everyday experience from a standpoint in the everyday world'.⁸

I have served in the RCAF for 7 years, and have been a part of three different units, deployed twice on operational tours, and participated in multiple domestic exercises and short-term deployments. I have an extensive educational background that has primarily focused on equity and feminist studies. I position myself with a strong educational background and a unique lived experience within the CAF to be able to frame my perspective.

Having a background in law enforcement prior to the military, I am no stranger to the pervasive hyper masculine culture that permeates the para military culture that is policing. Joining law enforcement at such a young and impressionable age, I was confronted with a culture to which I felt obliged to conform to succeed. After joining, it was no surprise to me that the CAF was experiencing a similar culture. I quickly realized that law enforcement and the military were outwardly projecting an inclusive front, but were simply hiding its exclusionary, sexist and racist behaviour as a veiled form of fitting into the old boys club. I witnessed firsthand what happened to those who spoke out against misconduct and was intimately aware that doing so was a "career killer". Observing this served as a warning to stay silent and conform if you wanted to succeed.

The Harassment Prevention and Resolution Instruction for CAF members states that "self-help" is an initial option and that conflict should ideally be resolved not reported at the lowest level. Sexual misconduct, hateful conduct must be reported to MP, CFNIS, CO, CCMS or SMRC. There is no stipulation in policy or guidance to report at the lowest level. Despite the direction, it is common place in units to encourage and promote reporting "at the lowest level". Solving at the lowest level has translated into a way to make issues silently go away without holding anyone accountable. It is veiled as a way to address inappropriate behaviours proactively, but given the lack of buy-in of DEI policies, the mid-level ranks become echo chambers with resistant leadership. This can often result in leadership protecting favourite subordinates themselves. My recommendations will speak to a suggestion for a better way forward with reporting – one that would eliminate the harmful practices that are weaponized to silence those brave enough to speak out.

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The importance of my perspective is amplified when considering the majority of professional literature written on DEI and the CAF. A cursory search of keywords on DEI on the CAF Virtual Library (CAFVL) reveals that most pieces are written by senior officers. Education is more accessible and recognized within the officer cadre and the Masters of Defence Studies at Royal Military College (RMC) through which senior officers are encouraged to produce papers. NCM's can be reimbursed for academic studies they undertake on their own but higher education is not part of NCM professional development. Due to the disinterest and lack of perceived incentive for NCM's to complete higher education, coupled with a limited dispersion of women across the ranks in the CAF – it becomes clear why there is a gap in academic contribution from junior ranking non-commissioned women.

Not until NCM's achieve higher ranks are they expected to contribute to higher level decision-making, military research, or academic scholarship. In the spirit of DEI, this is a missed opportunity. It takes roughly 30 years to create the Generals, Admirals or Chief Warrant Officers and Chief Petty Officers (CWOs/CPOs) who constitute the senior ranks of the CAF.⁹ Given the CAF's underrepresentation of women over the past 30 years, it is unlikely that we will see women dominating the senior ranking positions any time soon.

Despite this gap in research from junior ranking women members, the exploitation of their emotional labour and lived experience is pervasive. After participating in numerous focus groups that address culture change in the CAF, I have left feeling drained and unproductive. I may be made hopeful by the promise of grand changes and feel validated, but I have never been offered a concrete way forward.

The emotional labour of a woman in the CAF is often exploited as a "token voice" or to provide education and advice on how to behave appropriately in the workplace. What becomes exhausting is the expectation that initiatives will simply implement themselves and that women and underrepresented groups must continually explain to others why these projects are necessary. Brown and Okros validate this emotional labour and suggest, "While

gender perspectives concern “the equal rights and opportunities of everyone,” the brunt of the work towards gender equality typically rests squarely on the shoulders of women, often bifurcating women’s practices from maintaining unequal gender orders.”¹⁰ For women’s inclusion to be fully realized, women are the ones that must continue to take responsibility for this implementation. Similarly, those stepping forward to speak their truth are potentially re-victimized by a resistant culture, unwilling to hear about the harassment they have endured. Kendall frames the experience of the warrior narrative and its effect on the survivor:

It sounds great in passing, the idea of those who fought the patriarchy being stronger, braver, more ferocious than those who did not take the same risks. But what we don’t talk about is what that costs victim. While they were fighting their way through whatever obstacles and feminism stands on the sidelines cheering them on, what happens when the coolness fades?¹¹

Advocacy is the responsibility of everyone, and to marginalize women to be the sole advocates for culture change further perpetuates an othering mentality.

