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"DROP AND GIVE ME TWENTY!": THE SOCIAL PRODUCTION  
OF A MARINE

by

Martha E. Frohlich

A Thesis  
Submitted to the  
Faculty of The Graduate College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts  
Department of Sociology

Western Michigan University  
Kalamazoo, Michigan  
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2002

"DROP AND GIVE ME TWENTY!": THE SOCIAL PRODUCTION OF A  
MARINE

Martha E. Frohlich, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 2002

This study is an attempt to understand the transformation of an individual that takes place during Marine Corps basic training. Primarily, it is an inquiry into how United States Marines *talk* about how they became Marines.

To assist in this inquiry, I turn to the field of military sociology, general role socialization literature and the notion of social identity. I conclude that while themes do emerge in the transformation of individual to Marine, it is still quite a personal experience -- one that could only be understood by positioning myself close to the experience via those who have lived it.

Through a series of interviews with Marines (active, reserve, past, and present), I uncover themes that are central to understanding the transformation of an individual in this context. Among these themes are unit cohesion, pride, role of the drill instructor, and suppression of prior identity.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement of the Problem

How does the Marine Corps make its Marines? Beyond that, how do Marines talk about being made into Marines? Individuals proceed through socializations and assimilations into various roles throughout a lifetime (Coates, 1965: 225). Assimilation into a military organization is one such process, and one that is taken on in a most powerful and transforming manner. Here I use the Marine Corps as an example of one process of socialization.

I do not intend to dissect basic training week by week. There are official manuals to outline the prescribed, logistical process. Rather, I am looking at the entire experience of Marine Corps basic training and the people and values that made the transformation happen for the Marines with whom I spoke. For all intents and purposes, this discussion pertains to all Marines, both

male and female. As it happened, my interviews were only with male Marines, but the training process is designed to be entirely the same for both genders. In the same respect, this is a discussion of enlisted personnel, as opposed to those who entered directly into Officer Candidate School. All references to basic training are made about basic combat training, or boot camp.

The Marines with whom I spoke lived the experience anywhere from one to thirty years ago, so their thoughts have had time to gestate and mature. Presumably, with the question prompts I used and the larger memories of their experience, the data I gathered will answer the question, how are Marines made? And, how did the Marines turn you into a Marine? This discussion will open the talk about becoming a Marine.

This research is important because there has been little research on the organization of military mentality since the end of the draft in 1973. There is even less sociological material on the transformative events of specifically Marine Corps basic training (Kitfield, 1998). It only seems appropriate, even necessary, to inquire about how the military is making its soldiers, in light of the present military campaign.



What I strive to do in this work is provide a voice for this group of Marines. I have listened to the transformation *in their own words* to understand the *talk* of making Marines.

It is my hope that all interested parties (from new Marines to their families and from infantrymen to drill instructor) will read this with interest and empathy. I hope to have shed some light and insight on a very personal transformation and that these words will resonate with those who have also lived the experience.

Janowitz (1959) suggests that the reason for so little sociological research on the military establishment is grounded in the tension between the professional soldier and the scholar (15). The scholar seeks to apply the scientific method to the human side of military organization and armed conflict, while the professional soldier sees this as naïve and unfounded. The professional soldier in effect, becomes the "expert," as he is the source of data to the scholar. The result has been several technical, demographically based, segmented studies of what the scholar calls a "dogmatic" group of soldiers, rather than comprehensive and scientific studies. It should be made clear that I am

not attempting to apply the scientific method as noted above, to this project. Naturally, I adhere to social science standards of research methodology, but I find it more intriguing to start at the base of the organization, with the people of which it is composed, and then work outward.

### Research Questions

Through qualitative interviews with men who have experienced Marine Corps basic training at Parris Island or San Diego Recruit Depots, I will explore two specific questions: 1) How are Marines made? 2) What are the emergent themes in such a transformation?

The purpose of this investigation is to contribute to the understanding of the character of the Marine Corps in general, and the individuals of which it is composed. By examining the transformation that occurs in Marine Corps basic training, I hope to understand how Marines talk about their Corps and their role in it.

## CHAPTER II

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As a new generation develops it's own personality, the military is responsible for staying abreast of who will be joining their ranks. They must have a feel for the issues facing such a generation, and respond in a manner that is in line with the values of the particular branch. For instance, the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard have moved to gender-integrated basic training programs. This is in the continued effort to make a "kinder, gentler military" that strives toward lower attrition, a more racially and ethnically diverse composition, and the need to accommodate "Generation X" recruits who are less physically fit and disciplined (Kitfield, 1998: 45). The basic training response is the abandonment of a demeaning leadership model, and is moving toward a teaching, positive reinforcement model (ibid. 48). This is clearly an effort to work with all who desire to join, and working with all the baggage that they bring.

Critics of such a paradigm shift suggest that part of the war-fighting spirit is lost when the military does all that it can to keep the recruits happy and satisfied (ibid. 48). The Marines with whom I spoke agreed that basic training is indeed difficult, but there are high standards that have long been in place, and despite the changing personalities of generations, Marine Corps basic training must remain consistent.

Such a discussion of context is necessary before understanding the organization into which a person is socialized. At the present time, the military itself (Marine Corps included) is changing rapidly in demographic composition, mission assignment, and technology. This is evidenced by the growing numbers of women and racial minorities in combat, a wide range of missions, and the use of highly advanced weaponry, none of which existed to such an extent 40 years ago. The Marine Corps has responded by socializing their recruits into the same level of excellence as those who have preceded them.

## Socialization

As an individual comes to an age of decision, there is the matter of whether to pursue a college degree, a career, or the military, among other life choices. There are as many different reasons for which decision to reach as there are people, but for many who join the armed services, the reasoning lies in a series of introspective inquiries. Moskos (1970) extracted four primary reasons for enlisting into the armed services from a 1964 study done by the National Opinion Research Council: (1) personal reasons, e.g., to get away from home, to mature, or to see if one can take the challenge; (2) patriotism, whereby one has the desire to serve his country; (3) draft-motivated, though this motivation for joining has since been outdated with the end of the draft; and (4) self-advancement and the desire to learn a trade, receive an education as part of the benefit upon completion of tour, or to make a career out of the military (49). At the time of Moskos's research, the Vietnam War was in the forefront of the mind of the nation, so not all of these reasons came to the surface in my discussions with Marines. The primary reasons for joining, as I learned,

were personal, whether it was a personal test of oneself, or to continue the line of Marines in one's family. The larger national and military situation has a reflective relationship with those who are considering serving in the armed services.

Once the decision has been made to join the armed forces, there is the decision of which branch to pursue. Again, this is often a personal decision, and one that is perhaps rooted in one's family history or the portrayal of such an organization in the popular literature and media. Certainly enlistees are aware that they are facing a physical test, to varying extents, during basic training. That may be, in fact, a reason for joining the Marines, as they are portrayed as having remarkably high standards of physical strength and prowess. What is not so clear is whether enlistees are entirely aware of the total overhaul of their person, in the physical, psychological, and emotional realms.

While each branch has its own language and manner of training, there are several features of basic training that are specific to military socialization in general and can be compared across the branches. Faris (1976) describes the characteristics in five stages.

