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Retention Rate Factors of Junior Enlisted Females in the U.S Marine Corps

Iris I. Esquilin

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Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

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Iris I. Esquilin

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Walden University
2023

Abstract

Retention Rate Factors of Junior Enlisted Females in the U.S Marine Corps

by

Iris I. Esquilin

MA, Webster University, 2009

BA, National University, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

May 2023

Abstract

The modern United States Armed Forces is the largest and most powerful military force the world has ever experienced, and the U.S. Marine Corps represents the most elite members thereof, claiming the iconic tagline “The Few, The Proud.” However, while the Marine Corps expends considerable effort in recruiting excellent personnel, the branch also faces a high turnover rate, with 75.0% of first-year enlistees choosing not to continue their service for a subsequent term. This retention problem is especially pronounced with respect to female Marines, who only make up 8.0% of the Marine force, the lowest of any U.S. military branch. First-term attrition is costly and an ongoing issue across all military service branches especially regarding women. This study focused on the factors that impact the low retention rate of junior enlisted female Marines. A qualitative interview approach was used to collect the data from 16 junior female Marines, and data were analyzed utilizing the frameworks of Steer and Mowday’s turnover model as well as Herzberg’s two-factor model. A 30- to 60-minute virtual interview that consisted of 21 questions was used to ascertain their perspective on whether leadership played a part in their decisions to separate from the Marine Corps. The results indicated that leadership played a significant role in the reasons why these females choose to separate from the Marine Corps. The findings that inadequate leadership causes females to quit should be interpreted as a demand for a broader social transformation and an opportunity for leadership to campaign for more gender representation to develop equal and inclusive work conditions for women.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to the most amazing children any mother could ever ask for—my beautiful daughter, my clone, Mechalyne “Mikki” Esquilin, and my handsome son Meekael “Meeko” Esquilin—who both unknowingly made their own sacrifices in order for me to accomplish this goal. For their love, encouragement, and support during my educational journey, I love you both very much, (ME²). A special shout out goes to my kitty Peppa, for sitting on the keyboard as I attempted to type. Thank you for the much-needed distractions and for keeping me company night after night. Most importantly, I give thanks to the Lord and Savior above, Jesus Christ. You provided me with the confirmation I needed to believe that all things are possible.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart; and lean not on your own understanding.

⁶In all ways acknowledge Him, and he will make straight your paths.”

-Proverbs 3:5-6

Acknowledgments

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the many people who supported me through my educational journey. First, I would not have been able to accomplish this goal without the grace, mercy, and favor shown to me by my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. All that I am, all that I have accomplished, I owe it all to You Lord. “Thank you for forming my inward parts; for knitting me together in my mother’s womb and for establishing a path for my life, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps 139:13-14). A special thanks to Dr. J. Scott Frampton, my dissertation chair, for putting up with my rambling, which was most of the time, for believing in me, for your patience, guidance, and encouragement through what I believed was a path with no light at the end of the tunnel. Dr. Gregory Campbell, committee member, thank you for your constructive feedback and for providing the other set of eyes, for you were instrumental in ensuring that all my T’s were crossed and all my I’s were dotted. To the faculty involved in this process, you covered all the loose ends. To my girls, you know who you are, thank you for allowing me to cancel on all those shopping trips and on our girl time. I’m done! We can hang out now. Dr. CM, thank you for getting me over that last hump. And lastly, to my sister Maria Esquilin. You have been my biggest fan, forever in my corner with an encouraging word, and for always reminding me how proud you are of me. Thank you for being the bestest big sister EVER.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	v
List of Figures	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background of the Study	3
Problem Statement	5
Purpose of the Study	6
Research Questions	6
Theoretical Framework.....	7
Steers and Mowday’s Turnover Model.....	7
Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory	8
Nature of the Study	9
Definitions.....	10
Assumptions.....	11
Scope and Limitations.....	12
Limitations	13
Significance of the Study	14
Implications for Social Change.....	15
Summary and Transition.....	15
Chapter 2: Literature Review	17
Literature Search Strategy.....	17
Theoretical Framework.....	18

Steers and Mowday’s Turnover Model.....	19
Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory	22
Connection of Theoretical Framework to Study Design	23
Literature Review Related to Key Concepts.....	24
The Role of Women in the Military	24
Barriers Faced by Women in the Military	30
Recruitment.....	31
Factors Influencing Recruiting	36
Retention.....	39
Military Leadership.....	41
The Changing Nature of War.....	43
Direct Combat Roles.....	43
Summary and Transition.....	44
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	46
Research Design and Rationale	46
Role of the Researcher	48
Methodology	49
Participant Pool.....	49
Participant Selection	50
Participant Recruitment	51
Instrumentation	52
Data Collection	53

Data Analysis	54
Issue of Trustworthiness	55
Credibility	56
Transferability	56
Dependability	57
Confirmability	58
Reliability	59
Validity	59
Ethical Procedures	59
Summary and Transition	61
Chapter 4: Results	62
Research Setting	63
Demographics	63
Data Collection	67
Data Analysis	68
Evidence of Trustworthiness	71
Credibility/Validity	71
Transferability	72
Dependability/Reliability	72
Confirmability	73
Study Results	74
Research Question 1	74

Research Question 2	89
Research Question 3	97
Summary and Transition.....	111
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations	113
Interpretation of the Findings.....	113
Review of Theoretical Frameworks.....	114
Limitations of the Study.....	125
Recommendations For Practice	126
Implications for Social Change.....	130
Conclusion	131
References.....	133
Appendix A: Interview Protocol.....	148
Appendix B: Interview Questions.....	152
Appendix C: Permission Request: Published Research Instrument	153
Appendix D: Permission Request: Social Media Post.....	154
Appendix E: Interview Memos	155
Appendix F: Women Marines Leading the Way	159

List of Tables

Table 1	<i>Demographic Characteristics of Participants</i>	64
Table 2	<i>Military Demographic Profiles of Participants</i>	66
Table 3	<i>Codebook Table</i>	70
Table 4	<i>Participants' Reasons for leaving the Marine Corps</i>	75
Table 5	<i>Factors Influencing the Participants' Decision to leave the Marine Corps</i>	89
Table 6	<i>Participants' Challenges with Leadership in the Marine Corps</i>	99
Table 7	<i>Participants' Expectations of Leaders</i>	102

List of Figures

Figure 1	<i>Conceptual Framework</i>	19
Figure 2	<i>Steers & Mowday's Turnover Model</i>	21
Figure 3	<i>Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory</i>	23
Figure 4	<i>Braun & Clarke Thematic Analysis</i>	55

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The U.S. Marine Corps has perpetuated a high turnover rate (Plag & Goffman, 1966; Plag & Hardacre, 1964; Schogol, 2021). A recent report by the Marine Corps' current Commandant Gen. David H. Berger stated that roughly 75.0% of its first-term Marines have been discharged each year for the past 36 years. The low rate of attrition indicates that turnover is not necessarily the result of individuals wanting to leave but rather a lack of desire to stay (Marrone, 2020). Despite this significant turnover, the Marine Corps recruits 36,000 new Marines annually to replace those separating (Athey, 2021), which has affected the growth and maturity of the Marine Corps. In accordance with the strategy in General Berger's plan, the Marine Corps prefers attrition towards the end of a Marine's first term enlistment rather than investing in retention and committing to preserving its bottom-heavy grade structure (Schogol, 2021).

Perhaps not surprisingly, the Marine Corps has recently struggled to retain its Marines (Schogol, 2021). Instead, according to research, the Marine Corps has experienced an increase in widespread personnel turnover (Plag & Goffman, 1966; Plag & Hardacre, 1964;). The low rate of re-enlistment in the Marine Corps is paralleled by a relatively low rate of attrition, indicating that turnover is not necessarily the result of individuals wanting to leave but rather a lack of desire to stay (Marrone, 2020). The adoption of a "recruit and replace" people paradigm rather than an "invest and retain" model is the result of decisions taken more than a generation ago (Schogol, 2021).

With the demographics of the United States changing from those of previous generations, the composition of today's military is projected to change in the next 20 to

30 years. More women have been joining the U.S. military in recent years; the percentage of women in active-duty forces rose from 15.1% to 16.5% between 2004 to 2018 with the U.S. Navy seeing the largest increase. Though the Marine Corps saw a 2.5 percentage point increase in the proportion of women enlisted over the same time period, the total percentage of women in the Marine Corps remained at only 8.6%, the lowest of all military branches. Women make up half of the potential recruit population; however, women leave at higher rates than men, leading to a persistent disparity in the gender composition of active-duty forces (Dickstein, 2020). A report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) showed that in fiscal years 2004 and 2018, the attrition rates for enlisted females were 33.1% and 8.6%, respectively, and the rates for enlisted males were 22.7% and 6.1%, respectively (Farrell, 2020). This correlates with women being 28.0% more likely than men to separate before the completion of their contract term (Dickstein, 2020).

As suggested by the aforementioned statistics, women qualified to complete the requirements of their positions are choosing to leave of their own volition. Women largely leave over the following concerns: work schedules, organizational culture, family planning, deployments, sexual assault, and the lack of female mentors (Dickstein, 2020; Kime, 2020). Consistent with poor retention, in 2016 women made up a smaller percentage of officers (7.4%) than they did the enlisted population (8.2%), suggesting that women are either not retained or not promoted with the same frequency as men (Lee, 2018). In light of this information, I conducted this study to gain insight into the

perceptions of female Marines who choose to separate from the Marine Corps and how interactions with leadership influenced their decision.

This chapter contains an introduction to this problem, including background information about the study, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, and related research questions. It also includes descriptions of the theoretical framework guiding the study, the nature of the study, and definitions of key terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations. Finally, the chapter concludes by discussing the significance of the study and provides a summary and transition to the review of the literature.

Background of the Study

The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) has recognized that increasing the gender diversity of its force relies on bringing more female recruits into the service (Werner, 2020). Women make up an important demographic within the armed forces, having made significant contributions to military efforts before the first women enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1918 (Lee, 2018), disguising themselves as men to participate in combat throughout American history (Amara, 2020). During WW II, women increasingly took on auxiliary roles so that more men were available for combat. Roles for women in the military have gradually expanded, leading up to the 2015 decision to remove all restrictions preventing women from participating in direct combat roles (Kavanagh & Wenger, 2020). However, the Marine Corps until recently, remained the only military branch that maintains separate basic training programs based on gender (Swick & Moore, 2018). It also remains the military branch with the lowest proportion of women

(Dickstein, 2020). The percentage of female active-duty service decreases when considering only service members that have been enlisted for 10 or more years across all levels and decreases even further when considering only those who have been enlisted for more than 20 years (Farrell, 2020).

In 2011, the Department of Defense (Department of Defense, 2020) called on the Military Diversity Commission (MLDC) to review and evaluate the military's diversity and inclusion policies. Under the jurisdiction of the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2009 (MLDC, 2011), the Commission outlined three goals:

1. Establish the foundation for effective diversity
2. Develop future leaders
3. Implement policies and practices (MLDC, 2011)

As a result, the DoD identified female recruitment and retention as critical to diversity in the U.S. military (Farrell, 2020). According to DoD officials, although the DoD continues to update its diversity and inclusion plan, neither its prior plan nor its current one includes specific details on improving recruitment or retention goals, performance measures, and timelines for any particular demographic group (DoD, 2014). Recruitment and retention goals cannot be met unless the U.S. Marine Corps has a fundamental understanding of why certain demographic groups choose to leave the service. This study is, therefore, well poised to address whether leadership impacts female Marines' decisions to leave the military.