The Problem – From a Theoretical Perspective

Despite the CAF’s history of women serving in the military, there has been a constant battle for women members to be accepted amongst men or equality among men and women, let alone gender-diverse members. Despite the removal of formal legal barriers to women serving in all military roles in 2001¹² the issue of gender integration in relation to equity and inclusion was not addressed effectively. The CAF declared that gender integration was complete, but the changes were superficial.¹³ Simply allowing women into the CAF without a plan to overcome systemic processes that placed them at a disadvantage speaks to the issues CAF members are still dealing with today. In a candid article on barriers to women in the CAF, Pierotti¹⁴ suggests, “Despite all the progress, the CAF is still not the safe and desirable employer of women that it wishes it could be”. As an organization, the CAF needs to address and combat systemic issues that perpetuate inequality, harassment and misconduct.

From Representation to Inclusion

In 2017, *Strong, Secure, Engaged* (SSE) presented the Government of Canada’s (GoC) new defence policy. SSE asserted, “The Canadian Armed Forces is committed to gender equality and providing a work environment where women are welcomed, supported and respected”.¹⁵ SSE emphasized a need to reflect the Canadian demographic through more inclusive recruitment and avows that the CAF shall align with the Canadian values of inclusion, compassion, accountable governance, and respect for diversity and human rights.¹⁶ SSE set a target of 25% female representation by the year

2026. As of March, 2020, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) was comprised of approximately 68,000 regular force and 27,000 reserve force members, with only 16% of that population being women.¹⁷ As of April 2022, the population of women remains stagnant at 16%.¹⁸ While greater representation of women in the armed forces aligns with Canada’s national and international commitments¹⁹, the inclusion of women requires considerable attention to institutional culture.

DEI have become important values to organizations seeking to foster meaningful and significant culture change. Yet, approaches to DEI in other organizations are wildly different when considering the military’s unique structure. Despite being similarly experienced in other organizations, sexual misconduct, hostile culture, or inequality are exacerbated in the CAF due to the institution’s professional purpose, rank structure, power imbalances, and historical systemic issues with misogyny, racism and heteronormativity.