First, there is a departure from civilian status, which often comes in the form of humiliation. Recruits who have been to college may be ridiculed for not knowing how to fasten their laces correctly, and the entire platoon is made to feel inept for not being able to march as a unit. All of this is an attempt to place all recruits on an equal level, as a person who has a college degree knows nothing more about rifle drill than someone who has just completed high school. Their mistakes are then exploited to teach a lesson.

Second, basic training is characterized by extreme isolation from outside society, meanwhile introducing a complete lack of privacy from other recruits. Contact with friends and relatives is very limited, perhaps in an attempt to build unit cohesion and camaraderie among the platoon, and to increase attention on the present task. At the same time, it is almost impossible to be alone, even in the most private acts of bathing and using the bathroom.

Third, much of the evaluation of performance is done at the group level, rather than the individual. However, the entire platoon can be, and often is, punished for the mistake of one individual. This collective evaluation

violates the recruit's sense of justice, and the platoon quickly finds a way to keep the troublesome individuals in line, often done out of the eye of the drill instructor.

Fourth, basic training includes an emphasis on masculinity and aggressiveness. Recruits must shout, rather than speak to one another, suggesting a rather abrupt manner of communicating. The emphasis on masculine toughness, together with the threat of being labeled feminine in a derogatory fashion is motivation to uphold that masculine "mystique." In the same respect, the warrior image, a stereotypically masculine notion, dominates the daily activities and language, as recruits are being taught to kill using any means necessary.

A warrior is, by definition, a fighter and a specialist in meeting and resolving conflict and challenge (Fields, 1991: 2), and in this society, one who confronts battle. That image comes through in the techniques and activities of training in the Marine Corps. All of the branches of America's armed forces train women to do much the same jobs as these men, however the Marine Corps is the only branch that has kept the training cycles entirely separate from one another.



Lastly, basic training is designed to place the recruit under both physical and psychological stress. While some recruits enter into training in better physical condition than others, mechanisms exist so that all recruits will be exposed to some amount of physical stress. The stronger recruits may be asked to carry extra weight in their packs, meanwhile all recruits may eventually feel sleep or food deprivation.

Psychological stress includes a fear of failure or being recycled (repeating part of basic training with another platoon). The stress may also be brought by the drill instructor, as recruits feel as though they will never be adequate. Some recruits make the decision to fight off the training process. Such a resistance is handled by way of eliminating the recruit, which in turn, strengthens those who remain.

The above characteristics would seem to make basic training a highly negative experience, and certainly it may be perceived as such by the recruits while they are in the thick of the process. How, then, is it possible that so many Marines (and the same can be said of other branches) come to identify so positively with the institution, and with the characters who overlooked these

apparently negative experiences? I suggest that an adoption of the new identity provides a positive new identification.

### Social Identity

The manner in which a person is socialized into the military is determined by the basic training regimen, but the extent to which a person comes to identify with the new identity is quite personal. As was uncovered in the interviews, some military professionals willingly accepted the new identity as it was being imposed on them in training, but the new identity did not truly take hold until a period of time later, when they became actors of the new role. The label one offers as a primary identity, such as Private First Class Jones, when he was Mr. Jones prior to entry evidences such a shift in primary role identification.

Volker Franke (1999: 15) defines social identity as "that part of an individual's self-concept which is derived from knowledge of their membership in a social group, together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership." For Marines, the

significance of the Corps values (honor, courage, commitment) comes to the forefront, as a Marine is identified as such, and consequently held to the high moral standards that characterize the Marines. Certainly there are peripheral sub-identities, but once a person becomes a member, he begins to define himself by his military identity above all others (Franke, 1999: xii). Further, it is this primary identity which will affect the decision making process in certain circumstances.

When the identities with which a person previously associated begin to surface, individuals will engage in identity negotiation. From there, a person will tend to avoid behaving in ways that clash with an identity or value that is central to their self-conception (Franke, 1999: 16). For some, this could mean the cessation of smoking, using drugs, or engaging in other illicit behaviors which the military (as primary identity) would not find acceptable. That identity negotiation is what allows the individual to define which association is strongest at any given point.

Before one can begin to internalize the new primary social identity, he must understand the professional code within the new role. In some cases, this is called

indoctrination, and it is an indirect source of control to assist the socialization processes. Often, indoctrination comes further along in one's career path, as the most concentrated efforts in basic training are on the socialization of the individual by way of teaching knowledge. Indoctrination is a sense of "unspoken" rules or manners of conduct, aided by the power of a code of ethics and honor. For example, the Marines will "never leave one behind," in reference to searching for comrades' bodies before evacuating an area. While not the most time-efficient approach, that sense of honor goes a long way in explaining organizational control in the armed forces (Janowitz, 1959: 92).

Just as one can build a new identity and begin to associate wholly with it, so can the self be removed from previous identities. The Marines (via their process of socialization) strive to build a recruit into their new identity while simultaneously strip away any other salient identities.

As I heard again and again, the Marines took away all things individual and rebuilt the identity by providing the new necessities for fitting into the new role. What this does is provide recruits with a salient

identity in a forceful, imposing fashion, which, whether recruits know it, suppresses or disregards the prior self.

## CHAPTER III

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Military Sociology

It is useful to the reader to have an understanding of where military sociology has come over the course of this century in order to see how this research can fit into that roadmap. This review of the literature will go from the very broad (e.g. military sociology) to the narrow (e.g., that which pertains solely to the Marine Corps and concepts relating to recruit training).

Military sociology largely began with World War II, as the field of sociology had grown to the point that considerable sociological knowledge had accumulated, and sociologists within and outside the profession were interested in demonstrating how their methods, techniques, and findings could prove valuable to the military establishment (Coates, 1965). More rapid mobilization than America had previously experienced was resulting in both technical problems and human

organization difficulties. Especially serious were the problems of adjustment and assimilation from a civilian to a military way of life. As a result, the origins of military sociology are rooted in the study of attitudes and morale of troops. In The American Soldier, a great number of surveys were discussed concerning facets of attitudes and opinions of enlisted men in the Army, covering military life, job assignment, satisfaction, combat, and the war itself.

Following the publication of The American Soldier, Merton and Lazarsfeld (1950) published a series of papers that discussed the importance of the research, particularly in regard to research on groups, organization, methodology, and applied research. Rather than presenting new avenues of research, this series of papers is an examination of the scope and method of the previously released The American Soldier.

The end of World War II brought with it a series of publications by sociologists who studied, in retrospect, their experiences in military life and organization. An entire issue of *The American Journal of Sociology* (March, 1946) was devoted to articles of these matters, and several other sociological journals followed suit in

years following, with the largest number of articles dealt with the military as a form of bureaucracy.

The subject lay dormant until the early 1960's, when special note should be made of the contributions of Morris Janowitz, who has carried on research in military sociology for several decades. His research has primarily taken the focus of analyzing the impact of change on military organization and life. This contribution has been especially significant to the field in light of the tendency of sociologists to think of the armed forces in the context and conditions surrounding war, which is but one part of the duties of the military.

Also relevant to this discussion is Janowitz's study of the military's leadership in The Professional Soldier (1971). By and large, Janowitz suggested that the underlying philosophy of military leadership is moving from that of "domination" to managerial tasking (Moskos, 1970: 15). The implications that followed this new philosophy were persuasive incentives and individual initiative to join.

