

Antenarratives About Leadership and Gender in the U.S. Coast Guard

By Matthew Eriksen and Colleagues
University of Tampa, FL

ABSTRACT

The following are antenarratives related by female U.S. Coast Guard cadets (now officers in the Coast Guard) as part of a gender and leadership directed study taught by Dr. Matthew Eriksen. Also, there are antenarratives by Captain Robert Ayer and Dr. Matthew Eriksen concerning their response to *The Conference on Women at the Academy* in which the female cadets participated. As well as education, the purpose of the directed study was to fundamentally change the participants: their self-understanding, gender discourse and gender performance. In addition, the directed study was conceived as a medium through which to change the U.S. Coast Guard Academy's and Coast Guard's gender performance and ideology to improve the day-to-day experience of female cadets and officers. The approach taken in the directed study is outlined in the article "Conceptualizing and Engaging in Organizational Change as an Embodied Experience within a Practical Reflexivity Community of Practice: Gender Performance at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy" (Eriksen, Van Echo, Harmel Kane, Curran, Gustafson & Shults, 2007) in *Tamara*: 4(1).

INTRODUCTION

The set illustrates the power of stories, even at first seemingly fragmented tellings, to foster relatedness not only among their narrators but also their hearers/readers. Also, taken as a collection, the antenarratives sketch a broader picture of the complexities and diverse contexts of modern stories. The underlines represent different narrators; any italics represent questions posed by Prof. Eriksen; the stories and comments reflect only the views of the person who gave them and not that of any collective, such as the Coast Guard or even Professor Eriksen's entire class; and, since time sails on, some of the contributions are from students who have since graduated. Additionally, because the cadets' stories helped raise awareness, we have included a contribution from one of the Coast Guard officers.

Jesse's answers

Please describe how you came about participating in this directed study.

Last year in LOD class we had to come up

with a leadership conundrum paper relating to the Coast Guard. My leadership conundrum was about being a small, petite female and how would I be able to lead others, especially older men who may think that women shouldn't even be in the military. After we wrote the papers, Prof. Eriksen said that he noticed a trend, and that many females had written things relating to being a female in the Coast Guard. Noticing this, he developed the idea to research this further, and asked us if we would be interested. I remember that the initial meeting the females had was in Chase hall, and there were about eight females. At first it was awkward and uncomfortable, but as we went around the room talking about our leadership conundrums, we all realized that they were similar, and the talking became much easier. From this initial meeting, we decided that we wanted to learn more and participate in the directed study that Prof. Eriksen was offering. I remember leaving that room, was such a weird feeling because it was the first time I had ever been involved in anything with females talking about real concerns and problems we had with other females. It was like in the back of all of our minds we let out a sigh and said whoa, I thought I was the only

Eriksen & Colleagues

one that had these thoughts or feelings. From then on I was very interested and that is how I ended up taking this directed study.

Please describe the process, including your feelings around participating in the directed study.

The process around participating in the directed study was actually difficult for me. I was nervous the first meeting that I had with just all females telling each other what our conundrums were, so I was pretty nervous in the beginning taking a class that only had three other cadets in it. At first I think I just tried to take everything in, and Prof. Eriksen talked most of the time, and that was fine with me because I was not ready to talk. I am very introverted around people that I do not know well, and at first it was difficult for me to express my own thoughts and feelings on something that was personal, but as we got to know each other better, it became much easier and by the end of the semester I was just natural. I think the readings helped a lot because they gave us a common language to talk through. At first I had thought that maybe some of the things in my head were just exaggerations, but when expressed to the other females in the class, they also agreed so I felt much more comfortable when I realized that other people thought or saw the same things.

Overall, I think that the process started off very slow, but that was necessary at least for me to become comfortable talking about my own feelings. Once this happened, participation was much easier for me. It was a unique experience because we got to learn how to reflect on things that happened in the past as well as develop tools for self-reflexion. At times I was frustrated because I thought... what are we doing.. are we accomplishing anything.. is this all in my head? And I would begin to question everything... but then something would happen and it would all make sense. For awhile I was very frustrated and I started to look for something tangible to answer our questions. I felt like we had all these great

questions- the biggest being who to be as a leader?

What is the nature of your participation in this directed study? What was this based upon?