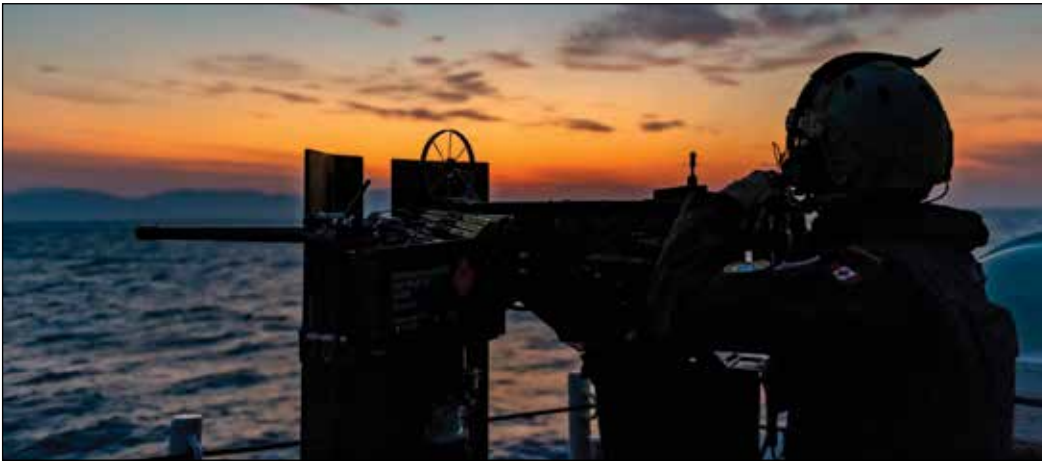
Military Structure

The military is a rigid organization that is known in modern society as a “profession” or “profession in arms”.²⁰ The military operates much like other businesses or corporations, but is set apart by the requirement of “unlimited liability”, the contractual obligation to lay down one’s life.²¹ The military rank structure creates a highly hierarchical social system where power is used to control those of subordinate rank. The military rank structure has the potential for misuse of power and dominance, which are frequently associated with status or, in the context of the military, rank.²² As Magee and Galinsky suggest, “Inherent to the definition of a social hierarchy is the stratified ranking of group members along a valued dimension, with some members being superior or subordinate to others, and fewer members occupying the highest positions.”²³ Men are more concentrated at higher ranks.²⁴ The power and dominance of rank is deeply entrenched in the CAF member’s psyche and is performed through symbols, behaviour, the chain of command and tradition. Members are socialized to follow the rank structure as a form of discipline and order. Brown and Okros explain that both men and women experience this socialization by suggesting that “gender inequalities within militaries continue despite women’s increased representation, as women along with men go through processes of socialization where they each adopt traditional gender norms of the military institution and the profession of arms”.²⁵

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Hypermasculinity and Patriarchal Systems

Not only does the military emphasize a power-based hierarchal system, but the Deschamps Report describes its organization culture as “highly sexualized and hypermasculine”.²⁶ Reinforced through Connell’s theory of power, “Men in general are advantaged by current social structure.”²⁷ The construction of social power in the CAF is highly gendered and remains patriarchal in nature. The required culture change is much less about equality, as it is more concerned with the discomfort of giving up power



A member of the ship's company stands by the .50 calibre heavy machine gun as HMCS HALIFAX enters the port of Aksaz, Turkey at the end of Exercise DOGU AKDENIZ 19, in the Eastern Mediterranean, as part of Operation REASSURANCE on November 18, 2019.

and confronting the perceived entitlement of benefits offered by a patriarchal system.

Hegemonic Masculinity

Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity is one way to frame the structure of the military.²⁸ Connell suggests, "Hegemonic masculinity is always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women."²⁹ Militarized masculinity suggests that the process of creating soldiers idealizes specific forms of combative and competitive masculinities.³⁰ The associated behaviours of the ideal warrior and soldier are highly gendered and favour masculine traits.³¹ The embodiment of idealized masculine traits such as, "toughness, violence, aggression, courage, control, and domination" have been noted as idealized by members regardless of gender identity.³² However, the intersections of gender with other categories of difference such as racialization, sexuality, service, occupation and rank can make it difficult to fit the norm of militarized masculinities.³³ Over the years, more women in the CAF has not resulted in a change in militarized masculinity, as women have been socialized into the military in the same way as men. Thus, militarized masculinity remains a powerful systemic barrier to the inclusion of women as well as diverse members.

Critical Perspectives

The CAF has been advancing culture change through new policy and by implementing DEI initiatives. In addition to my ethnographic observations, the dominant narratives in the media and formal government reports about the problems of the CAF provide valuable lenses to assess progress.

Lack of direction or strategy. A common theme amongst media stories and external reports on the CAF is the lack of direction or strategy to obtain DEI goals. A report from the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) Purge Fund released 23 recommendations to improve training and inclusion. The Purge Fund report noted there are no long-term strategies to monitor its effectiveness, little onboarding for employees to share resources and supports, and few efforts to expand LGBTQ representation

and encourage retention was successful. Overall, the report found: "In our opinion, it is unlikely that the Regular Force will be able to reach the desired number of members by the 2018–19 fiscal year as planned. We also found that although the Canadian Armed Forces had established a goal of 25 percent for the representation of women, it did not set specific targets by occupation, nor did it have a strategy to achieve this goal."³⁸

Tone-deaf. Despite the sentiment in SSE asserting, "The Canadian Armed Forces is committed to gender equality and providing a work environment where women are welcomed, supported and respected" the CAF has been accused of being tone deaf.³⁹ In February 2021, then Chief of Defence Staff Admiral Art McDonald's tweeted about diversity, inclusion and culture change. The photo featuring eight, white men at the table and one woman (LGen Francis Allen (now VCDS) participating virtually) sidelined on the screen, caused backlash from the general public. Tricia Doyle urged that people take this as a lesson in blanket diversity statements stating, "'No one is looking for token changes," she said. "We're looking for systemic changes, we're looking for access to opportunity at all levels."⁴⁰

By December 2021, the originator of the tone-deaf photo tweet had been terminated in connection with sexual misconduct allegations. McDonald was one of eleven senior Canadian military leaders who were investigated or forced into retirement that year. The CBC observed: "The investigations often came to light publicly only after journalists started asking questions of the Department of National Defence (DND)."⁴¹ In response, military police cited privacy and limitations on the public's right to know.