The cumulative result of all of this research is relatively small, for a number of reasons. Much of the available research about the larger military



establishment is specific to a time or historical period, such as Germany, World War II. Such studies have little relevance to the present project. Many of the studies that have been done are in the form of applied sociology, with the aim of solving problems to increase military readiness and efficiency. The problem is not that these studies are more applied than theoretical. A more central concern is that they do not build on one another to form an expanding swell of knowledge. In any case, these studies are interesting and they do provide some base of knowledge, but by and large, they do little more than provide a glimpse of the personality of each of the branches.

### The United States Marine Corps

The Marine Corps does two things for America: "She makes Marines and wins wars" (Rogers, 2000: 45). The ability to accomplish the former, of course, depends on how well she does the latter. While there are published manuals on the standard operating procedures that govern the daily activities of recruits, there is little written on the philosophy underlying the process. Retired Commandant, General Krulak, (1984) suggests that the

philosophy rests on one single assumption: That these men and women may be called upon to fight for their country (160). Beyond that, they are called upon to win the battle and to come home alive, which is the reason for the rigorous training schedule. Another recruit training philosophy was expressed by Commandant Pate: "Recruit training consists of preparing and conditioning mentally, physically, and emotionally a group of young and naturally well-disposed youths to meet the experience of violence and bloodshed which is war" (Krulak, 1984: 160). In a similar respect, Arkin and Dobrofsky (1978 :157) suggest that the intensity of Marine Corps basic training *must* be as intense as it is because the Marines are responsible for meeting the enemy face to face. It is not so much the actual content of basic training that characterizes each branch as it is the level of intensity and *esprit de corps* that sets the Marines apart from the "relaxed easy-going sailor in the Navy" (157).

Certainly there are the literal, practical instructions for recruit training, but in the larger sociological frame, there are the notions of identity and socialization to consider. One approach is to consider the military at-large as an organization with which

persons identify and associate. However, for the purposes of this study, the Marine Corps provides a most useful point of departure for a discussion of such ideas. For the purposes of this discussion, I will utilize the literature as it applies to socialization into the Marine Corps.

Much of the research that has been done on military identity and indoctrination has not been specific to the Marine Corps. Samuel Stouffer's (1949) four-part study of the American enlisted man is touted as a benchmark in the study of military personnel's attitude, support, criticism. In the same respect, Sanford Dornbusch's (1955) research on assimilation into the United States Coast Guard Academy shares ideas with Marine Corps indoctrination and training, but is most applicable to the Coast Guard. For instance, cadets in the Coast Guard, West Point, or the Naval Academy are involved in a highly structured, rigorous transition into a new social identity, just as Marine recruits, but the manner in which that is achieved and the time allotted to do so is not comparable (Franke, 2000; Dornbusch, 1955). Cadets in such a situation are primarily being trained to enter directly into officer candidate's school, and are

obtaining a college degree at the same time, so while socialization is a common thread, there is little else to compare. In military academies with multiple classes, much of the socialization and hierarchical lineage happens behind the scenes and is in a spirit of competition between classes (Starr, 1982). After all, it is training into two different organizations, in which personnel serve different purposes and positions.

There is some literature on Marine Corps basic training, though much of it comes in the form of historical counts, popular stories, or propaganda (DaCruz, 1987; Freedman, 2000; Jeffers, 1971; Norton, 1995; Ricks, 1997; Woulfe, 1998). Recruit training has evolved into what it is today through the leadership and guidance of the Commandants (Krulak, 1984: 162). Since "making Marines" is a primary purpose of the Corps, it is of central importance to the Commandants to keep a careful, reflective eye on San Diego and Parris Island Recruit Depots.

To be included briefly in this review of the literature are the popular images, or propaganda, which give an indication of the character of the Corps. One such piece is a large poster showing the image of a man

doing a pull-up, his face sweaty and straining. The line of text reads, "Pain is weakness leaving the body." This is parallel to the use of incentive training, that which is inflicted on recruits who appear to need some extra incentive to perform drill correctly, or not to misbehave. It could also be considered punishment, again showing the importance of discipline and accountability (Ricks, 1997; Cooper, 2001).

Perhaps the most widely known movie relating to Marine Corps basic training is Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*. As I learned in the course of the interviews, this is a popular image of the rough, tough Marine Corps to which many potential recruits aspire.

In recent years, there has been much attention paid in the popular literature to a culminating event of recruit training. This critical event, The Crucible, was introduced by General Krulak in 1996, and has emerged as the final, culminating point of transition into the Corps (Woulfe, 1998: 7). At the completion of this event, recruits are no longer recruits. They are Marines. Likewise, drill instructors are no longer called as such. They may now be addressed by their title. This marks a level of approaching equality between recruits and

Marines, a role-shift noted by Faris in a study of the role of the drill sergeant in the Army (1976). Beyond all else, those who have made it this far have earned the title (Woulfe, 1998).

The reception of new recruits is an event that has not been altered much over the life of the Marine Corps (Krulak, 1984: 172). This marks the introduction of the drill instructors, the necessary medical checks, the fastest haircut these men have ever had, the only wardrobe recruits will need for the next three months, and a new language. Thus begins a period of "disorientation" into the Corps (Ricks, 1997: 29). Franke refers to the notion of "disorientation" as finding one's military identity (Franke, 1999: xi). This new social identity is that part of individuals' self concept which comes from knowledge of their membership into that group, together with the value and emotional significance attached to the group. For young recruits with many different reasons for joining the Corps, becoming a member of the group is something to which they aspire, as it also carries an emotional weight in the form of the cohesion that will occur within their units.

Brutality in recruit training has been under particularly close watch since the drowning of six recruits in 1956, in what is called the Ribbon Creek incident (Krulak, 1984: 168). The argument is that this late-night march into the black waters of the tidal estuaries of Parris Island was meant to be incentive training for an inadequate performance during training that day (Jeffers & Levitan 1971). Incentive training is not a foreign idea to any Marine, and is, in fact, an authorized technique to activate discipline in any recruit (Cooper, 2001), but the intensity of such training was called into question after the affair at Ribbon Creek.

### Social Identity

Military identity has largely been discussed as it applies to military personnel as a whole. Again, Stouffer et al (1949) produced an analysis of demographic information and related it to Army attitudes, activities, and values. Browning conducted a similar study in 1958, which, via The Army's Sample Survey of Military Personnel, cross-tabulated relationships between socio-economic status and career attractiveness across all

ranks (Coates & Pellegrin, 1965: 267). To utilize that data today would not be especially worthwhile in this discussion, as the attractiveness of military careers has shifted over the course of almost four decades.

Likewise, one of the keys to recruiting in the armed forces is the promise of benefits (signing bonus, education) simply by signing into an enlisted position. Such benefits may shift public attitude to enlistment.

Appropriate to the discussion of social identity is the level of commitment one will give to their service (Janowitz, 1964: 26). Janowitz suggests that those who make a career out of their service in the armed forces associate and identify more deeply with the military than reservists and civilian soldiers. Such an identification is embedded into an individual through socialization (both professional and via basic training) into the military.

### Socialization

Consistent with Franke's (1999) notion of social identity, Arkin and Dobrofsky (1978) suggest that a successful socialization into a military identity occurs when there is little contact with civilian influences.



Further, the potential for resistance comes from values, attitudes, and primary socialization with non-military relationships (152). At the time of recruitment, most enlistees are in a transition period between adolescence and adulthood where this secondary socialization takes the recruit captive, as he has little experience in the role of adult (151).