I participate in the directed study through having class once a week and lunch once a week as a group, and reading the readings from the books or packets. But more importantly to me, is the conversations that I usually end up having outside of class with other members of the group or my roommate. Usually I talk to her after every class about the discussion that we had in class, and we continue the conversation and I get to hear her thoughts on the issue, or whatever it was we were talking about. Most of this is based upon my personal thoughts and feeling that I would like to see these changed. I like talking to other people because I think it gives me more confidence in my own leadership conundrum- and I feel the more I talk about it- the better prepared I am to enter the fleet at the end of the year.

What does our group mean/ represent to you?

The group that we have formed has a few different meanings. It means 1) that although things are much better for women than they use to be, there still is a difference because everyone in the group has felt this and it has created a "place" to bring out these questions, fears, feelings, and things we notice. 2) that if we feel this way, then I bet other females out there have the same feelings, and this group can try to address the situation and develop solutions- so the group represents all other females 3) the group represents my own leadership conundrum and I see the group as helping me, as well as the others involved in answering or coming to terms with who we are and what we will be when we graduate

Please describe how you have changed as a result of participating in this directed study.

It is hard to explain to somehow how you

have changed when the change is internal. It cannot be clearly seen or tested, but it is there. I feel that I definitely experience life as a cadet at the Academy differently than I had before participating in this class. From interpreting the smallest actions of others differently to spending an hour talking to my roommate about something we both noticed, I am definitely not the same person. The readings made small things that I saw daily and were always there really pop out to me. Things I had never noticed or thought about-like girls being bussed in for dances, or how CAPT. can barge right into a male's room when they are changing and proclaim that we are all males here... or the reaction of male cadets to females in leadership positions. Not only has my awareness of the smallest details changed, but my interaction with others is different. My friends and I openly talk about these issues, which we had never done before.

My interaction with the command has changed in the way I interpret what they say and how they act. I notice things that seem gendered and I will try to have them clarify if that is the case. For example earlier this year I was asked to do an investigation on some of my classmates involving pornography and I felt that I was asked to do it because they thought that since I was a female I would be harsher in the punishment recommendations and give them the answer that they wanted. I was very frustrated by this, because I felt that not only that I was picked because I was female, but they were pressuring me into an answer that I didn't agree with.

Did your conception of yourself change?

Yes, after reading the book on gender and language, I could relate to many of the articles and things it talked about. For example, it talked about how males are more confident and extraverted than females, even when they have no idea what they are talking about. I never thought about this as a gender thing, I just had thought it was who I was. For example in my Nautical Science lab,

I am with all males, and I always get talked to about having more confidence on the bridge of the ship and how I need to take control of the situation. I know realize that the other members do now know more about the material than I did, they just have more confidence in pretending that they do. This changed my perception of myself because for the longest time I thought that I was just bad at ship driving, but now I realize that the males don't really know either (some have even told me that) they just have better confidence.

Have you reinterpreted any of you prior experiences in the CG differently after engaging in this directed study?

Yes, after looking back doing the (reflecting and reflexing) I have. Now I think differently about my entire swab summer cadre experience. At the time, I interpreted the leadership choices I had as either 1. being the yelling bitch or 2 being the mom of the group. I didn't want to be either this whole things makes much more sense when looking back, like when Ginny reflected about her time as cadre when she was forced into the 'motherly' role. At the time I was confused because there was another female cadre in my platoon that had instantly taken on the mother role because she was the person in charge of all medical, health, and counseling issues. This made her the 'mom' of the group immediately- but where did that leave me? I think I then became forced into the other role. I didn't really want that role and until this class I never really thought about it. This directed study also made me reflect on my past summer experiences- this last summer I was sent to an all male small boat station and they had receive training on females prior to my arrival. At the time I didn't think anything of it, but after taking this class I realized that that is so weird that males had to have training on how to act around a female.

Dear Professor Eriksen,
I would be remiss if I left out the fact that an article that I came across while surfing the web provoked me to write and inspired some

Eriksen & Colleagues

thoughtful reflection. Although it seems that the article has zero validity, it reflects badly on military women in general and especially the Coast Guard - in particular the women of the Class of 2006. It blames a tragic shipboard accident on the presence of too many female officers in strategic assignments because we are supposedly more emotional at the beginning of our menstrual cycle.