Problem Statement

Women make up approximately 8.0% of the Marine Corps' active component, which is less than half of the female population in the other branches (Trotta, 2021). The research problem for this study concerns the potential negative impact that leadership has on the decisions of junior enlisted females. Although the Marine Corps saw a 2.5% increase in the number of women between 2004 and 2018, from 6.1% to 8.6%, research showed that the Marine Corps has the lowest percentage of women serving (Kime, 2020), and women are 28.0% more likely than men to leave the military early (Dickstein, 2020). Attrition of female Marines contributes to the service missing its recruitment and retention goals and also represents a deficiency in significant opportunities for female Marines. There are more than 180,000 Marines serving on active-duty, making up approximately 13.6% of the active-duty force. Of the 180,000, 88.1% are enlisted personnel. Females make up 8.9% of that population (Department of Defense, 2020). In 2020, voluntary separation, which includes the expiration of contractual obligations in the first term, was the most common type of separation for enlisted personnel. The 2011 MLDC report highlighted growing concerns about representing certain demographic groups at a disadvantage in the military (MLDC, 2011). A 2011 MLDC report showed that female and minority promotion rates for all services were below average for any particular position. In particular, underrepresented populations (Hispanic and non-Hispanic) tend to have lower-than-average promotion rates for all services (King et al., 2020). In the same way, the Hispanic staff tends to have lower promotion rates for all services. Except for the military, Navy females tend to have much lower promotion rates

for O-4 (Major), and ultimately O-5 (Lieutenant Colonel). Thus, the combination of promotion and sustainability has a lasting impact on the diversity of the military's population (Kocis & Sonntag, 2018). These rates need to be documented and analyzed to study their ultimate impact on the diversity of military service, especially among officers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and better understand the potential negative impact and influence that leadership had on the decisions of junior enlisted female Marines to separate from the Marine Corps. Specifically, this study sought to identify the potential negative impact that leadership has on the decision-making process for junior female Marines related to retention. This study considered differences between stages in the careers of the participants, their perceptions of leadership, and whether leadership impacted enlisted female retention. A priority was placed on junior enlisted females who separated or left the military before becoming eligible for re-enlistment for a subsequent term.

Research Questions

The research questions (RQ) for this study were as follows:

1. Why do junior enlisted female Marines leave the Marine Corps?
2. What factors contribute to the decision to separate from the Marine Corps before becoming eligible for re-enlisting for a subsequent term?
3. What impact did leadership have on the decision for female Marines to separate?

Theoretical Framework

The theories that grounded the study included Steers and Mowday's (1981) turnover model and Herzberg's (1966) two-factor theory. This framework provided an explanation of the decision-making process employees go through when deciding to remain or leave their jobs (Ortiz et al., n.d.). Using this framework provided a more comprehensive understanding of the study and theory of female rotation in the military.

Steers and Mowday's Turnover Model

Steers and Mowday (1981) proposed a theoretical framework to explain employee turnover processes, integrating previous theories' findings to provide a more comprehensive model. The framework focuses on affective responses to an employee's job, including job satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational commitment. They further considered three major factors influencing these affective responses: job expectations and values, experienced organizational reality, and job performance (Steers & Mowday, 1981). Finally, they considered other influences that may inform the decision-making process, such as individual characteristics and the awareness of alternative options. Steers and Mowday recognized the complicated interplay between these factors, portraying an employee's decision to leave their position not as a linear process but as a complex diagram incorporating a series of feedback loops. The model allowed me to consider numerous interrelated factors that collectively influence an individual's decision to separate from their job, considering these factors both independently and as a network. This was especially relevant, as the interviews included

open-ended questions, the responses to which did not fit a linear framework, as some other employee turnover models employ.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

In 1959, Herzberg's two-factor theory was published as the "motivation-hygiene" theory. The theory argues that all decisions are influenced by a combination of desires to seek out satisfying things and a desire to avoid dissatisfaction. These categories are referred to as motivation and hygiene, respectively. Hygiene factors are considered less important to job satisfaction than motivation factors and may include poor salary, unpleasant or unsafe working conditions, hostile relationships with colleagues, or unfair expectations (Nickerson, 2021). Conversely, motivation factors that lead to job satisfaction include the work itself, earned recognition, the potential for advancement, and personal growth (Dion, 2006). An individual who associates their work with self-actualization is more likely to experience job satisfaction than one who considers their position to be just a way to earn a living. Self-actualization refers to the pinnacle of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, where there is an innate drive to be the best person one can be, or rather, to be whom one is meant to be (Maslow, 1966). Herzberg's two-factor theory argues that sufficient motivating factors are likely to encourage employees to remain at their jobs, even in the presence of hygiene factors that may act as a deterrent (Alshmemri et al., 2017).

In the case of the current research, interviews were conducted to identify motivation and hygiene factors impacting women in the Marine Corps and how these subsequently impacted their decisions to separate. More importantly, the study addressed

whether a lack of motivation factors, an excess of hygiene factors, or a combination thereof played an important role in this decision; this can also be related to factors such as leadership influencing the females. As such, the study focused on motivation and hygiene factors related to leadership.

Nature of the Study

To address the research problem and related questions, a simple qualitative approach that centered around Moustakas' theoretical work with hermeneutic phenomenology was used for this study. This approach was appropriate for this study because it provided the best opportunity to give voice to the experiences each participant described in the interviews (see Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Interviews were conducted with junior enlisted female Marines in either active duty or recently separated status. The study was conducted to understand the life experiences of each participant and the specific motives related to their decision not to continue to serve actively. Interview respondents were asked to speak on the sacrifices they have made throughout their careers and the impact of leadership on their decisions. Conducting semi structured interviews and using interview guides provided flexibility while collecting the same data from each participant (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

The NVivo Version 12 qualitative software package was used for the management, coding, analysis, and visualization of qualitative data in the form of interview transcripts. It helped organize, analyze, and find insights in unstructured or qualitative data like interviews, open-ended responses, journal articles, social media, and web content where deep levels of analysis on a small or large volume of data were

required (McNiff, 2016; Richards & Richards, 2003). During data collection, I set aside my own experiential beliefs and engaged in reflexivity protocols. Data were compared and themes identified until data saturation was reached, and recorded and posted using NVivo 12 software.

Definitions

Understanding certain keywords or phrases in this study provides a greater comprehension of the purpose of this research. The following is a list of terms used in the study.

Active-duty service: Active military service requires someone to serve full-time military service. They work full-time, are available 24/7, can be at a military base, on-call and relocate at any time (Grier, 2019).

Attrition: A gradual, natural reduction in membership or personnel, such as through retirement, resignation, or death (Basariya & Ahmed, 2019).

Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB): The military's enlistment and job assignment examination (Gilroy et al., 2020).

Department of Defense (DoD): An executive branch department of the federal government charged with providing the military forces needed to deter war and ensure national security (Buchalter, 2007).

Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT): Official federal policy on lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals in military service.

Employee Turnover: A separation of an employee from an establishment as voluntary, involuntary, or other (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022).

Leadership: a process in which a person uses behaviors and skills to influence others to work toward a common goal (Drugus & Landoy, 2014).

Military Occupational Specialty (MOS): The term used by certain military branches such as the Marine Corps to describe the jobs available for aspiring Marines (Marines.mil., n.d.).

Motivation: The term means how to provide something to a person to drive him or her to do something (Ruthankoon & Ogunlana, 2003).

Retention: The term relates to the rate at which military personnel voluntarily choose to remain in the military after their contractual obligations (Kapp, 2021).

Servicemember: The term, as defined by the Department of Veterans Affairs, means a member of the “uniformed services” consisting of the armed forces (Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard, and Space Force; U.S. Code § 3911 section 101(a)(5) of title 10).

Underrepresented populations: The term refers to a subgroup of the population whose representation is disproportionately low relative to their numbers in the general population. (Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.)

Voluntary turnover: A separation of an employee from an establishment that is initiated by the employee; a voluntary separation; a resignation from a job or position (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022).

Assumptions

Before selecting this topic, I assumed that there was a link between leadership and junior enlisted female Marines’ decisions to separate from the Marine Corps. It is the

responsibility of the researcher to annotate the biases of those involved in the research through their responses in the course of this study (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Several other assumptions were made, such as that each Marine answered each question frankly and honestly resulting in the accuracy of the answers and collected data, that participation was completely on a voluntary basis, and lastly, that participants would have good judgment, a good understanding of what leadership is, and sufficient experience and exposure to different leadership styles to provide the correct answers to the questions. Another key assumption was that every Marine who participated in the study had an honorable discharge with no disciplinary action associated. The risks associated with participation were minimal but nevertheless important to provide confidentiality.

Scope and Limitations

This study was limited to junior enlisted female Marines who were on active-duty or had recently separated from the United States Marine Corps. The focus was on the junior enlisted female Marines to understand why they left the Marine Corps before becoming eligible for re-enlistment for a subsequent term. The scope of the study was limited to the Marine Corps in the United States. Specifically, junior enlisted female Marines were chosen to be the focus to build on prior research that focused on the experiences of women in the Marine Corps. However, if a sample was collected and reflected the proper sample population then it could have been assumed that there could be transferability to other U.S. branches of service. Specifically, the findings of the present study may also apply to women serving in other branches of the military who may choose not to re-enlist for similar reasons. Beyond this, some of the study results

may be relevant to all individuals who choose to leave the military and to reasons why women choose to leave their jobs in general. However, due to the delimitation of the study to include only junior female Marines, no such extrapolations will be made at this time. Additionally, it is important to consider that the results of the present study cannot necessarily be transferred beyond the study population. For example, the findings cannot be presumed to pertain to women who chose to separate from the Marines less recently, or to eligible women who chose not to participate in the study, as women with certain experiences or reasons for choosing to separate may be more or less likely to be willing to share these for research purposes.

Limitations

This study was limited by (a) access to participants, due to current coronavirus conditions; (b) time constraints in data collections; (c) compliance with the acknowledgment; and (d) validity/reliability of data. To gain a thorough understanding of the retention rate and factors of the junior enlisted female in the U.S. Marine Corps, it was necessary to secure the participants from the junior pool in the Marine Corps and those who departed before their re-enlistment for the second or third term. However, the number of participants in this study did not represent the entire group.

This study also had several challenges in order to effectively reach a conclusion. Some challenges included ensuring a clear delineation of my role as a researcher and as a retired female Marine to avoid inherent bias. As a researcher, my ongoing relationship with the military, my military service, and my personal experience with the topic of study may have led to bias and could have influenced the outcome. Researcher biases in this

study were managed through personal awareness of any similar personal or professional experiences, a thorough research plan, placing topics into separate and appropriate categories, and having the ability to summarize answers using the original context in an effective and integrity-based manner. I also engaged in reflexivity throughout the entirety of the study by journaling and memoing my thoughts regarding the research process as well as the participants' responses to questions. These procedures allowed me to mitigate researcher bias.

Significance of the Study

Attrition represents a significant cost to the U.S. military, as the cost of recruitment alone is estimated to be \$11,000 per enlistee and additional resources must be applied towards lost wages and training replacements (Marrone, 2020). It was thus important to identify important factors driving attrition, especially for specific demographics that are known to leave at higher-than-average rates. Furthermore, the Marines have identified gender diversity as an important area for improvement, with disparities in attrition being a major underlying factor in the present lack of diversity, especially in this branch of the military.

This study is significant in that it fills a gap in understanding why junior enlisted females leave the Marine Corps before becoming eligible for re-enlistment in the second or third term. Better understanding this dynamic, the rationale behind the decisions made by junior enlisted female Marines to separate, and their lived experiences could aid the U.S. Marine Corps in creating a better plan to recruit and retain their female Marines. Female retention has been a problem in the military, particularly in the Marine Corps, and

this research aimed to assist in understanding the phenomenon more deeply and ultimately fixing the problem.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for social change from this study include helping to identify the link between leadership and retention rates of junior enlisted female Marines. The potential decreased cost of resources alone should be sufficient for military services to further assess retention efforts. The retention of qualified military personnel, male and female, is essential to all branches of the military, not just the Marine Corps. It is essential to preserving good order, unit readiness, and morale (Calkins & Asch, 2022). Furthermore, an adequate response to these leadership factors influencing poor retention rates of junior enlisted female Marines is likely to also increase job satisfaction for these individuals as well as others who may be similarly affected but choose to remain in their position.