Janowitz (1964) expressed the professional socialization of military cadets as being comparable to military recruits at-large. The heterogeneity and wide representativeness of incoming cadets and recruits is resulting in a compounding of professional perspectives (21). That is to say that as the cadets' outlook continues to reflect their diverse backgrounds and skill levels, the military must respond with the most efficient and effective manner of training.

Merton and Lazarsfeld (1950) discuss an "anticipatory socialization" whereby individuals take on the values of the group to which they aspire, and consequently make an easier adjustment into that group (87). Such a socialization appears to be functional only for the individual within a relatively fluid social structure (88). Marginal individuals then, fail at

anticipatory socialization, as they have aspirations and hopes that cannot be satisfied. Such is the case in a later discussion with recruits who resign themselves to resisting the transformation.

## CHAPTER IV

## RESEARCH PROCEDURE

Reflexive Statement

The summer of 2000, just before I started graduate school, I met a Marine by chance. We talked pleasantly and developed a friendly rapport with one another. I asked him to tell me about basic training, naively thinking that all branches are the same. I couldn't get enough of his stories of boot camp. I wondered, how could this organization get away with (what I thought was) such extreme physical punishment and call it training? Likewise, how is being constantly scolded a productive way to teach a lesson? As we parted our ways, he suggested that I read Making the Corps, by *Wall Street Journal* writer Thomas Ricks, for, in his opinion, it is the most accurate account of boot camp thus far.

I bought the book and devoured it. What was most fascinating to me was the standardized method of training Marines for so many years. I was intrigued by the ways in which the Marines could take an individual person and

turn him into a part of this mobilized machine. More than anything, the question burning in the back of my mind was whether I could go through this transformation. I wanted to know what kind of person could do it. I was speaking from very little knowledge and plenty of curiosity and enthusiasm.

The questions that kept coming to mind revolved around the transformation of an individual into a Marine in Marine Corps basic training. To understand the transformation, I needed to develop a before-and-after picture of sorts. Who was this person before he enlisted? Who did he become after completing basic training? How did that change happen? Further, before any of these questions could be understood, what is the character and personality of the Marine Corps, in general? I let these research questions guide the methods. As this project in itself comes to a close, I take with me the skills I developed to carry it out, and the interest with which I began.

## Overview of the Research Design

This study is by and large, an interview study. Starting with a thorough review of the pertinent literature, I worked my way outward, and into the lives of members of the Marine Corps. I hoped to investigate gaps in the literature to fill my own curiosity. To do so, I became familiar with the language of the Marine Corps, or at least enough to keep me versed in a conversation, and then began asking questions about the experience of basic training.

I was not satisfied pursuing this project from the book stacks in the library. Next to enlisting myself into the Marines, interviewing was the most valuable and appropriate way to approach this research. Certainly, there is literature that provides a framework and relevant information, but to get inside the experience, I was most interested in talking to Marines who had lived it.

I have yet to meet a Marine who does not want to talk about his Corps. Finding these individuals has largely been through a network of acquaintances. One Marine was a student in a colleague's Introduction to

Sociology class. Another Marine owns the violin repair shop frequented by the violinists in my own family. Four Marines alone came from my grateful acquaintance with a career counselor. This group materialized for me by way of convenience, as opposed to actively campaigning for persons to interview. I hold that this friendly gathering of interviewees provided an environment of open discussion, as opposed to a feeling of interrogation or imposition.

I developed a set of probing questions that would lead to understanding the larger research question (see Appendix A for interview schedule). The knowledge that is being constructed must come directly from the participants in order to be meaningful, as this is an inquiry into how *these* Marines talk about what is true to their experience. Many of the questions are opinion or experience-related, and were designed to be conversation starters, so as not to silence the respondents with a strict set of questions.

### Data Collection Procedure

I conducted loosely structured, in-depth interviews. This means, as Gilgun (1992) explains, the questioning style did not follow the rigidity of a formal interview, but remained somewhat unstructured in order to allow the exploration of what the interviewees found meaningful. I followed an outline of broad, topical questions, following with "reflexive comments, probes, and clarifications" (Gilgun, 1992: 41). Such clarifications were not worded such that I was giving new meaning to the respondents' comments. Rather, I was simply probing for more information or specificity.

This loosely structured interview schedule was most beneficial in that the questions provided direction for the interviewee to pursue, but the talk of personal experience in getting to the final point provided valuable data.

Interviews lasted between one and four hours. They took place at Western Michigan University when possible, and otherwise, at area restaurants. This decision was left to the participant and was made largely out of convenience.

### Participant Description

Because these are personal stories and experiences, it may be useful to the reader to have some biographical information on each interview participant. This is in an effort to become acquainted with each person more intimately and to create a unique dialogue with their stories. All names and identifying information have been changed or omitted throughout this discussion.

#### *Matthew*

Matthew is Caucasian, 21 years old, and went through basic training at San Diego approximately one year ago. He is affiliated with a local Reserve unit. Matthew's father was a Marine, which was part of the motivation for joining the Corps. Currently, he is working toward a four-year college degree. I interviewed Matthew at a local restaurant, as was most convenient for him.

#### *Jason*

Jason is in his mid-twenties, and completed basic training at San Diego seven years ago. He said he joined "just to see if [he] could do it." Jason has finished



his active tour of duty, which took him to places such as Macedonia, Bosnia, and South America. I interviewed Jason at a university library.

#### *Al*

Al is Caucasian, in his mid-thirties, and completed basic training nearly twenty years ago. He is also affiliated with a local Reserve unit, and indicated that he is close to eligibility for retirement from the Corps. Many members of Al's family served in the armed forces, though he is the first to join the Marine Corps. I interviewed Al at an area restaurant, as was most convenient for him.

#### *Nick*

Nick is Caucasian, in his mid-fifties, and went through basic training at Parris Island over thirty years ago. His father was a Marine, and his son is currently serving active duty. Nick felt that he was expected to serve in the military for part of his life, and joined the Marines, in part, at his father's encouragement. I interviewed Nick at the violin shop he owns and operates.

*Chris*

Chris is 25 years old and is in his seventh year of active duty. He joined the Marines as enlisted personnel, trained at San Diego, and then continued on to Officer Candidate School. He is currently a recruiter at a local office. I interviewed Chris at a university where he was working at a Marine Corps recruiting table.

*Eric*

Eric is Caucasian, in his early twenties, and completed basic training at San Diego nearly a year ago. He is currently serving in a Reserve unit. Eric indicated that he joined primarily to "get some direction in [his] life." I interviewed Eric at an area restaurant, as was also most convenient for him.

*Rich*

Rich is Caucasian, 24 years old, and completed basic training at San Diego five years ago. His father was a Marine, and indicated that he had an influence on which branch he would join. Rich served his tour of duty and is currently pursuing a college degree. I interviewed Rich at the university.

## Data Analysis

I chose not to audiotape interviews in the interest of this considerably sensitive population. Some of the Marines indicated in advance that they would not be comfortable being recorded. It was made clear to each Marine that their identity would not be revealed in the writing. Likewise, it was requested that some of the information shared be kept confidential. It was my responsibility to honor that request by way of being an active listener, interviewer, and by taking notes in the course of the interview.

Immediately following the interview, I wrote comments regarding my impressions, the interview, and the setting. The jottings I made during the interview proved to be the key to sparking the context and content of the discussion. Where possible during the interview, I made note of an entire passage as the interviewee spoke, primarily when it would be most useful to hear the words directly from himself, as opposed to my paraphrase.

