

CENTRE FOR
International and
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QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY



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Queen's University
Kingston, ON

A conversation about mentoring women in the CAF

IDP Speaker Series 2021

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Today's Discussion...

Study overview

Experiences with mentorship

Gender & Mentorship

Culture & Mentorship

Women-specific mentorship program in the CAF?



Research Question

What can a gender-informed, culturally competent mentorship program aimed at supporting women in the Canadian Armed Forces look like?





What is mentorship?

Mentoring is characterized by seven critical elements:

1. Reciprocity
2. Learning
3. Relationship
4. Partnership
5. Collaboration
6. Mutually defined goals
7. Development

(Zachary, 2012)



Research Design



Review of the literature



Interviews

Subject matter experts

Mentors

Mentees



Existing DND/CAF mentoring resources



Developed mentorship resources



Validated mentorship program



Participants

Subject matter experts, mentors, mentees

N=28 (n=21 [women]; n=7 [men])

Representation

- Regular Forces (Canadian Army, Royal Canadian Navy, and Royal Canadian Air Forces)
- Across Canada and on international deployment
- Range of ranks (CWO, Captain, Major, LCol, Cdr, Maj, BGen)
- Canadian Defence Academy (HQ, RMC)
- Canadian and international Veterans
- Consultants, private-sector employees



Questions

Can you tell me about your experience with mentorship?

Can you share a story or situation of **positive/effective** mentorship?

Can you share a story or situation of **negative/ineffective** mentorship?

What do you think are the **benefits** and **challenges** of mentorship for women in the CAF?

What do you think are some **gender-related considerations** necessary for a mentorship program?

What do you think are some **culture-related considerations** necessary for a mentorship program?

What would an **ideal mentorship program** look like for women in the CAF?





Experiences with Mentoring



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“Growing up as a mentee...”

“I’ve really enjoy it to be honest. I find it really rewarding. I was super fortunate to have a few women early on in my career that did that for me so I’m super keen to pass it on.”

“They were great leaders and good mentors. And some of them, I mean, mentored me right up until their retirement a couple years ago.. Yeah! So um, for me, mentorship is, you know, I was fortunate enough to have met those people at the very start of my career. So as a pay it forward uh, you know, act in some respects, but also as a responsibility.”

“The first time I’d ever personally interacted with a female *[high ranking officer]* in my life, I was kind of like holy shit if she can be a *[high ranking officer]*, I can be [one too]. It was this mind-blowing moment. From that moment on that’s what piqued my interest in mentorship. I was around her all the time and got to see her interact with male officers and her other staff and it was just like it changed a lot for me. I was motivated and wanting to help.”



Shared Experiences

“I would say the women come to me for different reasons...They know [that] I was a victim of sexual misconduct...sexual assault when I was in military college. They heard, reached out to me on that aspect because they too had encountered a similar situation and wanted guidance and help on that aspect and moving forward in their careers. They thought that I would be a good mentor to them on how to continue on in your career despite some initial challenges like that.”



Necessary for Success

“When we joined, women, we didn't have anyone to be there for us. During my first posting...we were all *[rank type]* there was one female *[rank type]* and there was no one else higher than that. There was no one to to guide us on things like starting families and stuff like that because it hadn't been done. I was actually the first woman in the entire *[unit]* to have a woman officer to have a baby. It was still relatively new that women had been in *[unit]*, so we had no one to reach out to. So, over the years as younger people came in behind me they would reach out to me about ‘How are you balancing with kids?’, ‘How are you doing deployments with kids?’. I was kind of mentoring without calling it mentoring all along.”



Navigating “the system” as a woman: Psychosocial Development

“I'll give them my own personal experiences what worked what might not have worked and how things have changed too...So my challenges 25 years ago are not the same challenges that they would have today. I also show them the options that are there now for them...like Military Family Services. Twenty-five years ago, it didn't exist...So it's a combination of things. I might provide advice what worked or not worked for me but I might also point them in direction of programs that they might not know about. That's one of the big challenges we have across the board is all these great programs we have in place and just people don't know them.”



Navigating “the system” as a woman (2): Career Development

“I [would] ask them, wanna get promoted? Here’s what you have to do to get promoted. The system is the system. I can’t change that system. I can tell them how the system works and the best way to go forward. There’s no one way in the system but [for example] French is a pretty obvious one...So, I can help teach them the rules. What I’m doing is I’m teaching them the system. How best to use the system to do what they want to do with it. Not to exploit it but to make it work, I guess, to make it work for them. And the life they want.”