After reading the article, I was instantly transported back to Professor Eriksen's office - where Cindy, Amanda, Sarah and I sat and talked...and talked. I was reminded of those feelings and thoughts that I have so recently dismissed for better, more positive ones. It's funny how quickly you can be reminded all over again. This afternoon, I felt much of the same thing. I remember vividly speaking of problems at the Academy, in the Coast Guard, and in the world in general that disturbed me. After all, it's 2006. Women can do whatever they want ... and more importantly, their menstrual cycle does not determine the seaworthiness of a vessel. I know, is this some kind of joke? I instantly called Sarah to vent. She was underway but made it close enough to land to give me a quick call back. Prof. Eriksen, you would have been proud!

I remembered the talks really being a lot to handle at times. Many of them led to a few tears and a lot of frustration. A frustration that existed because we felt there was nothing we could do. We didn't even fully understand what being a woman in our organization was all about - so where would we even begin to tackle issues? How could we suggest ways of developing female leaders at the Academy, if we weren't even quite sure exactly what was wrong with the process?

Well, we started from within, which was perhaps the hardest part for me. Again, we all talked. To come up with a solution of how the Academy should address female leadership development, we needed to talk about our own leadership experiences - how

did we develop? Most of us formed our leadership styles by a combination of our personality types and the experiences we had over the past few years. This experience forced us to account our summer cruises and cadre summer - evaluating where we felt we didn't have much direction.

For me, it was an ongoing struggle of being the nice girl. Right now, I would definitely not consider that as a leadership style but it was a good beginning for reflection. I knew that in most of my past experiences I was that "type." Further along in the year, we called this woman the "Mom." All of us in the Directed Study thought we were "Mom."

I approached leadership with more of a friendly smile than a bark. I set out to inspire those I was leading. And, for me, it worked. Although there were definite downfalls - sometimes it was easier to be taken advantage of. Sometimes, you can get a bigger part of the workload because your co-workers believe that you are so nice, you will take care of it. Sometimes, it leads to a more relaxed attitude by those your leading, which eventually makes leading and getting the mission accomplished more of a challenge. Later on in the year, we discovered these things to be the consequences of being in a category. Oftentimes, if you are mom, you are socially accepted but professionally your effectiveness may decrease.

Many cadets experience things in the fleet that go unsaid and may lead to more challenges later on. Part of our paper was the recommendation of sense making groups, where young women could share stories and subsequently, help others be prepared for potential stumbling blocks. We all learn and possess the tools to get through harder experiences, sometimes we just need somebody else to provide some guidance where we can really realize our full potential and have the confidence to stand up for what is inherently how things should be. Sometimes, we just need to know we aren't alone.

Because of the group we each had stories to share and all of those experiences helped us paint a picture of what we saw occurring in our organization. For us, the data was just additional support. Female cadet's stories led to our insights and understandings.

Somehow, after months of discussion, research and talking, we compiled our data and experience into our paper, "Who to Be: The Prevailing Leadership Question for Women in the Military." We never did clearly find an answer, but we certainly captured and understood a little better what exactly was going on.

I remember distinctly telling him, "It's so much easier to be ignorant than to accept that things like this happen." Yet, by the end of Spring Semester, we stood up in D.C and to the Academy community and truly believed in what we talked about. We accepted that you can be proud of your organization and question it at the same time. We found passion in what we researched and had a yearning to make things better. We realized it was okay to question the Academy and the Coast Guard - that's how the most change occurs. And, what better way, to end your cadet career and enter the fleet - ready to change the world (or at least your small part of the Coast Guard).

Because every woman, by her actions, by what she accepts, by how she carries herself, and how she assists those women in her command - has the power. The power to make it better. And ... a little change never hurts either.

A Dialogue from our Experience at *The Conference on Women at the Academy: Gender, Respect and Tradition* by Robert C. Ayer, CAPT USCG, PhD, Department of Humanities, USCGA

The panel of cadets reflecting on current gender relations at CGA was especially thought-provoking, both in presentations and in Q&A. Some of the topics brought out

ranged from what we can do today to improve people's attitudes and behavior on gender equality, to what are the responsibilities of male cadets and female cadets when faced with disrespectful attitudes, all the way to whether males should open doors for females. The discussion spurred my reflections that follow. Several speakers said we should have more conversations about gender; let this spark one.