Thematic analysis is the method I utilized to extract emerging themes. I conducted multiple readings of the interview notes to search for these themes and

patterns. Thematic analysis provides the opportunity for "direct representation of an individual's own point of view and descriptions of experiences, beliefs, and perceptions" (Luborsky, 1994: 190). That is, by way of saying that the interviewees' experiences are authentic and in their own words, but rather than appearing in a narrative story structure, they are placed within the context of the theme.

#### Limitations of the Research

The limitations of this research project are two-fold: (1) that the primary focus is solely on the Marine Corps, and (2) that my position would not allow as intimate exposure as desired.

I was able to concentrate most fully on the transformation processes of this one branch and get to know it most intimately. However, what is missing from such a study is a comparison between branches in terms of basic training regimens, differences in rank, and differing experiences between genders, among others.

Also a paradox of sorts, my position as an outsider allowed a fresh look into basic training, but at the same

time, my exposure to the actual experience of it was limited. My enlistment would have provided that exposure, but instead, I opted to explore what I could from my position on the outside.

## CHAPTER V

### FINDINGS

What follows are the primary themes that emerged from the interviews. This discussion is not intended to be generalized to the entire Marine Corps population. Rather, it is an attempt to uncover what *these* men had to say about *their* experiences, with the hope that the framework which precedes will act as a base to the findings. This is a bottom-up study, whereby the data holds the utmost importance. My findings coalesce around seven dimensions: unit cohesion, pride, the drill instructor, discipline, suppression of prior identity, how Marines are made, and resistance and failure.

#### Unit Cohesion

A sense of fraternity is basic to the military professional code. Unit cohesion is not something that can be taught by drill instructors or shared through manuals. Such a feeling of fraternity and intimacy just happens through the course of basic training. Likewise,

as the threat of danger increases and as the importance of the mission becomes apparent, unit cohesion increases (Janowitz, 1959: 70). The drill instructor will give the orders for the mission, followed by the crucial nature of it, and then the platoon is left to determine how the task shall be completed. In the course of the discussion, whether the recruits know it at the time, lateral bonding has occurred and the task will be conquered. As Matthew stated in regards to the necessity of unit cohesion: "The only 'you' in the Marine Corps is a female sheep."

In a situation of such stress, one may either turn inward or turn to others to get through the experience. In the Marine Corps, a sense of lateral bonding or unit cohesion was what carried these recruits through training. That is to say that the recruits counted on one another to sound alarm when one person was not holding his own for the good of the group. Perhaps it was a fear of extra physical training and the wrath of the drill instructor, but for any number of reasons, recruits held each other accountable for their actions. Rich described his experience of lateral bonding this way:

The guys in my platoon came up with the Bod-Squad, which was a group of four or five guys who didn't have to be put on fire watch [a rotating vigilance to guard for misbehavior or suicide attempts through the night]. The squad might wake up a guy one night, take him out, beat him up, and let him know that he is the problem and we don't want to be punished for his screw-ups. It was no secret that this was going on, though. The Commander would call us in and give us some story to tell the drill instructor or Military Police. Say, this guy instigated the fight and I was just defending myself. It was a different story every time.

What is interesting to note in the context of the Marine Corps is that to defend one's self is not necessarily fighting just to be in a fight. It is a defense of one's person and all the people for whom he is responsible. This is the unit cohesion that will surpass all individual challenges.

Al described the reason for such strong lateral bonding by saying:

Every action you take could have consequences for the larger group. If one guy messes up the formation at drill, then everyone gets punished for it. Every one of us gets bent [a an especially tiresome exercise]. It's the same way on the war field. If you are on guard one night, and you fall asleep on the job, and gunfire kills your comrades, then it's your own fault for not watching out for them. That is the larger picture the drill instructors try to get you to understand through what seems like unnecessary physical training.



Jason told me an old story that was passed down to him at some point in his basic training. It is the story of three Marines who shared a foxhole during a violent battle. One Marine stood watch during the night, while the other two slept in the foxhole. The Marine on guard duty decided to disregard his duties, and joined the other men already sleeping peacefully. When the guard woke in the morning, he saw that his two comrades had been killed, while his life was spared so he could think about his own selfish action. The lesson that Jason and his platoon took away was that the Marine Corps does not need a man so selfish as to indulge his own needs while he has been assigned to protect the lives of fellow Marines.

### Pride

Pride is a theme that ran through the interviews, and manifested itself in the context of pride in self, Corps, and country.

For some, pride lives in the body. In four separate interviews, these Marines indicated that they could "tell a Marine when he walks through the door." When prompted for more specificity, one Marine said it is the way he

wears his uniform and holds his shoulders back when he walks. A Marine tucks in his shirt and wears clothes that fit properly, according to another.

As I was interviewing Al at a local restaurant, another man walked by, leaned in a bit closer, smiled and simply said, "Semper Fi," (meaning, "Always faithful," a unifying phrase that the Marine Corps holds dear), and then kept walking. The look between the two Marines was priceless, as it showed that they had lived the same experience and that was all they needed to bring their worlds together. It was also a striking reminder of my own position as an outsider trying to get a glimpse at the inside.

Pride in Corps is a notion that is instilled at different points for different people. For some Marines, the pride began by hearing their grandfather or father recount their stories of heroism in the Corps. For others, it began by signing the paperwork at the recruiting office, knowing that they would soon be one of "The Few, The Proud." For others, this sense of pride came at a point in basic training where the recruit crossed a major hurdle or demonstrated his abilities to the satisfaction of the drill instructor. For Al, that

point of pride came when he excelled at the Confidence Course, a maze of obstacles twenty feet above ground and water. He described racing through the monkey bars, then the rope climb, and then the tires through which to run without falling, only to be left waiting for the recruit in front of him to finish at each step. The drill instructors were aware of his hard efforts to excel above his platoon, and promoted him to the position of Squad Leader, a role that goes to those who show outstanding effort and desire to be a part of the Corps. He is the leader of his platoon, responsible for carrying the only piece of identification the platoon has for thirteen weeks, the guidon, which is a simple flag with the platoon number embroidered on it. He noted that it is just as easy to be demoted out of that position, but he continued to show his worth of that role and was never pulled from the position, a point of pride for him to this day.

In recounting that same story of the Confidence Course, he mentioned one of the unwritten rules of the Marine Corps:

There are some things that you just do in the Corps. It's like opening a door for a lady or crossing your heart when you hear the National Anthem. When you

government's decision to initiate an attack on Afghanistan after September 11, 2001. In the next breath, however, he said, "But I signed on the dotted line and I'll go if they send me." This is clearly pride in the Corps giving way to pride in the country.

### The Drill Instructor

Just as a civilian becomes a Marine, so does a Marine become a drill instructor. The drill instructor school is housed at Parris Island, next to the office of the commanding general. The official motto of Drill Instructor School is, "The future of the Marines begins here," and it is essentially another round of basic training for these Marines. Although this time, they are held to impeccable standards, as they are the walking image of the Marines to young recruits. Instilled in these Marines is the idea that they hold the future of the Marine Corps, and the type of training needed to produce the new Marines is a balance between discipline, authority, and paternity. Sergeant Major Philip Holding described it this way, "Don't ask them to do something you wouldn't do...change the way they think about life. Do your best or get out of the Marine Corps. And don't hurt

my bunnies, or I'll stomp you" (Ricks, 1997: 103). Then in the next breath he described the type of warrior the Marines want, that being one who "held babies in Somalia one day and had to kill the next day, and knew the difference between the two" (ibid). These statements suggest the level of intensity in teaching and training, while taking the well-being of recruits very seriously.