Summary and Transition

The goal of this study was to conduct a qualitative phenomenological inquiry into the reasons underlying junior enlisted female Marines' choice to separate from the military. Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the study, identified the problem statement, and provided a general overview of the research. Chapter 2 provides an exhaustive review of the literature that is relevant to the study. Chapter 3 includes the research design and strategies used to promote credibility of the data. Chapter 4 shows the data collected and the analysis of the data, followed by Chapter 5, which contains the

results of the data analysis compared to previous works done on topics related to this study and also recommendations based on the results of this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Since World War II, the military has been the most progressive institution in America (Robinson, & O'Hanlon, 2020). Many of the existing jobs within the military require end-strength which is more likely achievable by men. Although females are capable of performing many of the same jobs that males do, physical limitations prevent many females from achieving the same levels of physical strength as males (Rader, 2020). This fact notwithstanding, women have historically played a critical role in the U.S. military and continue to do so. Therefore, it is important to understand how to best enable women to be successful in their military career choices.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and better understand the potential impact and influence that leadership has on the decisions of junior enlisted female Marines to separate from the Marine Corps. Specifically, this study sought to identify the potential negative impact that leadership has on the decision-making process for junior female Marines related to retention. This chapter includes a comprehensive overview of pertinent literature related to the theoretical frameworks guiding the study the history of women in the military and the barriers they have faced. Additionally, the chapter will include a review of the history of and influences on military recruitment and retention, a description of military leadership structure, and a summary of how these topics relate to the present study.

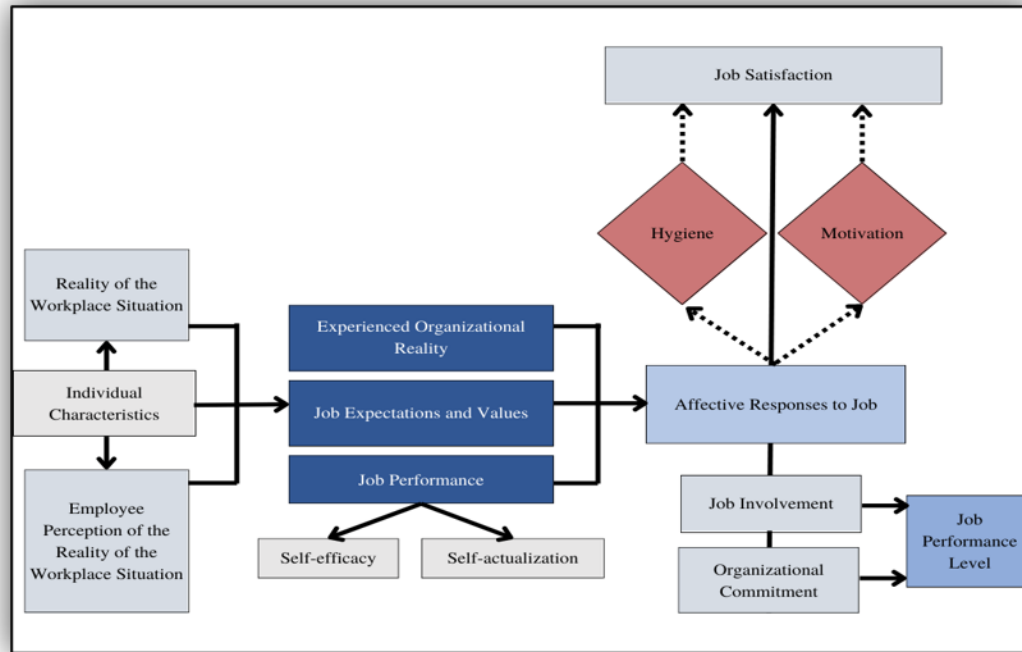
Literature Search Strategy

The literature in this study is a combination of peer-reviewed scholarly articles and dissertations. All of these were searched in various databases such as EBSCO,

ProQuest, SAGE Journals, and Google Scholar, as well as Walden University's Thoreau multi-database. Other sites used in the literature search included military and government sites as well as military publications. Keyword included *leadership, recruitment, military leadership, women in the military, military attrition, military retention, women in combat, female retention, gender, junior enlisted females, combat roles for women, and Marine Corps retention.*

Theoretical Framework

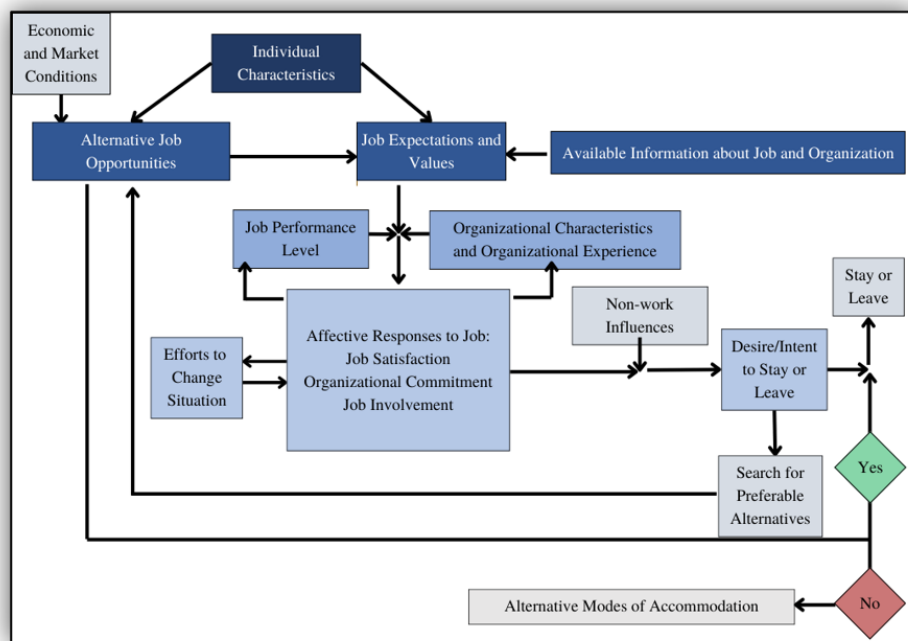
The study was grounded by two, complementary theoretical frameworks: Steers and Mowday's (1981) turnover model and Herzberg's (1966) two-factor theory, which both pertain to the decision of an employee to remain in or leave their position. Job satisfaction can influence an employee's decision to remain in their position. Researchers have widely recognized the concerns held by many organizations in terms of employee turnover. Identifying the reasons why employees choose to leave their jobs can help organizations retain their human resources. Though some of the findings of the present study apply specifically to women within the armed forces, other findings may be broadly applicable to employees of private, public, or military organizations. Figure 1 provides an overview of how the two theoretical frameworks are integrated for this study. These two theoretical frameworks are explained in greater detail in the following sections.

Figure 1*Conceptual Framework***Steers and Mowday's Turnover Model**

Steers and Mowday (1981) introduced their comprehensive model of employee turnover to consolidate the components of other commonly used models at the time. Previous models had prioritized employee satisfaction over other potential influences. Steers and Mowday considered this an oversimplification, arguing that additional variables should also be integrated into a complete model. Their new theoretical framework integrated and expanded on previous theories to provide a more comprehensive model, assessing affective responses to an employee's job, including job satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational commitment. Previous models had not considered affective components of work beyond satisfaction (Lee & Mowday, 1987).

Working backward from these central affective responses, Steers and Mowday's turnover model considers three major variables that contribute to these feelings: job expectations and values, experienced organizational reality, and job performance. Through these additional variables, the model incorporates both the reality of the workplace situation and the employee's perception thereof, as well as potential mismatches between the two, in contrast to other prevailing theories of the time. Job performance is also a novel addition to the paradigm, with important implications for employee feelings of self-efficacy and self-actualization (Lee & Mowday, 1987).

Finally, Steers and Mowday consider other influences that may inform the decision-making process, such as individual characteristics, clarity with respect to the job itself, and awareness of alternative positions that might be available should one choose to quit their current job (Steers & Mowday, 1981). For example, individual characteristics such as family responsibilities or gender identity may be important influences on the retention of female junior Marines. Significantly, this model relates all of these variables not as a linear process but as a complex network in which factors can be mutually influential. This network is shown in Figure 2 (Lee & Mowday, 1987).

Figure 2*Steers & Mowday's Turnover Model*

Note. Adapted from “Voluntarily leaving an organization: An empirical investigation of Steers and Mowday’s model of turnover,” by T. W. Lee and R. T. Mowday, 1987, *Academy of Management Journal*, 30(4), p. 723

The model is appropriate for the present study, as it incorporates consideration of numerous interrelated factors and how these interact to collectively influence an individual’s decision to separate from their job. The theory also considers these factors both independently and as a network, demonstrating the complexity of the decision of an employee to quit their job. As such, the Steers and Mowday model was used to identify and characterize long-term service-related thinking processes in female junior Marines who ultimately choose to separate prior to retirement eligibility.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

Herzberg's two-factor theory argues that two separate categories of factors explain why employees are satisfied or dissatisfied with their jobs. Herzberg et al. (1959) considered two classes of factors that contribute to employee job satisfaction or dissatisfaction: hygiene and motivation (Nickerson, 2021). The two distinct types of factors are mutually exclusive and have their own dynamics. Hygiene factors, in reference to "medical hygiene" which considers all health hazards within the work environment (Alshmemri et al., 2017), contribute to job dissatisfaction and "the need to avoid unpleasantness" (Nickerson, 2021, p. 1). This means that when the work environment declines to a level where it becomes dysfunctional or unacceptable to the employee, job dissatisfaction ensues. Hygiene factors tend to be related to other factors such as working conditions, relationships with supervisors, pay, and among others organizational culture. Motivation is the second contributing factor to job satisfaction because it satisfies the need for employee growth within an organization and self-actualization (Herzberg, 1966). Motivation factors include a positive outlook on one's job, belief in the potential for advancement, recognition, satisfaction in the work itself, and achievement (Adair, 2006).

Herzberg's theory characterizes job dissatisfaction and lack of satisfaction as separate entities and argues that motivation factors, which drive satisfaction, can be powerful motivators to remain or leave one's job than dissatisfaction caused by hygiene factors. Thus, one might choose to remain in a position despite an unpleasant, dissatisfying work environment if they find sufficient satisfaction or self-actualization

through their work. Alternatively, an individual might choose to leave a position that does not bring them joy if they seek it. See Figure 3. The theory is one of the most significant content theories in job satisfaction and has been applied to a broad range of circumstances (Dion, 2006). Here, the two-factor theory was applied to the decision made by junior female Marines to leave their positions. Responses to interviews were grouped according to motivation and hygiene factors as a means of characterizing the driving forces behind this decision.

Figure 3

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

HIGH	Employees have fun but are not motivated.	Ideal situation. Employees have no complaints and are motivated.
HYGIENE	Worst situation. Employees are not motivated and have complaints.	Employees are motivated to work but they have a lot of complaints.
LOW		
	LOW	HIGH
	MOTIVATION	

Note. Adapted from *The Motivation to Work* by F. I. Herzberg, B. Mausner, B. & Snyderman, 1959, John Wiley.