Empty promises. Many articles have quotations from leader who make vague statements and promises that fall through. In a 2017 article on encouraging inclusion, General Vance, stated that if the Canadian Forces wants to "become more diverse and inclusive, we're going to have to change."⁴² Then the article references a need for proper fitting women's body armour. Despite the announcement of a \$2 million dollar project, it was later abandoned. General Vance was later stripped of the prestigious Order of Military Merit and conditionally discharged from the military after having completed his term as Chief of Defence Staff.⁴³

through recruitment and retention.³⁴ Similar concerns were raised in an internal audit on the Evaluation of Diversity and Inclusion.³⁵ Findings revealed that "despite some progress in terms of representation of EE groups, this progress has been slow and not all goals have been met".³⁶ A report on recruitment and retention shared the same concern in its findings.³⁷ The report sought to determine if the systems and practices intended to increase recruitment and encourage

Recommendations

DEI is a “wicked problem” for the CAF and requires structural changes to influence practices. Despite the CAF continuing to present solutions to promote equity through the CAF employment equity plan 2021-2026, the CAF is waiting for the new Chief of Professional Conduct and Culture to provide strategic direction on culture change.⁴⁴ Based on the critical analyses presented and from my vantage point within the RCAF, I offer four recommendations for how to move forward with the implementation of DEI.



Members of the Helicopter Air Detachment aboard HMCS MONTREAL conduct helicopter hoist drills with a CH-148 Cyclone helicopter, call sign Strider, during Operation REASSURANCE on February 13, 2022

Cpl Braden Trudeau, Canadian Armed Forces

Flight Safety Model

The Flight Safety (FS) program is used by the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) to investigate aviation accidents or incidents with potential to cause loss of lives or resources⁴⁵. The FS program is based on a “just culture” that seeks to shift from placing blame to focusing on reducing future safety incursions. “Our Flight Safety culture is founded on decades of learning from our mistakes and the fact that everybody can contribute to improving our operations without fear of retribution”.⁴⁶ Personnel at all ranks and levels are required to be a part of the FS program. The spirit of the FS program can be directly applied to the implementation of DEI within the CAF. The fifth fundamental principle of the FS program emphasizes: “Free and open sharing of critical safety information between managers and operational personnel, without the threat of punitive action.”⁴⁷

The framework of the FS program could be applied to discussions and education on DEI, as well as a more appropriate, accessible reporting system. The reporting system would remove biased responses and eliminate the fear of retribution towards the individual for raising a concern. An application of DEI would see members being encouraged to foster an environment that welcomes discussions on inclusion, without fear of being ostracized. Rather than mandating self-study courses on issues of DEI, open discussions that facilitate psychologically safe and honest conversation should be implemented.

In many ways, the FS program is intended as an equalizer to prevent future major disasters instead of holding an individual accountable for a minor mistake. The FS program states, “Personnel are able to report occurrences, hazards or safety concerns as they become aware of them, without fear of sanction or embarrassment.” In the spirit of the “just culture”, I recommend

that this culture be extended beyond FS to become the primary way of informing culture change efforts and a starting point for reporting. Members should have the ability to report in a timely manner that removes residual fear of retribution and protects their dignity. Most importantly, just culture would remove the biased first step of “reporting at the lowest level” so often encouraged and applauded. As outlined in my autoethnography, resolution at the lowest level is often ill equipped to handle reporting and responses can serve to silence the victim, protect the offender, and remain unresolved. The success of the FS program indicates that the model of just culture is an effective way to transform culture and encourage a way to report misconduct safely and effectively.

The Role of Allyship in Culture Change.