The drill instructor may just be the most formative person a recruit will meet in the course of basic training. This person and his team of junior drill instructors (referred to as "gods" by one Marine, and as being "perfect" by another) are responsible for teaching the young recruits nearly everything they will need to know about the Marine Corps as an organization. They are responsible for the recruits' safety and well-being, for training them to be warriors, and above all else, to be Marines. Beyond that, they teach the recruits lessons on discipline, efficiency, humility, and several other intangible assets. The means in which they do that, however, is what these Marines remember most about their drill instructors.

Discipline

Discipline was a theme that emerged over the course of several interviews. Guided by prompts on how a person can teach or instill discipline, these Marines gave examples from how it was instilled in them by their drill instructors. Often, the lesson came with the consequence of Incentive Training, or extra physical training, but the use of that extra physical labor also carried a lesson. Matthew recounted the story of his drill instructor finding an empty MRE (Meal Ready to Eat) in the podium lid:

I only saw the drill instructors really lose it a couple of times. One time we found an MRE wrapper in the head [the commode]. We mentioned it to the Heavy and he told us to place it in the podium lid, so that when the next drill instructor looked in there, he would see it. A few days later, they were getting ready for a lesson or something, and a junior DI looked in that lid and saw it. He just started yelling right away. Then he made us go to our racks, take our flip flops and throw them in a pile, then do the same with our sea bags, our underwear, everything. Then he said you have 30 seconds to find your own. Of course we couldn't do it on the first try and we were never fast enough, so he just kept on running us to teach us a lesson. He just sort of went crazy.

He went on to explain the lesson that was received by the recruits. To begin, someone was responsible for stealing

the MRE, an act that is largely unacceptable by Marine Corps standards of conduct. Further, that person did not come forward to admit his wrongdoing, which meant that the entire platoon was punished for his actions. This same Marine said more than one time in the course of our conversation, "Do the right thing, even when you are alone." When a Marine does not do the "right thing," the drill instructor uses the opportunity to teach a lesson.

Another interesting point of understanding is the personality of the drill instructors. They were teachers and the epitomized Marine to the young recruit, but was there anything else behind the hard façade? Al described his first encounter with the drill instructors that would see them to the end this way:

I remember the first sight of my drill instructors. The receiving drill instructor put us in a classroom, all sitting at attention, just waiting for us to meet the drill instructors we would be with the rest of the time. I could hear from around the corner, this tip-tap, then a perfect turn around the corner, then he did a perfect turn to face us. The creases in his pants were like this piece of paper [touches a paper folded in half], his buckle was polished perfectly, and his eyes staring straight ahead at us. You could tell he was trying to figure us out, trying to see who was who. Then came in the junior drill instructors, each came the same way, around those corners, staring straight ahead at us. Each of the junior drill instructors came in that same way. Once they were all introduced, the senior drill instructor gave his

command to them, he stepped back, and all of the sudden they all just unleashed on us. [Mimicked having strong wind blown on him.] It was like we could feel the heat from their breath and then just started barking orders and yelling right away. We knew who was going to be in charge from that moment.

The drill instructor played out to be a most formative and critical force in the transformation. There were times, however, when the drill instructor became human, whether it was to ease the mind of a scared recruit, or in an actual moment of care for a recruit's well-being. In the stories told by these Marines, those moments of being human came primarily from the senior drill instructor (or, the Heavy Hat). Eric and Nick told of human moments with their drill instructors in the following ways:

The senior drill instructor is like a father. He would sit us down maybe once a week and talk to us like real people. We were allowed to say just what was on our minds. They told us we could say "I" instead of "this recruit." They were still our senior drill instructors and we were still on edge, but we were at least allowed to speak.

There are two important points in this passage. First, is that the recruits were given the opportunity to refer to themselves in the "I" voice. More than once in the course of these interviews, I heard the phrase,



"There is no 'I' in 'team'." When recruits are allowed to identify themselves in such a way, they become more cognizant of their individuality, which is something that is primarily discouraged in basic training.

Second, for a good part of basic training, recruits are not given the opportunity to speak what they are thinking at all. That the drill instructor affords them the time to use their own voice and mind is a remarkable moment in the duration of the training cycle and philosophy.

Nick had an experience in basic training that would nearly force the drill instructors to speak to the human recruit, as opposed to the machinated body he may have become:

After I'd been at Parris Island for about a month, I got a call that my dad was in a plane crash. I had permission to leave for a week, but they took all my belongings away so I had to be fitted for a uniform to wear home. When I got back, the senior drill instructor was really nice to me, but I had to be recycled back two weeks. The other drill instructors were trying to mess with me and say that I planned that trip home. They just wanted to break me.

There seemed to be quite a distinction between the junior and senior drill instructors. It would appear that the junior drill instructors are also in a position

under the senior drill instructor, each with different roles to fill, but aspiring to be a Heavy at some point.

It would be useful to understand the internal dynamic of the drill instructors, as it would allow a glimpse of exactly how they talk about the process. Unfortunately, it was not possible to be in contact with a drill instructor, so I rely on the Marines with whom I spoke for their experiences.

### Suppression of Prior Identity

When asked about the loss of individuality and identity in basic training, Matthew described it by simply saying: "They take everything away that made you, you. That doesn't feel right, but it does put everyone on the same level." The logistics of the process begin in the receiving barracks, as recruits are blurry-eyed from traveling through the night.

The initial receiving of recruits encompasses the first few days on base. They are not in the platoons with which they will come to identify themselves yet. The time in receiving is spent taking MOS (Military Operational Specialty) placement exams, receiving medical

exams, doing initial physical fitness tests, issuing clothing, and for some, wondering what they have done. The tone for the next thirteen weeks has been set, though the recruits are still not acquainted with the drill instructors that will lead them to the end. Before they meet that person, they must be stripped of all individuality that brought them to the Corps.

This begins with the infamous Marine Corps recruit haircut, done upon arrival at the recruit depot. The event of it lasts less than one minute, but the significance of it carries through the duration of basic training. The tired recruits are told to place a finger on any moles or birthmarks, so as to alarm the barber of potential bleeding. For some, six months' growth of hair falls to the ground within seconds, and with it falls one more piece of identity.

For those recruits who come to basic training wearing glasses, they are issued a new pair. One Marine I interviewed referred to them as "BCGs," or, "birth control glasses." "No woman wants to be with a man with glasses like that," he said. Again, it is another loss of individual possession, whereby the Corps replaces the item with what they deem appropriate.

Once the last of the receiving activities has been completed, recruits are formed into the platoons that will become much like their families. The platoon is given a guidon, a pennant that becomes another member of the platoon. From this point on, the platoon, and each member within, is identified only by the four-digit platoon number.

Once the platoons are formed and established, they may begin to take on their own personalities, such as being an especially aggressive or tough unit. The development of such personalities is acceptable, as it indicates that the unit as a whole has come together enough to find its own voice within the entire company.