Connection of Theoretical Framework to Study Design

Steers and Mowday's turnover model and Herzberg's two-factor theory guided the present qualitative phenomenological study, as each framework considers the nuanced factors underlying the phenomenon of an employee's choice to leave their position. Both frameworks focus on the lived experiences of employees and the complex interplay between factors that motivate employees to leave or remain in their position. The chosen phenomenological method was thus appropriate in the context of the guiding

frameworks, which focus on identifying ways of helping employers identify strategies to retain employees.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

The Role of Women in the Military

The history of women serving in the U.S. military dates back over 250 years. In the early years, although not allowed to enlist in the military, women were active participants in support of war efforts, whether boosting morale, tending to the wounded, or simply mending clothing (Brooks, 2013). Throughout these wars, many women rose up as leaders, some with very noteworthy roles that carried on from the Revolutionary War to the present wars at hand. War has historically been dominated by men; nevertheless, women played significant roles in an official capacity dating back to the Spanish-American War. Due to the deplorable conditions dating back to the Spanish-American War, Congress authorized the U.S. Army to hire women to serve as nurses, and as many as 1,000 women served with no military status (Wilson, 1996). Throughout wars, many women also rose as leaders, some with very noteworthy roles that carried on from the Revolutionary War to the present.

Women have made critical commitments to the historical backdrop of military employment in the United States, even before the nation's establishment. They have demonstrated their abilities, capabilities, and boldness in military activities for over 200 years. Although barred from formally serving in the military, women performed critical roles during the Revolutionary War. Known as camp followers, women continued supporting the war efforts by sewing uniforms and blankets, making ammunition,

cooking, tending to wounded soldiers, and raising funds to support the war (Khan Academy, n.d.). Others put their lives at stake and served as spies collecting British intelligence to pass along to the rebels (Khan Academy, n.d.). Notably among the women who contributed to the war effort was Deborah Sampson, who, according to historians, disguised herself as a soldier and fought in the Continental Army in the late eighteenth century (Goldsmith, 2019).

The Civil War marked a turning point in U.S. history, during which women began to play a larger role in the war effort. By 1862 many women had served on and off the battlefield. They went from sewing clothing and caring for the wounded to bearing arms on the battlefield. Nearly 3 million soldiers fought during the Civil War, with over 620,000 dying on the battlefield (Zeller, 2022). As the number of fatalities rose, military officials scrambled to fill the gaps (Tran, 2007). Disguised as men, more than 1,000 women fought and died alongside their male counterparts in numerous battles as part of the Union and Confederate armies (Blanton, 1993). By the post-Civil War era, women's contributions to the war effort received notable mention in both the press and in literature. A book published by Frank Moore in 1866 dedicated an entire chapter to the women of the North (Blanton, 1993). Despite the heroism displayed by women in support of the war, the Army held no regard for their contributions and did not acknowledge these women as having made a significant contribution.

Prior to WW I, only nurses were allowed to formally join the military, and over 35,000 women served as nurses and support staff (Gorbujja-Maldonado, 2020). In 1901 the U.S. Army established the Army Nurse Corps, with the Navy following suit in 1908

with the Nurse Corps. With this, the contributions of these brave women, although just an addition to the war efforts in specific roles, became officially recognized by the Army and Navy in 1908 (Sherrow, 2007). During this time the number of female army nurses increased by 30.0% rising from 400 to 20,000, and the number of naval nurses increased from 460 to 1,400 (National WWI Museum and Memorial, 2022).

By the start of the first World War, a woman's primary role was to supplement the shortage of personnel and free-up the men to go into battle (Hacker & Vining, 2012). However, because of the shortage of men enlisting, the United States Navy became the first branch to allow women to serve in other capacities. Shortly after, the Marine Corps (part of the Department of the Navy) allowed women to enlist as well (Goldsmith, 2019). In 1918 voting rights for women had not yet been granted; however, women flocked to join the Marine Corps. The first enlistee, Opha May Johnson was one of 305 women who signed up to join the Marine Corps on August 13, 1918. The following day, the then-Secretary of the Navy allowed women to enlist in the Marine Corps Reserve (McLaughlin, 2018).

While mobilizing for the war, the country faced a serious labor shortage. This is especially true for supporting characters, as combat requires many personnel beyond those serving in combat positions. Therefore, the participation of women in military operations during the war became important, as the number of men available was insufficient to fill all combat positions (Evans, 2010). As a result, various efforts had been made to ensure that women join the military with women's organizations being established to support the military. The U.S. Marine Corps and the U.S. Coast Guard

employed hundreds of women for similar roles. The military claimed to have used women strictly as nurses, but it also recruited hundreds of bilingual women to work as telephone operators for the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe (Blanton, 1993).

When Congress declared war on Japan in 1941, the United States faced the need to increase their numbers in the military forces, making WW II a pivotal point in military history for women. As a result of that increased need, three new branches of the military were created, the Women's Army Corps (WAC), the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), and the Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service (WAVES) (Goldsmith, 2019). By 1942, jobs such as military intelligence, cryptography, and parachute rigging, were open and available for women to serve in including 1,000 who flew aircraft. Although great strides were made to recognize the importance of women's contributions in the military, there was still a divide related to the lack of equal pay and benefits for women, resulting in many challenges and resistances within the military. To solve this problem, President Truman signed into law the Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948. Through this act, women were officially recognized as part of the army and were entitled to full military status (Britannica, n.d.); however, the act limited the number of women that could serve to only 2.0% of each branch of service.

Approximately 350,000 women volunteered to fight in WW II. Women continued to take on non-combat roles to permit more men to fight and continued to work administrative jobs as they had done during World War I, with as many as 57,000 serving in the Army Nurse Corps, and 11,000 in the Navy Nurse Corps (McDermott, 2018). However, women now also contributed their efforts by driving vehicles, repairing

airplanes, working in laboratories and cryptology, serving as radio and television operators, rigging parachutes, test-flying planes, and even their male counterparts in air combat tactics (McDermott, 2018). All of these were risky roles. In total, during World War II, 432 women were killed in the line of service, and 88 were taken as prisoners of war (DeSimone, 2022).

Soon, women began donning uniforms in the Marine Corps and in the Air Force to serve alongside their sister counterparts from the Navy and Army (Norwich University, 2018), with over 120,000 women on active duty, more than 50,000 served in the Korean War alone. It had been 3 years since the end of the second World War, and President Truman continued to amend the Act to allow women to establish a permanent foothold in the reserve army and its usual components (DeSimone, 2022). Evidence indicates that the introduction of the Integrated Law was aimed at guaranteeing that women were granted permanent status in the military by allowing them to take on new jobs such as military police and engineers. Nevertheless, there were still many restrictions that prevented them from participating. It was during this war, however, that Mobile Army Surgical Hospitals (MASH) were introduced to provide fully functioning hospitals in combat zones and where women continued to serve a vital part in the war efforts (DeSimone, 2022).

The need for military power remained overwhelming in the early 1960s due to the Vietnam War. Of all the men and women who served in the Vietnam War, approximately 11,000 were women on active duty, according to the Vietnam Women's Memorial Foundation, with a total of over 256,000 serving in other capacities (History.com, 2020).

Women served on a volunteer basis, unlike the majority of the men who were drafted to serve (History.com, 2020). Most women serving during this era were nurses, with a small number serving as traffic controllers, intelligence officers, and clerks, while others monitored the weather conditions (History.com, 2020). Despite women not being allowed in direct combat roles, there were casualties reported during the war and others were awarded the Purple Heart for wounds sustained in the bombing of the officers' quarters in Saigon (Goldsmith, 2019). Another pivotal time for women in the military came in 1967, when President Lyndon Johnson opened promotions to general and flag ranks (DeSimone, 2022).

The 1970s were pivotal years for women volunteering in the military. In 1972, women were allowed to command units (DeSimone, 2022). The following year, the United States adopted the All-Volunteer Force (AVF), which opened up more job opportunities in the military and projected an increase in the number of females in the military (Grier, 2019). With more than 400,000 women serving in almost every role in the military, the 1991 Gulf War proved to be yet another pivotal time for the advancement of women in the American armed forces. The Gulf War marked the first officially documented example of a woman working near the front lines (Middleton & Craig, 2012). More than 7.0% of women who served during the Gulf War did so in nontraditional roles (Carney et al., 2003). Women have subsequently played an integral role in the U.S. military campaigns in South Korea, Vietnam, Grenada, Panama, Somalia Bay, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria (Robinson & O'Hanlon, 2020). In 2015, President Obama signed legislation removing all remaining restrictions on

female military service, allowing women to officially serve in any capacity, including direct combat roles (Kavanagh & Wenger, 2020). However, this decision remains controversial, and women are still a minority of current active-duty military members across all branches and a target of prejudice and discrimination.

Barriers Faced by Women in the Military

Women face additional challenges beyond those that apply generally and likely increase their propensity to separate from the Marine Corps. Perhaps most significant barriers are sexual discrimination, harassment, and assault. Many women decide to leave for family reasons, such as pregnancy, but many others report a sexist military culture as the primary driver for attrition (Dickstein, 2020). Exposure to sexual assault was found to double the likelihood of separating from the military over the subsequent two years (Morrall et al., 2021). Findings from the 2014 RAND Military Workplace Study suggest that an additional 10,000 separations occur annually due to sexual assault and harassment (Morrall et al., 2021). However, this is likely an underestimate due to the stigma associated with reporting sexual assault (Morrall et al., 2021). While sexual assault and harassment affect both genders, women are affected disproportionately and express significant discouragement by the military's poor handling of allegations (Dickstein, 2020; Morrall et al., 2021). Furthermore, women report that they felt required to work harder to prove themselves and that they were not treated as equals due to their sex. Much of the research focusing on military sexism has centered around overt assault, but a general culture of sexism reportedly mediates job performance and satisfaction for female service members (Obrecht, 2021). Interestingly, regression analysis demonstrated that job

success and satisfaction were lowest when women were subjected to moderate levels of sexism or perceived implicit bias, as opposed to high.

I hypothesized that this might be due to women being subjected to high levels of sexism and are more likely to benefit from organizational support or interventions. In contrast, moderate sexism can result in more subtle microaggressions for which perpetrators are less likely to be held accountable (Obrecht, 2021). Given the hypothesized relationship between job satisfaction and retention, this finding suggests the military should increase awareness of implicit biases against women, as focusing only on overt sexism and assault will be insufficient to improve the retention of female Marines. Interviews with current and former female Marines Corps officers also reveal a lack of female mentorship and career support. Inadequate job satisfaction, family conflict, and lack of role models were the most commonly reported factors influencing retention (Allen, 2018). However, as stated in Chapter 1, it is unclear how these factors influence junior female Marines' decisions to separate.

Recruitment

The recruitment of females in the Marine Corps is not as significant a problem as experienced during 1950-1990; however, discovering factors and increasing the understanding of the female experiences of active duty may show why junior female enlisted Marines do not always see it through to a subsequent term. While the number of females serving in the military has increased, at the same time women are 28.0% more likely to leave the service than men (Werner, 2020). The DoD has identified that women's recruitment and retention is important to ensure diversity in the military;

however, no known plans to guide or monitor these efforts have been established. Low retention rates in the Marine Corps are evident in the higher percentage of males than females over the last few years. An improved understanding of factors contributing to poor retention may inform recruitment strategies, which the Marine Corps have long prioritized as key to establishing a quality force (Gilroy et al., 2020). These elements may lead to positive social change and improved leadership leading to better female retention and a more viable military force in readiness.

History

The role of women in the military has increased as the United States grows in population and global importance. Another reason for the growth in female participation in the military is the increased complexity of warfare. In 2020, 17.2% of all active-duty personnel were female members, a 2.8% increase as compared to 2010 (DoD, 2020). Overall, the percentage of females serving on active duty increased across all branches of service in the last decade. In her 1988 publication, *Sex Roles in the Military*, Patricia Shields addressed the growing presence of women in the U.S. military movement. Shields remarks that not only did women score higher on standardized tests; they raised the overall quality of the armed forces (Shields, 1988). Early in the study, Shields (1988) addressed some important questions about the growing presence of women in the military as well as their respective contributions.