Some traditions of the Service become dated and should indeed be modified or dropped. But some traditions of the Service deserve to be reinforced and reinvigorated, because they can actually arch forward to the future we are seeking: one in which --even as we continue to value diversity and individuality -- a Coast Guard officer is treated as he or she should be, regardless of gender, color or other similar factors. The Service traditions to which I am referring are those concerning modes of address, greetings, salutes, etc.: customs and courtesies, matters of military etiquette and protocol. But fundamentally the military is and must remain a hierarchical organization. The beauty of the military system of hierarchical organization is that it overlays, crosscuts and transcends differences related to gender. This is not to say that positional authority is the be-all and the end-all, that it is sufficient to solve all our problems. Every leader needs to learn persuasiveness, how to engender cooperation and a team feeling rather than relying solely on rigid ranks and the issuing of orders. But we do our female cadets and junior officers a disservice if we lead them to think that they can or even should get done what needs doing primarily by persuasion. This can lead to reliance on charm, smiles, likeability, winsomeness, asking for "favors", overfamiliarity, etc. It degrades some of the necessary distance to be maintained between senior and subordinate.

To summarize: there are many situations in which a female servicemember's identity as a cadet, officer or more senior person is more important than her gender - and this

Eriksen & Colleagues

should be true both to her and to male members of the Service, whether they are more senior, more junior, or of the same rank or class. Some of the questions of respect and disrespect that vex cadets and junior officers on a daily basis would be simplified and transcended if we all put our focus more decidedly on the protocols and courtesies that form a part of our historical legacy, and which can provide a reservoir of institutionalized respect. This would lead to behavior modified for the better, and a more even operating field on which female servicemembers can demonstrate their equal capability to lead.

Matthew Eriksen, PhD, Department of Management, University of Tampa

Captain Ayer,

First, I would like to thank for your willingness to engage me in this dialogue about your reaction to the panel of 1/c cadets' presentation that I moderated at *The Conference on Women at the Academy* which is part of the *30 Year Commemoration of Women at the Academy* and commend you for your courage to publicly speak up and take a position on such an important issue to the Coast Guard Academy and the Coast Guard's future effectiveness and readiness. Also, I want thank the cadets: 1/c Celina Pearl, 1/c Matthew Duffy, 1/c Kenisha Scott, 1/c Dave Gonzales, 1/c Claire Mielke, and 1/c Ann Catherine Sullivan for being on the panel. They displayed great courage and provided the audience with thoughtful and insightful comments, questions, and recommendations that stimulated a fantastic dialogue. They embodied the Coast Guard's notion of a "leader of character." Finally, I think your focus on the day-to-day is of outmost importance. This is the place where any change initiative must ultimately take focus, not merely on abstractions of how we want things to be. To create change, we must jump into the flux, contingency and paradox of day-to-day life. This is where the organization actually exists: within our day-to-day interactions with one another.

As I read through your above ruminations about gender and respect at the Coast Guard Academy, I found myself fully agreeing with you and the logic of your argument - it made perfect sense. But as I began to think about my understanding of what actually happens in the day-to-day lived experience of cadets (based on my conversations with cadets and the research on this subject over my four years teaching at the Academy), I began to think about the difference between the intended purpose of official modes of address in the Coast Guard and the actual day-to-day lived experience of cadets and the present challenges of cadets actually living out the *spirit* of official modes of address in their day-to-day lives.

In the Coast Guard's infancy, this meant, regardless of which white male held a particular position, he would be afforded the same level of respect as any other white male occupying the position. It merely focused on differences among individuals. As minorities entered the Coast Guard, the official ways of address also entered the realm of respect across differences based on the social categorizations of race and gender.

It is not just *what* one says that has meaning, but also *how* one says it. Also, what is said in public versus what is said "behind closed doors" or "in the locker room" can be two different things. And what is said behind closed doors is what is seen as the "truth" of the situation. To use the example from above, a female officer might be addressed as Lieutenant in public, only to later be called a bitch in the locker room. Images are created and sustained by our culture and through such industries as film. The images one holds determine how one thinks and define the possible actions one might take. Our culture's image of a military leader may be generally described as a tall, strong, white male. Therefore, whoever is not a tall, strong, white male is most often not seen as a leader, or is done so only by qualification. Also, many cadets have not been led by

females in the past. Thus, in their minds, they may not have figured out how to be led by a woman, and therefore use another type of relationship that they have been in with an older woman, such as that of mom/son, to guide their interactions with a female in a leadership position. This leads to such consequences a women being forced into a nurturing role that the organization does not formally reward or value through performance evaluations, and away from performing operational tasks that are rewarded and valued.