Creating a Support Structure

“Oh, I think [the benefits are] huge in the CAF. I think we all just want to see somebody who looks like us or who's in a similar circumstance or who has had a similar circumstances as us just to validate that we have a place and our thoughts and feelings are important too. Where I think sometimes women can really feel dismissed or when they're the only woman sitting at the table it can be very intimidating.”



Amplifying Voices

“I think the generation that's coming behind me is not okay with some of the behaviors or some of the negativity in the military culture that was accepted when I first joined. So, I think it's a really exciting time that people who are joining are [coming into] a place where people have more of a voice whether in terms of initiatives such as Op Honour when we're talking about sexual misconduct or hateful conduct. I think we're finally saying these things out loud and we're giving people a voice to call out unacceptable behavior. I feel when I first joined there were things that happened that crossed all of those spectrums and you just didn't say anything.”



Gender and Mentorship



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Mixed Gender Mentoring

“If we don't have a network [or] have a mechanism out there [like] mentorship whereas a priority, women can't know what other women are going through. And [to be able to] share in a safe manner, share those thoughts, share their problems. If they're not being led by people who get what they're going through, at the end of the day, it's a silo of women [who are] not going to work. We [will have] missed an opportunity. [As a man], I acknowledged my blind spots that there's a lot that I just simply don't understand and I'll never understand and not to be defeatist, but there's limits of what I can comprehend and what I'll experience.”



There are Differences

“I think men, from my experience, want the facts. They were very interested in the steps, the logic, of how career management worked and my role and how I would represent them. Where women wanted to know more about ‘how can I reach my goal?’, ‘how do I operate in a system where not everybody looks like me?’ They wanted to know, based on my experience how I found successes and also how I work through failures...I also offered a perspective of being a married service couple. Some people were very interested in that. Like how can I be a mom and a woman who is an officer and how do I manage those things. Women were looking for more of the work life balance piece.”





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Cultures Outside of the Military

“But you know, what I would say for the majority of women that I’ve talked to...the concern is always...how do I balance the work/life situation? Mostly women are concerned about how can I do it all and survive as a mother, as a spouse, as a CAF member, as an operational warrior? How do we do it? Given, sadly, the traditional roles that most women are still stuck with.”





Cultures Within the Military

“So, the Navy is very hierarchal, very traditional, a little bit stodgy...I guess the same things could be said about the Army. I find the Army...gave[s] a bit more autonomy to people. They expect younger people to take action. It’s not as rigid as ‘you shall do this position before you before you progress’. I think the Navy...[has a] little bit more of a class structure whereas the Army...their officers die in the field with their soldiers and so the comradery is a little bit different and a little bit more familiar.”



“Mentorship Culture”

“I don't think we do a particularly good job of mentoring people in general...I'd like to believe that I'm developing my subordinates but it's the time I can squeeze out in the margins. We largely default to [teach] by leading them through activities and responses and events...and activities at work [and hope] that I'm able to shape their thinking. I don't know how much of this I would classify as mentoring...that's just management...there's definitely overlap but when you say *mentoring* I think about the deliberate activity of going out and focusing on it on an individual to improve their ability. I can say honestly say I do not do it as much as I would like.”



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Cumulative Effects of Culture

“I think women want to talk about how to be seen as a credible leader in a system where there are often few of them at the table. We talk a lot about being confident in a situation where you might be the only woman or because of being a logistics officer. We’re also a support trade so we have a couple of strikes against you. You're a woman, you're a supporter so how do you find credibility in the system?”





Building a Mentorship Program

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“We are a team”

“See, I see us all as one, right? I know that this study you’re doing is mentorship with women and I don’t think it should be different...the mentorship. For me, I don’t think it should be any different”



Competition Within

“Relationships between women are often strained relationships because we are very competitive or I don’t want to use the word petty because I don’t think that that is accurate. But we are competitive in a different way than men are. So, therefore the all-women mentorship program may not be a benefit to some women.”





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Gender Specific Mentorship Program?

“Having a female mentor helps younger women or women like myself take off the blinders that we don’t even know we have. It helps us more effectively deal with self-limiting thoughts because you have all of that gender stuff tied in. Whereas men, sure they’re parents but they don’t get stuck with being at home with the babies or the tough decision of ‘do I take this maternity leave or do I get back to work because I don’t wanna be penalized or be seen as slacker?’ So, there’s just a lot unique gender issues women have to deal with.”