Today, enlistment in the military is available for personal choice and is fully equipped with appropriate wages and benefits. When the draft was abolished in 1973, the military needed to develop a recruitment platform to compete with civilian opportunities

and interests. The U.S. shifted from mandatory services with assigned positions (drafts) to a voluntary opportunity to explore interesting careers. Military service also came with potential long-term benefits, combined with opportunities for travel, adventure, education, training, career advancement opportunities, and new experiences (Shields, 1988). Women were amid a gender role revolution when the military began announcing incentives. For this and many other reasons, the recruitment of women into the military was very impressive in the 1980s, and changes were seen in increasing the number of women in the workforce (Grier, 2019).

Marine Corps Recruiting

Recruitment of quality enlistees is critical to the success of the Marine Corps and all branches of the military. Significant effort goes into ensuring that recruits are of a high caliber and minimizing the likelihood of attrition. Since its inception in 1973, the AVF has been concerned about the military's retention rate. Today's AVF is the largest employer of youth in the United States. For the past decade, the armed forces have recruited an average of 259,000 men and women annually (Gilroy et al., 2020). To sustain the AVF, each service must attract and retain its personnel. Many challenges to maintaining such a large force of quality personnel exist for those recruiters charged with finding these individuals. In short, a successful AVF begins with recruiting (Gilroy et al., 2020), especially in times of war when greater numbers are needed.

The Marine Corps invests heavily in recruiting and training their Marines. As the smallest armed forces branch, it does not require the same recruiting efforts as the other branches. On average, the Marine Corps enlists and separates approximately 36,000

individuals per year, compared to the Army's average of over 80,000 per year (Powers, 2019). It is not enough to simply "meet a quota or ship them down range"; the quota must be filled with quality Marines that meet specific qualifications. The political and social climate during the Vietnam War differs tremendously from the current climate. Much of the recruiting was dependent upon the draft, and therefore a shortage of recruits existed. After 9/11, the climate shifted, and the need for more qualified recruits was greater; however, the difference was that there were more in the pool to choose from. The military was therefore required to tighten its standards and recruit more qualified candidates to join its ranks. In particular, the Marine Corps was to become a strategic force in their recruiting efforts in order to recruit and maintain "the few and the proud."

Like many other branches, the Marine Corps is selective with whom they bring into their ranks. The standard requirements of education and aptitude are among the criteria for acceptance, along with the highest physical fitness standards. These factors have also been shown to influence the likelihood that a new enlistee will complete their contract term, as described below.

- Education – 75% of individuals with high school diplomas complete their first contractual obligation as opposed to 60.0% of their counterparts without a high school degree or with alternative credentials (Gilroy et al., 2020). Individuals with no diploma have high attrition rates and are likely to experience disciplinary problems within the first enlistment.
- Aptitude – Individual aptitude is evaluated by the military's enlistment and job assignment test; the Armed Forces Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB).

The examination combines a candidate's skills and knowledge on a variety of subjects to determine their Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) (Gilroy et al., 2020).

Gilroy et al. (2020) also found that there are three key elements that affect recruiting efforts for all service branches: environmental, resources, and policy considerations. Environmental factors fall into two categories: (a) factors entirely beyond the department's control, and (b) those in which the department has little to some influence. Of the 35 million or so youth (ages 17-24) in the United States, only 29.0% are qualified to serve in the armed forces. The largest specific disqualifier listed in the Gilroy et al. study is that of medical eligibility, which disqualifies 28.0% of otherwise eligible youth. Other common disqualifiers include qualified college enrollment, drug use, obesity, and lack of education requirements. Another environmental factor is the financial implications the economy has on recruiting efforts.

The state of the economy is important because military organizations have some characteristics that are uncommon in the civilian world and can provide job stability in an otherwise unstable economy. For example, if the economy is unstable and unemployment rates are high, recruiting efforts will likely come easy. On the other hand, if the unemployment rate is low, recruiting will likewise suffer. This cost of resources alone should be sufficient for military services to further assess recruiting efforts. The branches that make timely investments in their recruiters and advertising can mitigate any adverse effects that may impact recruiting. As of 2018, the military's recruiting budget was over \$3.13 billion dollars among various resource categories (Gilroy et al., 2020). The

advertising budget stood at \$502 million as opposed to 2011's baseline of \$90 million (Malone & Clemens, 2013). More than 50.0% of this was dedicated to recruiting efforts and supporting personnel. According to Gilroy et al. (2020), the recruiter is the heart of the military and, therefore, the heart of recruiting. General Thurman once stated, "the military may be called an 'All-Volunteer Force,' but it really is an all-recruited force" (Thurman, 1986).

Factors Influencing Recruiting

Due to the high cost of attrition, the Marine Corps has poured substantial resources into optimizing its recruitment strategy to preferentially target individuals who are less likely to leave before the completion of their initial contract. In contrast, the Marine Corps has affirmed a commitment to diversity, reflected in their recruiting efforts. Effective recruitment is, accordingly, a delicate balance subject to influence by many variables. In addition to the factors described above, recruitment can be affected by unique circumstances, such as policies affecting specific demographics or major world events. An example of each of these is presented below.

Don't Ask, Don't Tell

Policies on gay and homosexual individuals serving in the military date back to the Revolutionary War. These policies stated that engaging in homosexual activity while serving in the military was grounds for discharge. When psychiatric screening was implemented as part of the induction process into the military (implemented in 1941), it included homosexuality as a disqualifying factor. Recruits with the propensity to engage in homosexual activities were found to be "high risk" and therefore disqualified to serve

in the military (Bérubé, 1990). Members of the military who evaded screening were tried, imprisoned, and dishonorably discharged if found to have engaged in any sexual misconduct. Some notable dates include 1949, at which time standardized policies to keep homosexuals out of the military were implemented by President Truman when the Uniform Code of Military Justice was signed (Cole, 2017). More than 30 years later, in the 1980s and after the gay pride movement, the Department of Defense (DoD) Directive 1332.14 was released with reasons explaining why the military took its stance against homosexuality in the military.

A modern policy era regarding gay people serving in the military began in the mid-1990's, when the Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT) policy was implemented (Malik, 2011). The term was introduced by then-President Clinton, directing the military personnel, specifically senior personnel to simply "don't ask, don't tell, don't pursue, and don't harass." (Feder, 2013). When the policy went into effect, it lifted the ban on homosexuals serving in the military, "theoretically speaking." However, anyone serving who was gay, lesbian, or bisexual still served in secret. In 2009, more than 1,000 retired senior officers released a statement stating that DADT repeal "would undermine recruiting and retention, impact leadership at all levels, have adverse effects on the willingness of parents who lend their sons and daughters to military service, and eventually break the All-Volunteer Force" (Flag & General Officers for the Military, 2010). If the predictions in this letter were true, repealing DADT would prove devastating to the armed forces (Belkin et al., 2012).

Despite significant pushback, in 2011, during President Obama's administration, the House of Representatives and Senate voted to repeal the DADT policy. President Obama signed it into legislation later that year, officially ending the DADT policy as of Sept 2011 (Stolberg, 2010). DADT's role on the military has been extensively studied since it ended. A study conducted by professors at UCLA most notably concluded that the repeal had no overall negative impact on military readiness or its component dimensions, including cohesion, recruitment, retention, assaults, harassment, or morale (Belkin et al., 2012). Moreover, neither were the recruiting efforts. In fact, the Marines were proactive and capitalized on the movement by being the only one of the five military branches invited to take part in the first of its kind job fair at the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center in downtown Tulsa (Bullimer, 2011). Although they were not successful in finding interested, qualified personnel at this particular event, the Marines were determined to overcome and succeed in uncharted territory.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

The arrival of the coronavirus pandemic of 2019 (COVID-19) and the resulting statewide shutdowns altered traditional military recruiting and retention strategies. As a result of the massive economic downturn and limitations on in-person interactions, people's reasons to enter or remain in the armed services may have altered. Despite the fact that the number of enlistment contracts decreased, all branches, except for the Marine Corps, saw an increase in end strength, reduced accessions, and increased retention compared to the previous fiscal years (Calkins & Asch, 2022).

This might be due to the Marine Corps force restructuring plan, published in March 2020, and also pandemic-related problems. In comparison to FY 2019, the Navy increased end strength, had just a little change in accession, and increased retention. In addition, it cut the number of enlistment contracts while keeping the quality of recruits the same. The Air Force also increased end strength, reduced accessions, improved retention, reduced the number of enlistment contracts, and improved the quality of recruits in FY 2020 (Calkins & Asch, 2022; Moore, 2020).

Retention

Retaining military personnel is essential to national security and, more specifically, to preserving morale and unit readiness. Historically, the Marines have invested significant attention and funding towards recruitment efforts, while efforts to increase retention have been largely neglected. While the perceived benefit of the high rate of turnover in the Marines is a younger population, it is generally understood that there is a high cost of recruiting and training replacements for all those who choose to leave, both financially and concerning the quality of work (Schogol, 2021).

Schogol (2021) suggests that in the case of the Marines, the issue is not so much that people want to leave but instead that they are not incentivized to stay. The Marine strategy for “maturing the force” includes recruiting older individuals, but also making changes to structures to encourage re-enlistment. This includes allowing people to opt-out of promotions, make lateral moves, or otherwise engage in unconventional career paths. The Marine Corps also plans to improve parental leave policies. Finally, by embracing

digital data management, they plan to eliminate tedious administrative paperwork, streamlining the process of reenlistment as well as other tasks (Schogol, 2021).

Factors Influencing Retention

As part of the Marine Corps' Force Integration Plan, the Marine Corps contracted with a research team to analyze factors contributing to the retention of men and women from 1990 to 2015. This quantitative study relied on data analysis of factors largely within the military's control and did not perform any interviews to determine self-reported rationale for leaving. They identified several factors that were predictive of attrition for both men and women, including age at recruitment, education, race, time spent in the delayed entry program, AFQT scores, and enlistment waivers (Desrosiers & Bradley, 2015). The number of women serving in the U.S. military has increased in the last 40 years. However, compared to their male counterparts, women have shorter military careers.

Studies have revealed several barriers to female sustainability (Rader, 2020). Examples cited include sexual violence in services, delayed promotion, career development, insufficient access to discriminatory same-sex counselors, and counseling programs. In addition, family planning and other care roles affect women disproportionately, which may not be consistent with traditional career paths and may be a decisive factor for women to stop military service (Abramovitz et al., 2021). The GAO identified six factors that influence female active-duty servicemember's decisions to leave military service; work schedules, deployments, family planning, sexual assault, dependent care, and lastly, organizational culture. Overall, two categories of answers lead

to premature separation: (a) unforeseen events such as medical and mental conditions, and (b) difficulty in balancing the burden of service. This category is associated with traumatic experiences, such as violence and the lack of support (Grier, 2019). More systematic and comprehensive research is needed to understand why women volunteer and eventually leave the military.

Military Leadership

The U.S. military has a well-established hierarchical structure fundamental to standard and historical operations. In fact, leadership is so ingrained in military culture that the role of leaders in the military is often used as the primary prototype of leadership research in general (Nazri & Rudi, 2019). The U.S. Marine Corps and military in general operate using a standardized chain of command, in which newly enlisted members are identified as privates. Enlistees are promoted through the ranks according primarily to length of service. At the same time, officer promotions may reward either tenure, merit, or simply the need for additional higher-ranked officials (Lucas, 2020). The system of ranking individuals according to the duration of time served and level of authority confers a unique leadership environment in which individuals of lower rank may be especially vulnerable to leadership abuses (Tarzi & Fosher, 2020). While authoritarian leadership strategies are evident in many organizations, the formal chain of command characteristic of the U.S. military often exemplifies this type of leadership. It has long been known that authoritarianism is a characteristic of the military, with Hollander (1954) demonstrating that individuals with high authoritarianism scores following

training more readily integrate into the organizational culture as compared to those who are less inclined to agree with authoritarianism.