In High School Were You Comfortable with Who You Were?

At the Academy, has there been any time that you had difficulty trying to figure out who to be (i.e., how to behave and interact with others), in general and/or in a specific role? If so, when did this occur? Why did it occur? How did you feel? How did you attempt to resolve this? Were you able to resolve this?

Yes, there were times that I had difficulty trying to figure out who to be. In the beginning, this was overall in general. I remember the first time I went home after swab summer, I did not want to come back because I insisted that I did not like it, everyone was weird, and I had no friends. Looking back, I think I felt this way, because I felt like I didn't really belong. After that initial difficulty, the feelings about who to be became more directed on specific situations, like who to be as a leader, especially during my second class summer. It was easy for me to be a follower, but I had no idea who to be as a leader. I felt like I was stuck because I did not have the qualities that the institution thought were needed to be a good swab summer cadre. I was quiet, shy, small, and felt like I had no authoritative presence, as well as different objectives about training than the Academy had. In preparation for swab summer, they videotaped each of us pretending to be cadre, while the rest of our class mates were our swabs. This experience created the final idea that in order to be a good leader, then you must yell and

have those masculine qualities we had witnessed in leaders since our arrival here. This caused a dilemma because I knew that wasn't me, but I felt forced into that role. I didn't know how or act or what to do. In the end, I think I tried to display some of these leadership qualities I had been taught, but it was obvious that they were not me, and because they weren't, they didn't work. If anything, I just came off as a bitch.

Did you try to emulate any role model(s) when you entered your first leadership role? If so, was this effective? Why or why not? Were there any leadership theories that you tried to act out? If so, was this effective? Why or why not?

No, I was conflicted by this because I felt like I didn't really have any good role models that I could emulate. Yes, I had role models, but we were so different that it seemed ridiculous to try to emulate them. The role models that I had from my swab summer, were all very confident males. I felt like there was no way to emulate these people, so I didn't even bother.

What is the most salient personal characteristic or attribute that makes leadership challenging for you?

Hmm.. This is hard to choose just one. I would say the biggest is my personality- shy and introverted and the second is my size and stature.

What are the categories of woman at the CGA? What does being a member of each one these categories mean?

I am not really sure. I guess there are the athletic ones, the more girly ones, the more studious ones, the military like ones, and maybe the ones that are girls and don't really fit into any category- they are just normal. Being a member of one of these means that you have someone to relate to and identify with; whether you are really like them or not, I think people just assume you are.

AOM Answers 1

Eriksen & Colleagues

I had an unusual high school experience in that I was a minority (racially) in my high school. Because all students were military dependents, it was very racially diverse. While there was racial diversity within my immediate group of close friends, there wasn't necessarily social/cultural diversity. There was almost a definite line between officers' children and enlistees' children. Of course there were exceptions, but generally, the officer's children were all college bound, which meant we were in all the AP classes together (of which there was only 1 section for each class) and we also lived near each other on base. Less than 50% of my high school went on to college. This definitely affected how I behaved with others, especially those who weren't on the college bound track. I tried hard not to be judgmental, but in reality it was hard not to be. I didn't want to associate myself with that group. To over simplify things, as a white girl going through my school, you basically had two paths to choose from. You became part of the *involved* crowd or you fell into the *ghetto* crowd. So not only was there separation between races, but even within the same race and same gender there was separation. That was the most difficult to deal with. It was uncomfortable and I usually avoided interacting with white females who weren't on the same "path" as I was.

Coming out of swab summer, I very much wanted to be a "good cadet". I worked hard at everything and really bought into the whole system. I never felt like I needed to suppress my female characteristics to succeed; but then I don't think I have a lot of overly feminine traits. In fact, some of my normal traits might be considered masculine. To succeed 4/c year I just put my nose to the grindstone and did my job the best that I could. In the 2/c summer, when we were preparing to be cadre, I felt the need to amp up my masculine traits. When I looked back at my cadre who I wanted to emulate, they were all large, intimidating, confident males. I quickly realized that would not work for me. I actually ended up taking on a more feminine role then I think I naturally would, outside of

swab summer. I was very much the nurturing cadre-taking cadets to see the counselor or chaplain, falling out with them if they started to cry, encouraging them when they were having difficulty.