The military, regardless of branch, has somewhat of a language of its own. For example, a door is a "hatch," the floor is the "deck," a bed is a "rack." Part of the suppression of all things individual and civilian is the teaching of this new language. In the same respect, recruits are not referred to by their first names at any point. They must refer to themselves as "Recruit [last name]," even when speaking of themselves. The reasoning behind this is that it is meant to be a constant reminder of their position of recruit, as they have no rank or

status yet. The result is a sense of unanimity and anonymity, as recruits are aware that they are on an even level with others in their platoon, and that each of them has no outstanding identity beyond the others. Again, this is directly related to the unit cohesion that would ultimately build an unbreakable team spirit.

### How Marines are Made

One of the interview questions was, "How do you think Marines are made?" As I have thought back to my discussions with Marines, this seems to have been the most revealing interview question. Asking such a question allowed the Marines to verbalize their summarized thoughts on the process. Their thoughts have had time to mature, and the responses they gave were quite succinct and basic, almost primal. Though it is the overarching research question of this study, it also yielded the least verbose responses. The initial response from the Marines was without a doubt, "Ooh, that's a difficult question to answer."

After a few pensive minutes, many of the Marines had similar responses. Al described it this way:

In basic training, you are stripped down to your most basic needs. You have no privacy. You have to bathe with 30 other guys, sleep with them, and go to the bathroom with them. And that's all you get. You have nothing of your own when you are put in that position. They break you down so you are all alike, it doesn't matter who you were back home because everyone is the same there.

From that point on, the drill instructors (via the history, tradition, and skills that are taught in basic training) begin to work with raw recruits that have nothing of their own. They are a clean slate on which to begin writing the prescription of a Marine.

Jason, who joined in part "to see if he could do it," had a similar response: "They break you down into nothing so that they can build you back into what they want." The tone of this particular passage seems an "us against them" mentality, where the drill instructors would appear to be the enemy forces. However, in the context of the discussion, Jason indicated (and this holds true for the other Marines with whom I spoke) that he proudly gave of himself to the Corps. While it felt like an adversarial relationship at the time of training, he can see the point of it all now. Jason's individuality subsided during training, and though he may have resented that at the time, now he can see that above

all else, he is a Marine. He can see now that there was a reason for every action and exercise in training, and the larger goal was to make these individuals into Marines.

Matthew answered the question in a similar way:

They give you everything you will need to be a Marine, all the equipment, weapons, and books. They give you a toothbrush, razor, clothes, a bed. They give you three meals a day and eight hours of sleep. And then they start all over again and make you what they want you to be.

To this, my response is a question of how these Marines define Marines (noting the distinction of not the Marine Corps, but *Marines* themselves). In nearly every response, these Marines referred to the transformative forces as "them," meaning the drill instructors as epitomized Marines to which the recruits aspire to be. What, then, is "a Marine"?

Again, the responses to this heavy question were few in words. Jason's notion of a Marine is one that is "focused, logical, and he has an immediate bond with all other Marines." The unit cohesion does not end on graduation day. Rather, it is widened to include all who have shared the basic training experience.

The other emergent theme in the definition of a Marine was that of a warrior. For some of these Marines, this was a role that they may not have expected to fill. It is one thing to learn the technical skills of firing an M16 rifle, but it is quite another to adopt a killing mentality in doing so. Likewise, while it is a simple task to identify the enemy, attacking and perhaps killing the enemy is a job that many recruits know nothing about, let alone are prepared to do. Al suggested that he was one such recruit, limited in fighting experience, and possessed very little warrior spirit. I asked how that spirit was instilled in him, and he described it as such:

When I went through basic training, on marches and runs, the drill instructors would run next to us and sing cadences about raping, pillaging, and killing. They would sing one line and then we had to repeat it. And we would go on like that for the entire run. You can't get away with not singing it because that would draw attention to you. It was easier just to go along with it. After a while, you start to internalize it. Most guys didn't pay any attention to what the words were, but they were coming out of our mouths. One day I just thought about what I was saying and thought, "man, I wouldn't say these things in front of my mom." But that's how they turn you into a warrior.

A same such scenario occurred in an account described by Ricks (1997): "An M16 can blow someone's head off at 500 meters. That's beautiful, isn't it?", to



which the platoon responded with a loud, "Yes, Sir!" The drill instructor continued, "What is the mission?" The platoon responded in unison, "The mission of the Marine rifle team is to locate, close with, and DESTROOOOOOY the enemy!" (150). The thought is that the more the words become familiar to the recruits, the more of a reality it becomes.

Such a warrior spirit is instilled throughout various training exercises as well. The idea is not that killing is a way to solve problems. Rather, the exercises are intended to teach recruits how to defend themselves, their comrades, and their country. In doing so, recruits are taught a variety of techniques for delivering a fatal punch, jab, or shot. With these lessons come the ability to identify the enemy, discipline, and the importance of a rational head.

Combat fighting is taught, among other exercises, by way of pugil stick fighting (rods with padding on both ends with some resemblance to a Q-Tip, used to mimic fighting with a bayonet), hand-to-hand combat, and rifle training. The winner of a round of pugil stick fighting is the person who delivers a final jab in a potentially fatal area of the body. Hand-to-hand combat teaches the

places of the body to strike that would debilitate the enemy. These are the technicalities of basic training, but Matthew described the lived experience of becoming a warrior (synonymous with Marine in the present discussion) as something quite different:

They teach you to kill. I had two moments where I had to take a step back and think about what I was doing. The first was in close combat, where they teach you to kill with your bare hands. We were learning all the holds to knock a person unconscious, and then they told us to step on his head. And that's how you kill him. And I thought, wow, I am killing someone with just my hands. The other time was during the Crucible [a culminating event at the end of basic training] when we were fighting with our bayonets. We always kept the protective cover on the tip of the rifle, you know, the part that's like a knife. But there was one time at the end of the Crucible when they let us take it off and stab a dummy. I got him right there in the throat and it was so real to me. The dummy had a face and hair, and it was just so real.

Matthew was not especially prepared for the act of killing, but he compromised those emotions in the name of becoming a Marine.

The point at which a person is officially a Marine, graduation, is the highest point of recruit training for many recruits. All of the lessons, exercise, training, drill, and marching come to fruition at graduation. In one sense, the recruits are closing a chapter in their

Marine Corps careers, but they are also entering into a much larger network.

Many of the above themes come together at graduation. It is a very proud moment, as recruits stand on the parade deck in their dress blue uniforms, where thousands of other Marines have once stood, all with the same experience behind them. The role of the drill instructor changes at the moment when a once-recruit can address his drill instructor by his rank rather than by a title that implicitly states the hierarchical levels that separate them. Al suggested the final dismissal was when he truly felt like a Marine: "All along, they teach you the proper way to finalize a conversation with the right commands. So when they gave us the final dismissal, that was it. That's when I truly felt like a Marine."

The bond of the platoon is further strengthened at graduation, when at that moment, that group of 60 men feels as though they have shared something that no one else could ever understand. Basic training and graduation are events that make Marines. Everything that follows (careers, traditions, uniforms, values, cohesion) is what *defines* Marines.

## Resistance and Failure

In opposition to those who are successfully made into Marines are those who fail in the transformation. I was interested in understanding whether there is a particular type of person who does not complete basic training, though through the course of the interviews, it appears to be a mindset that prevents a recruit from being successful in graduating.