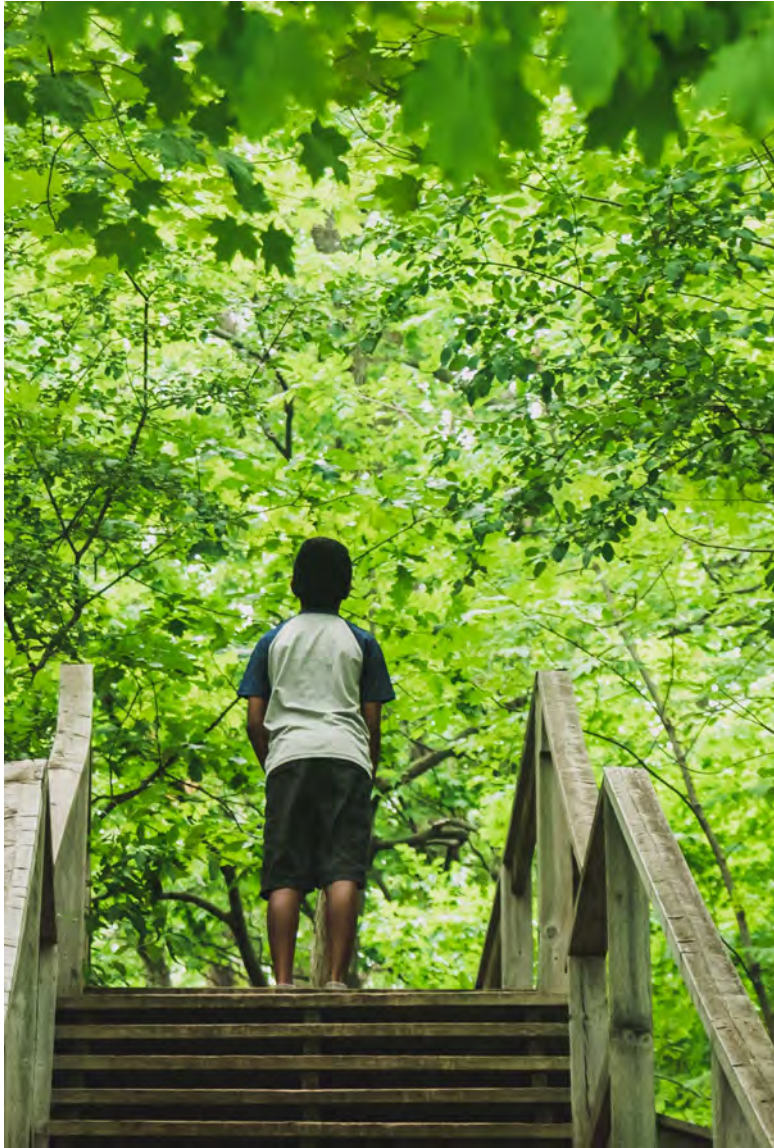


On Being a Mentor

"It's a very rewarding thing to do. If you're thinking about becoming a mentor, I think it's important to do some introspect[ion] onto yourself to figure out who you are and what you can offer, or not, where your own boundaries might be. What are the things that you would be willing to talk about or not with a mentee and then lay it out there and let them know. Just be honest...laying yourself out there to be honest on the challenges you've had or the things that you wish you had have known early on that might be helpful for someone else."



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On Being a Mentee

“It’s just been a lovely relationship [with my mentee]. She always has a set of questions like when we set up our monthly chat. She comes with an agenda, so I appreciate how organized she is and how well thought out her questions are and they’re usually pertaining to stuff that she’s dealing within real time. Some of its career related, some of its job related, some of its decision making related, some of its work-life balance stuff um and, it’s just a really enjoyable reciprocal relationship that we have.”



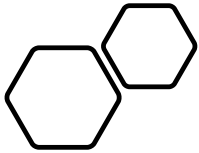
**“No country can ever truly flourish
if it stifles the potential of its
women and deprives itself of the
contribution of half of its citizens.”**

- Mrs. Michelle Obama



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Thank you

Transcription Team: Bibi Imre-Millei, Melika, Anna, Maddy, Elana, Claire, and Kaiya

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Women and men in the CAF
Thank you for your service!



Questions and Comments

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