At first, I was angry at the fact that I was forced into this role. I felt it wouldn't be as valued. While I certainly was not the feared cadre that the 4/c talked about, I felt like I made a difference and did a good job. I think the other cadre in my platoon respected me and felt I did a good job over swab summer too. I ended up really enjoying my role during swab summer, and I think that playing that "role" actually brought out some of my more feminine traits. I feel like I act more feminine now than I ever have. I don't know if its because I feel like it is "ok" to now and they are coming out or if I am just developing more feminine tendencies. I tend to think the latter.

What really makes leadership a challenge for me is taking charge of something that I'm not knowledgeable about. I am very nervous about taking charge of a bridge team and driving the ship. I feel like I don't have a knack for it and that is what the CGA stresses as important. While it's not necessarily what you mainly do, it is the most visible.

I don't mind being in charge when I feel I have a competent understanding about the mission/goal of the group. I enjoy making decisions, and would prefer to be the one making them then having them made for me.

What are the categories of woman at the CGA? What does being a member of each one these categories mean?

Women who perform well militarily-You're looked upon to set an example for the underclass and fill leadership positions.

Girly girls-personally I hate this name, they could at least call themselves something else that is less demeaning. It wouldn't necessarily be demeaning outside of the military, but in this setting it is. This group of women might have put make up on over swab summer or act aloof. They do not

exude the poise and confidence that the "academy" might wish cadets would.

Ho's-self explanatory

What are the categories of men at CGA? What does being a member of each one of the categories mean?

Athletes (Jocks)-This group is mainly the football players. You could play soccer, swimming and baseball and still not be considered part of this group. This group's primary concern is in the athletic area

Intellects-This group is viewed as kind of nerdy, but very smart-the engineers.

Video gamers-These guys play a lot of video games and spend a lot of time in the dark with there computers.

2.0's and go-This group is here just attempting to graduate and trying to have the most fun they can.

AOM Answers 2

As far as my change since high school, well that really ignited on reporting in day at the Academy. When I walked through those front gates, I walked in a very shy and lacking in confidence individual. I was not comfortable with speaking in front of people, and I was certainly not comfortable with my ability. I felt as though every single person could outdo me in anything. I think that was mainly because it was a military Academy and these people had to be better then me, for I only got in because my basketball coach got me in. However, as soon as we braced up on that wall for the first time, I forgot about all of those things. Nothing mattered to me at that point because the only thing that I could focus on was sounding off, squaring, bracing up, double-timing and making that uniform look good. Tunnel vision? Maybe, but I felt as though we were all on the same level, and the only way to progress was to perform. I was a robot then, doing those things that I thought we were supposed to

do and following the commands of my cadre. However, I performed to the best of my ability. And I think during swab summer I began the process of gaining the confidence in my performance and that shy person in high school began to fade away.

I recall having difficult relating to my roommates, and to other people in the company. I also had difficulty relating to my "friends" from swab summer. I say friends because really they were just people that I was put with during swab summer. We didn't really have that much in common so I would not have chosen all of them as my friends. However, my girlfriends from swab summer I am still friends with now. It is my male friends from swab summer that I don't really talk to anymore. I think my difficult in relating to others was a lack in knowing myself. I seemed to be on a search while having people tell me who they thought I was. In turn I found it difficult to define myself by myself.

I took notes on behaviors and styles that I wanted to emulate and those styles and behaviors that I wanted to make sure to avoid. I was very conscientious of those things that really made an impression on me as a swab and as an underclass. But when the time came to actually be a platoon commander, I really just forgot about all of those things. I ended up just being able to focus on one thing, at a time because there was too much to think about. I didn't want to spend my time "thinking" about my actions and every move I made, rather I just wanted to lead naturally. I was worried about being the best cadre that I could. I wanted the swabs to know that I cared about their well being, while at the same time I wanted them to realize that I would correct them if they were doing something wrong. I was really focused on the "big picture" during swab summer, hence I did not really nit-pick about every little thing that was done wrong.