As mentioned above, an individual is drawn to join the Corps for any number of reasons. Perhaps there are qualities of the Corps that resonate with an individual's personal values, or he just wants to test his own physicality or sense of self. In any case, an individual has already been made privy to the mentality of the Corps before entering, and it is further embedded through the course of basic training. However, there are recruits who set their mind to *not* letting the Marine Corps or the drill instructors get inside their heads. These are the recruits who actively resist the training for the duration, and then may be recycled (set back in the training cycle by joining a different platoon) or dismissed from the Corps altogether.

Rich described himself as being one who was determined to maintain his own values and personality, while still possessing the desire to become a Marine:

They break down everything that you have. If the drill instructors see that you have a weakness, they will exploit that and make you get over that weakness. I just didn't let them in. I knew what they were trying to do and I didn't let them do it. But I didn't outwardly fight it. If I would have, I would not have made it through.

Rich, in fact, prefaced our conversation by saying that he did want to be a Marine, but he was aware of the identity-stripping that was imposed on him and resisted it passively.

Other Marines (none with whom I spoke), however, actively resisted the transformation by way of being purposefully disrespectful to drill instructors, failing to rise to physical fitness or qualification standards, or failing to abide by the rules of the Marine Corps. In the most extreme instances, a resistant recruit may become physical with a drill instructor or attempt to run away from the training facility. The Marine Corps response is that the Corps does not need an individual who will not think with a clear head, or one who abandon their duties when the "going gets tough" (per Eric).

When asked who fails in the transformation, the general response from the Marines with whom I spoke was that those who did not have the strongest desire failed. This fact was perhaps most apparent to drill instructors, the driving force behind the transformation. As Matthew described, once the drill instructors could see that a recruit had little desire to become a Marine, they did what they could get him out of that platoon, and potentially out of the Corps. There was such an instance in Matthew's own platoon:

There was a guy in my platoon, what was his name, a real goofy looking guy. The drill instructors tried to break him after a while, and break him so bad he wouldn't want to stay in. They'd run him back and forth along our platoon while we were on a hump (long hike) just to wear him out. He always thought of himself and not the group, and that's why they wanted him out.

At the other extreme, an extremely passive recruit is just as dangerous to the platoon, and the drill instructors will pick him out instantly. In Ricks' (1997) observation of platoon 3086 at Parris Island, one such recruit was dismissed for "lacking an emotional shell," and crying at the sound of a raised voice (157). When Ricks asked the drill instructor about such passive recruits, his response was, "Most of the guys like that

who aren't going to adjust, you usually lose up front...But I wouldn't want him next to me in combat, and that is the ultimate measure of a man" (158). Again, every action affects the larger group, so those who resist the transformation are perhaps doing a better service to the Corps by leaving, for they would be a weak point where there is no room for weakness.

## CHAPTER VI

## DISCUSSION

The data from this study contribute to an understanding of sociological theory and its dramatic portrayal of the organizational processing of the self. Identity theory, Symbolic Interactionism, and the entire field of social psychology are premised on the existence of and individual development of the self as an independent and autonomous being. The organizational processes disclosed in this research provide startling documentation of the ways in which relationships within organizations can *subdue* the self.

Such a conclusion is directed not just at sociological theory, but has immediate policy relevance at the historic moment of this writing. The society in which it occurs is engaged in war and this crusade will continue on without hesitation. Social scientists have an opportunity and an obligation to study the processes in which its instruments of war are produced.

The information shared from the interviews is the lived experience of being made into a Marine. It is not



prescribed by a manual. It is not being fed by the makers of Marines. Rather, it is the experience of basic training, in the most raw and basic words available, and most importantly, it is from the mouths of those who have lived it.

To reconstruct basic training as it was revealed to me by this group of Marines, I find a series of pivotal moments that define the making of Marines.

First is the initial receiving of recruits. For the first time in many of their lives, they are losing the identity with which they have always associated. While a young man may be the toughest person in his school, he has suddenly lost that identification in a matter of a few powerful words from the drill instructor. Self-definition and identity is a rite of passage into adulthood, and to have that taken away can come as a shock when not prepared for it.

The adoption of a new social identity is the point at which a Marine is made. That moment comes at different times for different people, but each recruit has to go through the same series of transformative events. To permanently suppress all prior

identifications is a monumental event in the shaping of one's self-concept.

Second, the manner in which the Marine Corps teaches recruits to be warriors is crucial to understanding how Marines are made. In some ways, the methods for teaching to kill are so subtle that they could go unnoticed; for instance, repeating the words of barbaric cadences and not really processing what the words meant until some later time. That does not change the fact that the recruits are being socialized to believe wholeheartedly in killing the enemy by whatever means necessary. No matter how many times I hear the stories of recruits learning to kill with their own hands, it never fails to impress on me that the masters of the Marine Corps can socialize a pacifist into a warrior. Even more impressive (and shocking) is the amount of pride that comes with being turned into such a figure.

Since the knowledge and truth of making Marines in this study comes from the mouths of the men with whom I spoke, I summarize the process as such: A young man walks into a recruiter's office. He evaluates the character of the branches by studying the propaganda on the walls and in his hands. The recruiters try to sell their branch to

him, but like many Marines, his mind is already made up by the time he walks through the door.

Before signing the papers, the Marine recruiter takes him through the essential matters of the character and values of the Corps, followed by the potential recruit detailing what he has to offer the Corps. After all, "We don't want him if he doesn't want us" (as per Chris).

He submits himself to the knowledge of gaining a new self-concept that will be superimposed over what currently exists. How that will happen, however, is as yet unknown.

The new definition of self begins with being stripped of his hair, clothes, glasses, language, and "back-home" mentality. None of those things will be needed at basic training, for the Marine Corps will provide whatever he needs to become a Marine.

Upon arrival at basic training, he is greeted with the realization that nothing he does is ever fast enough, good enough, or efficient enough. Whether it is to have a moment of relative silence without the drill instructor's voice overhead or to help his platoon, the recruit does what he is told. Like it or not, he does it

quickly, efficiently, and without drawing attention to himself. He learns the knowledge of the Marine Corps-its history, battles, values, strategies, and personality. In time, he will adopt all of these things, and the more he surrounds himself in the element, the more successful he is in being transformed into a Marine.

Upon graduation, his family sits in the bleachers with hundreds of other proud families. Each platoon marches by, rows perfectly straight, and not a single recruit missing a step. The family cannot pick their new Marine out from his platoon, much to the doing of the Marine Corps. Each new Marine has a stoic look on his face which suggests that he is part of a larger family now-one that can only be understood by those who have been transformed.

Appendix A  
Interview Schedule

### Interview Schedule

1. How do you define a Marine?
2. How do you think Marines are made?
3. What do you see as the role of the Drill Instructor at basic training?
4. At what point is a person/ recruit made into a Marine?
5. Why did you join the Marine Corps?
6. What are your thoughts about keeping the genders separate during basic training?
7. Do you think the Marines are different from other branches?
8. What is the role of the recruiter?
9. Why do you think particular individuals are drawn to the Corps?
10. Is there a kind, and if so, what kind of person is drawn to the Corps?
11. Who fails in the transformation process?

## Appendix B

Protocol Clearance From the Human Subjects  
Institutional Review Board

Date: October 16, 2001

To: Timothy Diamond, Principal Investigator  
Martha Frohlich, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Mary Lagerwey, Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 01-09-03

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "The Making of a Marine" has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may **only** conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: October 16, 2002



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