The inherent power that accrues to men from a masculinized military can be used in a productive way to promote effective allyship with women members. Kendall suggests “Sometimes being a good ally is about opening the door for someone instead of insisting that your voice is the only one that matters.”⁴⁸

Likewise, the reciprocal relationship of allyship could foster the support from women as men become more informed on issues of DEI. Similar to the FS program of open and honest communication, respectful support for members who feel intense pressure to embody hyper-masculine traits may help them learn how to create an inclusive culture that enables transformation. Respectful support meets members where they are, supports their learning and provides useful feedback to change the culture of the CAF. Such a reciprocal relationship can only happen if the member is receptive to change, and if others are supportive in facilitating their learning and transformation. That is, it is the right thing to do. Pierotti asserts the role of men in changing the culture in the CAF:

“Men must make changes to the culture that will eliminate harassment in the workplace and encourage flexible work arrangements for all personnel across the military. The men leading and shaping the CAF must make this a priority because we are already struggling to maintain the size of the force demanded by the Government.”⁴⁹

Knowledge is Power

This article posits the majority of academic research contributed by CAF leaders as being conducted by men who are senior ranking officers. This is a function of accessibility for senior ranking members, the decrease in women’s representation in mid to senior levels of leadership, and a lack of incentives for junior ranking members to pursue higher education. “Generically, the military tends to deliver skills training rather than a broader education of the theories, concepts, and frameworks that comprise the theory-based body of knowledge that informs professional practice”.⁵⁰ Academia teaches students to think critically about an issue or problem. The first time the CAF delivers theory-based learning is for the select group of senior officers who are nominated to take graduate level courses at Canadian Forces College. Senior NCM’s receive much more limited learning on short courses at the Osside Institute, but junior NCM’s are restricted to trades-based technical skills training. Encouraging junior ranking members to explore defence and security issues through academic inquiry and to produce research for and about the CAF would broaden professional intellectual capabilities and expand the wealth of institutional knowledge beyond a narrow group of professionals. An inclusive professional body of knowledge requires investigation and scholarly contributions from all perspectives and ranks, but this necessitates a greater commitment by the CAF to educate its members differently. After all, SSE asserts, “Investing in our people is the single most important commitment we can make.”⁵¹

Reverse Mentoring

Finally, I recommend that reverse mentoring become part of an informed culture that would give voice to junior ranking members. I have identified throughout my article the lack of junior ranking contributions in academia, as well as the lack of action taken when members contribute to focus groups. Reverse mentoring became popular in the 1990’s as a way to inform executives of technology changes; while currently being applied to support diversity and

inclusion initiatives.⁵² Reverse mentoring provides the opportunity for senior ranking members to be informed on issues or concerns of they would not otherwise be aware. Reverse mentoring could provide transparency at all rank levels of how culture change is being implemented and received.

Given the generational gap between most junior and senior ranking members, there is often a disconnect between the Zeitgeist of their respective generations. Proposed culture change within the CAF has generally failed to be informed by the desired values and workplace environments of younger generations. When considering future policy that affects CAF culture, it would be beneficial to co-create between junior and senior ranks. The benefit is reciprocal, as it provides junior ranking members an opportunity to have their voices heard and to develop their leadership skills. For senior ranking members, the use of reverse mentoring explicitly shows a desire to be inclusive of the unique knowledge and experience of their subordinates, which promotes an inclusive team. To be heard, to be valued, and to be recognized for the skillsets one holds is the key to promoting an environment that shows full respect for one another.

“Reverse mentoring provides the opportunity for senior ranking members to be informed on issues or concerns of they would not otherwise be aware.”

Conclusion

This article has used an autoethnographic lens to analyze systemic barriers of implementation of DEI in the CAF. Future research might see the CAF encourage members engage in critical autoethnography to identify how they have been affected by institutional policies, to have a voice in shaping them, and to assess how DEI policies and initiatives are being experienced at the unit level. The CAF stands to benefit from research that gives voice to the often-overlooked junior ranking members. This glaring gap in research results in a lack of insight into how well policy and initiatives are working. Junior and non-commissioned members offer an underutilized advantage for the CAF to learn about the way the institution functions, as they are often the ones who have the most to say, but with the least opportunity to speak up. After all, junior ranking members will become the leaders of the future CAF. By incorporating junior members in the discussion and positive implementation of DEI, we will see faster, permanent culture changes and more effective feedback loops to ensure strategic plans that actually deliver on intended results.



NOTES

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