I did find that if ever I tried to emulate role models, I ended up being fake, because I was acting upon actions that were not my own. It was more helpful to actually make

Eriksen & Colleagues

mistakes as myself and learn from them, then rely on acting as someone would act. Often times I was very worried about making mistakes, and I wanted everything to turn out perfectly. Which became a problem because there was no special formula for the way things were supposed to be. Not really any specific standards (except the performance report). And in emulating someone's style that you look up to, you in fact think that you can not make a mistake because the person you are emulating was doing it perfectly (or else you wouldn't want to emulate them) so how can you learn from that anyway. When in fact the whole leadership experience is all about learning.

Departing Thoughts

Maybe I am in the wrong for looking out for others too much. It certainly takes up a lot of my personal time. It's my nature to be nurturing. Maybe it's because I'm a female. Or, I've noticed that I change my leadership style based on what is needed. On this boat, I feel I am an approachable person and my leadership personality is more one with my actual personality.

When I was at the Academy, I was a very gung-ho motivated cadet. My room and uniform were immaculate. I was trained by a Marine Corp gunnery sergeant at NAPS and that stuck with me throughout my cadet career. Most people today would probably not believe it, but I was actually the most feared 2/c in the corps of cadets. I wanted things done right. I didn't yell at people for no reason. I challenged the 4/c, and I feel today they can look back and say they accomplished something. I had a very hard core attitude because that was lacking at the academy, just as nurturing is lacking on this boat.

Because I am nurturing, people ask me for help on a lot of things. I have no problem helping people do this stuff, but why doesn't their own division officer or

chief take the time to do this? Anycase, I've already taken up almost two pages with looking out for others, and this is just stuff that's occurred since January of this year. Imagine how long this list would be if I started from when I got here! Bottom line is people need to look out more for their own people. It will motivate them more about staying in the Coast Guard if they do.

Role Model:

I don't feel I have a role model or someone that I can relate to on the boat. Just as the crew wants someone to look out for them, I do not have someone to look out for me. My OPS boss doesn't understand me and apparently I don't understand him, so that leaves him out as a role model. The CO and XO are too busy to really ever talk to about anything personal. Ideally, I wish there was another senior female, or even female of the same rank that I could talk to. I had a very strong group of girl friends at the academy which I miss dearly. I really sucks to be one of the only girls on the boat. I guess I understand how black people feel. At the academy I noticed all the African Americans sat together. Some people wondered why they did this. I feel it is because they all have something in common and can relate to each other. I look around at the wardroom and sometimes I'm the only girl in there. The conversations people have are one that a male would have. If I talk about something feminine that a girl would like everyone sort of chuckles. Everyone's trying to be the masculine man and if they talk about shopping or something all the sudden they aren't as macho. Maybe people just need to be more secure in their masculinity. Bottom line is how am I supposed to succeed or want to carry on in the Coast Guard if there is no one that I look up to or want to emulate? Everyone I see is a man. No one is like me. Maybe all the women get out after five years. Maybe no one else wants to put up with it either.

Female in a Man's World:

The other night I went to the Tiki Club with one of my Petty Officers because I wanted to go see the OPS of the boat because he told me he would be there. I knew him from when I was a cadet and he was CO of the station to which I was assigned. Anycase, when I walked into the Tiki Club, my PO looked at me and said, "Do you realize that every guy in the club is looking at you?" I guess ordinarily this would be flattering, but I am just tired of it. I'm tired of being the only girl. I'm tired because I wish these people were looking at me because they want to be my friend and not because they want to sleep with me. The gawking is ridiculous. I wish I could video tape what these people say to me as pick up lines or ways to start conversations to show people who probably don't believe it. If someone walks up to me and says right off the bat, "You're hot," does this person think that that is going to win me over and now I'm going to want to go home and sleep with this person? Maybe I should just do a better job of ignoring these folks.

Instead I listen to their crazy horny state. I miss my husband. I knew him for 4 years before we started dating. We were friends first. I knew he liked me for who I was and not what I looked like. He cares about me as a person.

I cannot stand these men that try to charm you. Don't they understand that a way to win a woman over is to be her friend and be a gentleman? Yeah, it's going to take time. This is why I don't drink around guys anymore. This really pisses me off because it happens all the time. I meet guys in Charleston and I get really excited because I think maybe this person wants to be my friend. After a while, I still haven't slept with the person and they take off. Can't we just go out and have a good time? This is ridiculous. I wish I could meet some girl friends. At least they can like me for who I am.

Copyright of TAMARA: Journal of Critical Postmodern Organization Science is the property of TAMARA: Journal of Critical Postmodern Organization Science and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.