Effective leadership can be especially critical within military organizations, as successfully handling potentially life-threatening situations requires trust, so much so that Marines are often referred to as a brotherhood (Tarzi & Fosher, 2020). Many Marines report trust in both their peers and their superiors to be an essential component of effective military culture. While positive experiences with leadership are common, there is no shortage of reports of problematic leadership interactions (Tarzi & Fosher, 2020). Toxic leadership within the military has been a topic of discussion for many years, with some estimates suggesting that 20.0% of U.S. Army soldiers contend with toxic leadership and the consequences thereof (Winn & Dykes, 2019). In addition, many individuals have reported ineffective, micromanaging, and self-serving leadership, which has negatively impacted their career trajectories (Tarzi & Fosher, 2020). This is especially true for women, who are often faced with gender biases from leadership, citing this and lack of support from leadership in the face of discrimination, as significant factors underlying attrition (Dickstein, 2020).

Among other criticisms, leadership in the Marine Corps has been criticized for lack of diversity, with an even lower proportion of female officers than in the general enlisted population (Farrell, 2020). In recent years, the military has invested in efforts to promote a more diverse body of leadership, expanding diversity targets to focus on inclusion. This mission focuses not only on the increased promotion of women and minorities to leadership positions, but also on better training leaders to understand and

appropriately value diversity (MLDC, 2011). The DoD further emphasizes that diversity leadership training must be specific and not simply reiterate standard diversity training. However, this mission is ongoing, with the military commitment to diversity in leadership a reassuring yet thus unfulfilled goal (MLDC, 2011).

The Changing Nature of War

Today, war looks significantly different as compared to the American Revolution or even as recently as the Korean and Vietnam wars. This is in part due to policy changes but also technological advances. While trench warfare and direct combat remain a part of front-line duties, warfare has become significantly more tactical and precise in response to evolving technologies. This holds significance concerning military recruiting, retention, and women's roles in the armed forces.

Direct Combat Roles

In 2013, the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman announced the cancellation of the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule (DGDAR). The result of this decision would be that male-specific jobs within the Marine Corps would be open for consideration to women, including some previously closed jobs within the infantry, as long as the female Marine met all the standards of performance. A study conducted by researchers at the Rand Corporation would address some of the potential risks and costs associated with the integration. Six factors were studied to determine the impact of integration: cohesion, critical mass, lessons learned from foreign militaries, lessons learned from the U.S. police and fire departments, the cost associated with integration, cross-cutting implications, and developing a monitoring

framework (Schaefer et al., 2015). One notable key finding in the research was that of cohesion. Schaefer et al. (2015) noted that although cohesion can affect group performance, the effect of gender integration depends on the culture of the group. Marine Corps is built on Honor, Courage, and Commitment, therefore, cohesion in a gender-integrated organization will increase with time as groups work together toward one common goal.

Although the concept of integrating women in combat direct roles is relatively new and some would vote against it, the Marines Corps has indeed been successful in its implementation. Before the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule was rescinded and it was made official for women to serve in infantry jobs, women were already fighting side by side with their male counterparts despite the Marines' reluctance. Serving in various capacities in support units alongside men. Enlisted female Marines have particularly broken through several barriers since combat roles opened. Now officially able to serve in those combat roles and receive the same recognition men do.

Summary and Transition

Women have made significant contributions to the history of USMC military service. Many professional or personal factors influence career decisions, including the decision to remain on active duty. There is evidence to support the claim that the Marine Corps has a tough time keeping women. However, there is insufficient evidence to determine whether or not the problem is connected to leadership. The detailed approach utilized in the study to analyze the factors that impact the choice to leave the Marine Corps is described in full in Chapter 3. The key methodological aspects employed in the

study, such as Research Design and Sampling Techniques, are described in depth. It also discusses the data analysis methodologies and strategies used to improve the data's dependability and any ethical concerns that may develop during the research.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and better understand the potential impact and influence that leadership has on the decisions of junior enlisted female Marines to separate from the Marine Corps. Specifically, this study sought to identify leadership's potential negative impact on the decision-making process for junior female Marines related to retention. To address the purpose, I followed specific procedures represented by the sections in this chapter. These include the research design and rationale, my role as the researcher, methodology, instrumentation (data sources), data collection instrument, researcher-developed instruments, data collection procedures and methods, and methods and procedures of data analysis. In addition, the chapter also covers issues of trustworthiness, ethical procedures, and a summary of the chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

Qualitative research is a scientific approach that involves the investigation of unresolved social phenomena (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Qualitative research is a natural way to explore and argues that this type of research should be conducted in natural settings (Given, 2008). This study involved a qualitative phenomenological research design. This design included an interview questionnaire as the instrument for answering the three research questions:

1. Why do junior enlisted female Marines leave the Marine Corps?
2. What factors contribute to the decision to separate from the Marine Corps before becoming eligible for re-enlisting for a subsequent term?

3. What impact did leadership have on the decision for female Marines to separate?

The design chosen for this study was phenomenology, which deals with understanding the human experience. Moustakas (1994) stated that phenomenology is the most appropriate tool for investigating and explaining the general experience of target populations associated with a particular phenomenon. Furthermore, phenomenology is used to describe rather than explain and begins from the perspective of those who lived the experiences and without preconceptions (Lester, 1999; Neubauer et al., 2019). The approach's main purpose is to describe the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2016), which can be done by gathering the subjects' experience (Dörfler & Stierand, 2020). In the case of the present study, the objective was to use the information collected to better understand the perceptions, thoughts, and feelings behind the females' decisions to separate from the Marine Corps. Phenomenology, which has roots in philosophy, psychology, and education, aims to extract the purest, most candid truths possible. In some interpretations of the approach, the researcher records personal contacts with the subject using bracketing to increase the quality of the findings (Dörfler & Stierand, 2020).

For the study, hermeneutics phenomenology was used as a specific methodological strategy. According to Neubauer et al. (2019), this branch of phenomenology is related to the human experience in life. This approach combines the trivial aspects of experience that can be evaluated in people's lives, as a means of generating meaning and understanding from these experiences. Therefore, this approach

was most appropriate to achieve the study's objectives and explain the perceptions of the junior enlisted female Marines and why they do not remain in the military. According to Aspers and Corte (2019), qualitative research is a scientific approach that investigates unresolved social phenomena. Given (2008) described qualitative research as a natural way to explore and argues that this research should be conducted in natural settings. As such, the present research focused on female turnover and retention in the military without attempting to control for social variables that realistically cannot be controlled by individuals or groups experiencing a phenomenon.

According to Guba and Lincoln (1981), for qualitative research to be considered worthwhile, it must consist of four verification methods, truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality. Based on the main data collected, qualitative research methods attempt to explain the theory behind the events being studied.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher and observer in this study was to observe and record significant details. The role of a researcher is to also act as a stranger and as an observer as if approaching something new where no detail is too small to be considered relevant (Moustakas, 1994). Another of my roles in this study was to ensure all participants were equipped with all the necessary information and to set upfront expectations about the nature of the study. I was tasked with securing data, enrolling participants, conducting interviews, and analyzing data.

My biases in this study were managed through awareness of similar personal or professional experiences, a thorough research plan, placing of topics into separate

categories, and the ability to summarize answers using the original context. Given that I am a female and a military member, it was important for me to gain the trust of the participants and maintain it all the same. As a female Marine and researcher, my ongoing relationship with the military, my military service and personal experience with the topic of study may have led to some bias. Therefore, I used bracketing as a strategy to reduce my bias and consciously separated my views and opinions from those of the participants. Additionally, at the beginning of the study, I informed the participants of the purpose of the study and their suitability. Participants were encouraged to disclose and share valuable information about their experiences through open-ended questions. During the process, I facilitated communication and fostered friendships as participants shared their experiences with me. Throughout the research, I continued to set goals for answering all questions from the perspective of the participants (see Moustakas, 1994).

Methodology

This section explains the details about how the data were collected from the participants. The primary method of collection was personal interviews with former and active-duty junior female Marines.

Participant Pool

All of the women selected to participate in this study were junior female Marines both an active duty and recently separated status. This enabled me to include perspectives from individuals at various stages in their decision-making process. Specifically, the target population included junior female Marines who had chosen not to re-enlist for a subsequent term but may or may not have completed their separation from the Marines.

This study did not include female Marine officers, as their enlistment criteria and retention standards differ from those of the general enlisted population.

Study enrollment was convenient and began with a request sent to all known potential, qualified participants by means of personal contact, email, via social media, church gatherings, or casual communication with members of my military community. Once participants were identified, an email explaining the study and a request for participation was provided. Participants were identified using a convenience simple sampling method and those who replied to the email and confirmed that they met the selection criteria were selected on a first-come, first-serve basis. I then contacted the participants to arrange an interview at a time and place that was convenient for them. I also utilized chain sampling, in which one or a few relevant participants asked others who met the criteria to join and provide their perspectives (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Participant Selection

The intended participant pool for this study was junior female enlisted Marines who decided to separate from the Marine Corps after their first term. Ranks ranged from Lance Corporal (E-3) to Sergeant (E-5). Participants came from a wide variety of backgrounds as well as Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). Honorable discharge was a requirement for participation. I proposed that my sample size would capture the data for significance. If it did not, I would increase the size of the sample until data saturation was reached. This involved the continued data collection until it was determined that additional participants no longer provided new information not already collected from previous interviews.

Participant Recruitment

Participants were required to be 18 years of age or older and were recruited using social media. The following procedures guided the recruitment of study participants:

1. Social media invitation was posted on numerous Facebook groups via my personal Facebook page with appropriate site authorizations.
2. Recruit sufficient females to fulfill the sample size requirement of 20–25 junior enlisted female Marines.
3. Marines who showed interest were added to the list of participants.
4. Sent emails to all potential participants once confirmed, which contained a detailed description of the study and request for participation.
5. Provided participants with a consent form and a detailed description of participants' rights.
6. Participants reviewed the consent form and indicated their consent to participate in the study.
7. Marines selected to participate were directly contacted to schedule a convenient time, date, and location (if applicable) for the interview.
8. Conducted the interviews following the interview protocol (see Appendices A & B).
9. Stored all data collected in a secured place.
10. Provided participants with information on where to find and read the results of the study. Snowball sampling was utilized when social media recruitment did not obtain the desired number of participants.

Instrumentation

In qualitative research, research instruments refer to the tools that researchers develop to collect the data in a study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative interviewing was used for eliciting primary data. Researchers who use this strategy speak with people who have information or experience with a particular topic (Rubin & Rubin, 2012); as such, the instrument was appropriate for the present study. Qualitative interviewing reconstructs the events for the researcher who may or may not have had similar experiences. I used semi structured interviews with open-ended questions, delivered in-person or virtually. To assist in eliciting answers, I used a questionnaire that contained a series of questions adopted from previous studies and modified by me to fit the current study (see Appendix E). The questionnaire was developed based on an already published questionnaire by Dr. Darnell Patton (2007) after obtaining permission (see Appendix C). The questions I used for the interviews were approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB; approval no. #09-30-22-0260821).

If respondents could not participate in an in-person interview, a virtual interview was made an option. This afforded me the privilege to reach out to participants irrespective of their location and provided the participants the opportunity to participate from a place where they felt most comfortable. The semi structured design allowed each participant to share their answers from their perspective. It was not anticipated that participants would be required to complete follow-up interviews beyond what was required for member checking.

Data Collection

An interview protocol to address both the problem and the purpose of the study was developed in accordance with the study's research questions (see Appendix A). Interview questions are provided in Appendix B. The information collected from the interviews ascertained the necessary background information to address the questions. Consent forms were provided that addressed privacy and ascertained permission for any recorded conversations. Prior to scheduling the interviews, participants received an email invite containing the approved informed consent form with a detailed explanation of the research. During the interview, I recorded the conversations, took copious notes, and subsequently transcribed the information collected. In-person interviews were conducted privately between the interviewee and me in a secured reserved conference room in an office space at the local library.

Another option for interviews was Google Meets and conducted as if participants were in the same room. All participants were asked to keep their cameras off to protect their privacy and were not asked any personally identifiable information. All participants were also assigned a number for data collection. All participants were also informed of their ability to end the interview at any point if they chose to do so, confidentiality, and the option for any follow-up interviews.

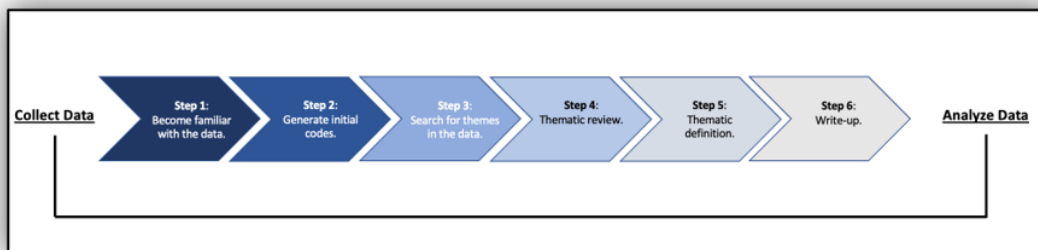
All participants were thanked for their time and contributions following the interviews. Following completion of the study, the published dissertation will be available online, at which point participants will have access to the study results. All data collected were protected and kept confidential.

Data Analysis

Many new researchers get stuck in the data analysis stage. They become overwhelmed by the enormous amount of data and are not able to move forward. There is no right way to interpret the amount of data, therefore, we adopt theories and techniques that will allow us to decipher the information. Utilizing NVivo Version 12 software, I adopted the Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis method as a procedure for analyzing and coding qualitative data. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns and themes within qualitative data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The unique characteristic about this technique is that it is a method rather than a methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2006). What this means is that this method is independent and is not tied to a specific theoretical framework, which in turn provides the researcher flexibility when implementing it (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017) within their study. The goal of this method was to identify themes within the data and organize the data accordingly. Braun and Clarke provide a 6-step framework to data collection. Themes were identified and coded using axial by uploading interview transcripts to NVivo Version 12, a software commonly used for qualitative research via which unstructured text data can be processed and analyzed efficiently. Themes were further categorized according to the research questions to which they pertain.

Figure 4

Braun & Clarke Thematic Analysis



Note. Adapted from “Using thematic analysis in psychology,” by V. Braun and V. Clarke, 2006, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2).

Issue of Trustworthiness

The ultimate purpose of every study is to produce trustworthy and dependable results. As a consequence, a researcher must use repeatable and consistent methods to fulfill this aim, such as identifying reliable data analysis and methodological processes, as well as collecting detailed documentation of the process of developing themes, concepts, and hypotheses (Lacey & Luff, 2007). Guba and Lincoln (1981) through their studies developed five components to ensure reliability and validity in all methods of research; hence the term “trustworthiness” (Morse et al., 2002, p. 14): credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity. In addition, they argued that the implementation of specific strategies such as negative cases, persistent prolonged observation, participant check-ins and maintaining accurate documentation was implemented would maintain the necessary trustworthiness within the research. The last component of trustworthiness would be an adaptable and responsive researcher with the ability to clarify and properly summarize the information (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

Credibility

Guba and Lincoln (1981) defined credibility as the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings. Establishing credibility in qualitative research requires active participation from interviewees. This is essential to maintain confidence in the data collected from the perspective of the individual participating in the study (Trochim & Donnelly, 2001). Determining credibility in the data can only be a challenge for many researchers, as this can truly only be judged by those who have provided the information. Therefore, the researcher must ensure that the results of the data collection mirror the views of the participant pool. In order to do so the researcher will (a) conduct a thorough review of all materials acquired, (b) provide interview transcriptions to participants, and lastly, (c) cross-check and confirm their replies have been captured accurately.

Strategies to establish credibility in qualitative research will include, but are not limited to, the following: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, and member check (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Establishing confidence in the truth of findings also requires the researcher to facilitate a positive, comfortable environment that is conducive to honesty. The researcher will ensure adequate time is spent developing relationships with participants and observing the study from various angles (Guba, 1981).

Transferability

Transferability is the degree that a study's findings can be applied to other situations within comparable settings. Because phenomenological studies attempt to provide a complete picture of a particular groups' experiences, generalizability, or the

extension and transferability of study findings to other contexts and circumstances, is a judgment made by the potential reader of the research rather than the researcher (Trochim & Donnelly, 2001). As researchers, we examine the findings for ourselves, (Guba, 1981) and therefore strengthen transferability by providing a detailed description of our findings and their context and ensuring that we keep the details based around the study's central idea.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) speak to this eloquently, arguing that "it is, in summary, not the naturalist's task to provide an index of transferability; it is his or her responsibility to provide the database that makes transferability judgements possible on the part of potential appliers" (p. 316). Therefore, I ensured transferability in this study by describing the data in such a way that it could be compared to similar settings. In addition, to guarantee transferability, the research was subject to member checking by Senior female Enlisted Marines who were not involved in the study.

Strategies to establish transferability in qualitative research will include, but are not limited to, the thick description. Thick description was first used by Ryle (1949), and is used to achieve external validity. This refers to a detailed account of field experiences in which the researcher makes the patterns of cultural and social relationships and puts them in context (Holloway, 1997).

Dependability

Dependability is based on the assumption that if the same research is conducted multiple times, it will yield similar results. A fundamental aspect of dependability is that it places the responsibility on the researcher to identify and be able to adapt to changes

and describe how the research is affected by unforeseen variables. Dependability also requires that the research be conducted in such a way that the researcher themselves does not influence the results. Furthermore, sufficient sample size and appropriate population sampling are important to ensure that results are dependable and not an artifact of a non-representative sample. Additional strategies to establish dependability in qualitative research include, but are not limited to, an inquiry audit, which requires an examination of both the process and the findings of a study by an objective party not involved in the research.

Confirmability

Confirmability takes into consideration that each researcher will bring a unique perspective to the study, and that this can bias the results of the study if not properly attended to (Trochim & Donnelly, 2001). This is because the researcher can document and verify the data at any and every stage throughout the research. Confirmability in qualitative research is necessary to validate that the findings of the research are a result of the experiences of the participants of the study and not by the opinions of the researcher. Strategies to establish confirmability in qualitative research include, but are not limited to, an audit trail, in which the process of data collection is historically documented throughout the study, and reflexivity, where the researcher reflects on themselves to ensure the absence or control of any biases. I employed these techniques to ensure confirmability.

Reliability

In qualitative research, reliability establishes several things, such as the extent to which the results of the study can be reproduced under the same conditions (Middleton, 2022). Therefore, attention to reliability is essential to ensure the consistency and trustworthiness of the research being conducted. In order to establish reliability in this study, I used a consistent method of data collection using the interview protocol provided in Appendix D. To further enhance reliability, a list of questions (see Appendix E) derived from a previous study were developed. Furthermore, member checking was used to ensure reliability.

Validity

Validity is used to determine if the research is credible, confirmable, and transferable (What is Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research? n.d.). Validity in qualitative research refers to the ways by which researchers can affirm that their findings are faithful to participants' experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). It also refers to the instrumentation, methodology, and research design for exploring the phenomenon (Yin, 2018). The validity of this study was established by using the triangulation method. Triangulation uses different data sources as a means to avoid fundamental biases that may arise from the use of a single method (Noble & Heale, 2019). Therefore, it was appropriate for this study.

Ethical Procedures

By following the standards of research ethics, I fulfilled my moral responsibility. In order to elicit the desired data from participants, I first received authorization from the

appropriate authorities to perform the study. Approval to conduct the study from Walden University's IRB and signed agreements from the participant pool are all examples of these authorizations. I created an informed consent agreement based on Walden University's recommended items in order to obtain informed consent from the individuals. The agreement addressed the study's purpose, research techniques, research risks (if applicable), the study's voluntary nature, and confidentiality safeguards. Participants were allowed to terminate their participation in the study at any time.

During the course of my activity in analyzing and transcribing the data collected during the interviews for this study, "Retention Rate Factors of Junior Enlisted Females in the U.S. Marine Corps," I had access to information that was confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information remains confidential and that any improper disclosure of confidential information could be damaging to the participant. I agreed to the following:

1. Keeping all research information provided to me confidential. I will not discuss or share the information with anyone other than my doctoral committee.
2. Keeping all research information secure while in my possession.
3. Destroying all information regarding this research that is not returnable to the participants.
4. Not allowing personally identifiable information to which I have access to be accessible to anyone.

I understood that any violation of this agreement would have legal implications.

Summary and Transition

This chapter aimed to outline the research method that will be used to answer the research questions leading to insight on the research problem. Through a discussion of the procedure, participant pool, data collection, and the research instruments, this chapter outlined the specific details of how the study was conducted and who participated in the study. To summarize, this study employed a qualitative research methodology and a phenomenological research design. Ethical assurances were established to protect the participants' interests and rights, as this study involved human subjects. The findings' internal and external validity was ensured by using an adequate sample size, valid and reliable instruments, and statistical analysis tools.

The goal of Chapter 4 was to provide the study results and demonstrate that the methodology described in Chapter 3 was adequate to conduct the study. This included the sample demographics, an explanation of what the findings mean in light of the study's theoretical framework, comparisons of the findings to those of other related studies, and an explanation of how the findings will impact the retention rates of the junior female enlisted Marines.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of junior enlisted female Marines who have decided to separate from the Marine Corps before becoming eligible for a subsequent term. The research questions that were addressed included why junior enlisted female Marines leave, what factors contribute to their decision to separate, and the impact leadership had on their decision. I used a phenomenological hermeneutic approach to understand the lived experiences of the junior enlisted female Marines and the negative impact that leadership may have on their decisions to separate from military obligations after their first term. To create a unique understanding of what the participants experienced, I conducted 16 semi structured interviews. Three research questions were addressed in this study:

1. Why do junior enlisted female Marines leave the Marine Corps?
2. What factors contribute to the decision to separate from the Marine Corps before becoming eligible for re-enlisting for a subsequent term?
3. What impact did leadership have on the decision for female Marines to separate?

Chapter 4 presents the data collected from the participants who met the inclusion criteria to participate in the study, a description of the methods used for data analysis, along with evidence of data trustworthiness. I will then provide the study's results. Then, the chapter will include a discussion of themes that did not directly address the research questions but are important findings. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a summary and transition to Chapter 5.

Research Setting

Following IRB approval, Facebook group administrative personnel were contacted and asked permission (see Appendix D) to post the social media invitation on their pages. Once permission was granted, the social media recruitment flyer was posted to five groups using my personal Facebook page as the launching site.

I received responses from potential participants within 3 days of my initial post. Upon receiving a potential participant's contact information, I contacted the individuals and verified they met the inclusion criteria. After verification was obtained, informed consent forms were emailed and within approximately 36 hours, participants acknowledged they received and reviewed the informed consent forms. Interviews were immediately scheduled using my Walden University official email and Teams account. Interviews were conducted within a 4-week timeframe (October 5 - 25, 2022). Of the 22 scheduled interviews, one was conducted face-to-face in a secure location, and 15 were conducted virtually using Google Meets from my personal Google email account. The face-to-face interview was recorded using a handheld recording device, whereas the virtual interviews were digitally recorded using both Google Meets and the handheld device as a back-up recording mechanism

Demographics

Participants were required to meet the following criteria: (a) female, (b) junior enlisted, meaning that the highest rank a participant achieved was E5 (Sergeant), (c) member of the U.S. Marine Corps, and (d) honorably discharged via active-duty service. Participant demographic profiles are shown in Table 1. To protect participant

confidentiality, all participants were identified by one of the following participant identifiers or coding: P1 through P16. The ages of the participants ranged from 23 to 50 years old, with the average age being 30.5 years old. The participants were 62.5% White (10 participants), 12.5% Black or African American (two participants), 17.8% Hispanic or Latino (three participants) and 6.3% Asian (one participant). Currently, the U.S. Marine Corps is 75.0% White, 9.8% Black or African American, 6.3% Hispanic or Latino, and 5.8% Asian (DOD, 2020). Thus, the demographics of the participants in this study were similar to those of the Marine Corps, with the sample slightly under-representing Whites and slightly over-representing African American and Hispanics. The participants had various educational backgrounds, ranging from a high school diploma to a PhD. The participants represented 14 states of the United States, lending credence to the notion that the participants constituted a diverse group of individuals consistent with the diversity of the Marine Corps.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Education	State of Residence
P1	Female	30	White	Some College	Maryland
P2	Female	27	White	Bachelor's Degree	Colorado
P3	Female	25	White	High School Diploma	Ohio
P4	Female	23	White	Some College	South Carolina
P5	Female	24	White	Some College	Ohio
P6	Female	32	White	Master's Degree	Virginia
P7	Female	30	White	Associate's Degree	Ohio
P8	Female	27	Hispanic	High School Diploma	California
P9	Female	26	White	High School Diploma	South Dakota
P10	Female	33	Asian	Bachelor's Degree	New Jersey
P11	Female	25	Hispanic	Associate's Degree	Washington

P12	Female	23	Hispanic	Associate's Degree	New York
P13	Female	40	African American	Some College	Georgia
P14	Female	27	White	High School Diploma	Iowa
P15	Female	50	White	Some College	Virginia
P16	Female	46	African American	Ph.D.	Texas

The military demographics of the participants are shown in Table 2. The participants had the following ranks: Lance Corporal (E3, two participants), Corporal (E4, four participants) Sergeant (E5, ten participants). On average, the participants spent 5.6 years in service at an average of 2.3 duty stations, across a variety of MOS's. A typical first-term in the Marine Corps is 4 or 5 years (Marine Corps Recruiting Command Order 1100.1 Ch.1, n.d.). Examination of the participants' years-of-service (YOS) indicates that two participants (P4 and P15) departed before the conclusion of their first-term enlistment, eight participants separated from the Marine Corps after their first-term enlistment and chose not to reenlist (P2, P5, P7, P9, P12, P13, and P16), four of the participants separated from the Marine Corps before the conclusion of their subsequent term of enlistment (P1, P3, P8, and P11), and three of the participants completed a subsequent term in the Marine Corps (P6, P10, and P14). The diversity of experience, years-of-service, and different duty stations add diversity to the participants' perceptions, and experiences, especially in terms of the different leadership styles encountered while in the Marine Corps.

Table 2*Military Demographic Profiles of Participants*

Participant ID	Total YOS	Military Occupational Specialty	Duty Stations	Highest Rank	Type of Discharge	Years in Service
P1	7.5	Supply Administration and Operation (30)	2	Sergeant (E5)	Honorable	2012-2019
P2	5.0	Military Police and Corrections (58)	1	Corporal (E4)	Honorable	
P3	7.0	Aviation Ordnance (65)	5	Sergeant (E5)	Active Duty	2015-2022
P4	5.0	Communication Strategy (45)	2	Sergeant (E5)	Active Duty	
P5	4.0	N/A	2	Corporal (E4)	Active Duty	
P6	9.0	Air Traffic Control (72)	3	Sergeant (E5)	Honorable	2007-2017
P7	4.0	Logistics (04)	2	Sergeant (E5)	Honorable	2016-2020
P8	7.5	Supply Administration and Operation (30)	3	Sergeant (E5)	Honorable	
P9	5.0	Military Police and Corrections (58)	2	Corporal (E4)	Honorable	2014-2019
P10	8.0	N/A	2	Sergeant (E5)	Honorable	2007-2015
P11	7.0	Supply Administration and Operation (30)	2	Sergeant (E5)	Honorable	2014-2021
P12	5.0	Avionics (64)	2	Sergeant (E5)	Honorable	
P13	4.0	Ground Ordnance Maintenance (21)	2	Lance Corporal (E3)	Honorable	2000-2004
P14	8.0	N/A	3	Sergeant (E5)	Active Duty	
P15	2.5	Music (55)	2	Lance Corporal (E3)	Honorable	1990-1993
P16	4.0	N/A	2	Corporal (E4)	Honorable	

Note. Some participants did not provide details regarding their MOS and are indicated in Table 2 as N/A.

Data Collection

Data collection was initiated upon receipt of IRB approval from Walden University on September 30, 2022. Social media invitations were posted to Facebook groups on October 5, 2022. Twenty-two one-hour interviews were scheduled using my Walden University email account; one was conducted face-to-face in a secure location and 15 were conducted virtually using Google Meets from my personal Google email account. The face-to-face interview was recorded using a handheld recording device, and the virtual interviews were digitally recorded using both Google Meets and the handheld device as a back-up. Prior to the start of the interviews, I reviewed the informed consent form from each participant, with the participant acknowledging vocally they consented to have their data utilized in the study during the interview process. Participants were instructed not to reveal any personal information beyond what was presented in the approved interview protocol. Any personal information shared in the interviews was redacted; this situation only occurred in one interview. Participants were assigned a participant ID number for data identification purposes as well as to preserve their anonymity and ensure confidentiality throughout the research analysis.

To transcribe the data, I utilized Google for the in-person interview and Google Meets transcription capabilities for the virtual interviews. I reviewed the transcriptions line-by-line while comparing them to the original audio recordings to ensure accuracy of the transcriptions. After the transcription of the data was completed, the interview transcripts were sent to participants for interviewee transcript review and confirmation/validation of answers provided (see Candela, 2019). Three participants

responded to the member-checking emails indicating that no changes to the transcript were required. The remaining participants did not respond to the interviewee transcript review email. The original sample size was estimated to be 20–25 participants. However, since data saturation was reached after interviewing 16 participants, all additional interviews were canceled.

Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was used to analyze data. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke's method consists of six phases:

1. Become familiar with the data.
2. Generate initial codes for the data.
3. Search for themes in the data.
4. Conduct a thematic review of the themes in the data.
5. Define and name the themes in the data.
6. Write up the final report of the data.

To begin data analysis, the verbatim transcribed data were uploaded to the NVivo Version 12 software for analysis. Transcripts were coded by themes to determine the similarity or dissimilarity of the participants' responses. This step also included the identification of any trending data topics or comments. The research protocol and methodology for data analysis was conducted as described in Chapter 3, with the following additional details. First, I did four critical readings of each interview transcript. In the first reading, I read the interview transcript for overall impressions. In the second

reading, I read each interview transcript line-by-line to become familiar with the data. Third, I read the interview transcripts by reviewing each response to each interview question. This allowed the identification of important themes and trends that emerged from each interview question. It also offered insight into which interview questions could be grouped into common themes or trends. Lastly, on a fourth reading, I reread the interview transcripts by participants to regain a holistic appreciation of the entire data set.

I next reviewed the interview transcripts to determine if the data correlated to the research questions and subsequently provided insight into the research problem. All interview questions were answered by each participant, and there was no need to eliminate any data or collect further data due to saturation and data richness. A code-sub-code hierarchical coding system was used to code the data. I looked for themes according to each interview question's responses, which became the main top-level codes. Interview questions that were directly related to each research question were then considered. As such, there were four main themes: (a) reasons why participants chose to leave the Marine Corps, (b) factors leading to why participants chose to separate from the Marine Corps, (c) participants' challenges with leadership, and (d) participants' expectations of leadership. Theme 1 addresses RQ 1, Themes 2 addresses RQ 2, and Themes 3–4 address RQ3.

After the identification of themes, the thematic coding of transcripts was re-examined to search for subthemes within the data. Subthemes became the subcodes in the hierarchical coding system. The code table summarizing the themes for the entire study is shown in Table 3.

Table 3*Codebook Table*

Research Question	Theme	Participants
RQ1: Reasons to separate	Conflict with Family Responsibilities	P6, P9
	Military Sexual Trauma	P11, P13
	No Upward Vision	P2, P5, P12, P14, P16
	Poor Leadership	P1, P3, P4, P5, P7, P9, P10, P11, P12, P15
	Unrealistic Standards	P4, P5, P7
RQ2: Factors why to separate	Lack of Support For Leadership	P2, P3, P8, P10
	Lack of Passion of Job	P4, P11
	Leadership Itself	P1, P3, P5, P6, P7, P12, P13, P14, P15
	Marine Corps' Leadership Expectations (Stemming from Poor Leadership)	P1, P11, P13, P16
RQ3: Leadership Challenges	Confrontational Leadership	P3, P16
	Dismissive Leadership	P11, P13
	Racist or Sexist Leadership	P4, P5, P6, P9, P12, P13
	Unsupportive Leadership	P2, P3, P4, P6, P13, P14
	Used Rank Improperly	P1, P5, P7, P8, P15
RQ3: Expectations of Leadership	Approachable	P7, P10
	Compassionate, Firm	P1, P7, P8
	Fair	P1, P8, P9
	High Standards	P3, P9, P10, P11
	Invested	P2, P5, P6, P10, P13, P15
	Professional	P1, P3, P8, P9
	Trustworthy	P4, P11

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Guba and Lincoln (1981) developed five components to ensure reliability and validity in all methods of research. Morse et al. (2002) confirmed the importance of these factors by providing more details: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity. The following sections explain how this study met the criteria established by Guba and Lincoln.

Credibility/Validity

Guba and Lincoln (1981) defined credibility as the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings. To establish credibility in the study, I implemented several strategies in addition to those identified previously in Chapter 3. The first strategy was to ensure that a thorough review of all the materials was accomplished. The second strategy was member checking, which increases the authenticity of the final transcript and data. Participants were afforded the opportunity to review their transcripts to correct any errors, clarify any information captured in error, or provide any additional information they thought important (see Candela, 2019). Third, a comprehensive codebook was created that details all of the responses of the participants as coded in the data analysis process; this also allows readers to draw their own conclusion based on the participants' own words. Fourth, I aimed for narrative truth by including verbatim quotations from the participants in the final analysis of the findings. Fifth, an acute awareness of my own possible bias during the research process was undertaken. This included a reflexivity of taking field notes and memos during the research process and

interviews, followed by a comprehensive review and guard against bias. Finally, I ensured that all field notes taken were properly coded and organized.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree that results of qualitative research are transferred to other settings (Trochim & Donnelly, 2001). Transferability in this study was ensured through the use of robust and complete descriptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). To this end, a collection of detailed demographic information about the participants with respect to their personal characteristics (Table 1), as well as their military career profiles (Table 2) was undertaken. The inclusion criteria of the study ensured that the participants were knowledgeable about the phenomenon under investigation; namely, why junior-enlisted female Marines decided to separate from the Marine Corps and the likelihood that leadership had an influence. The sample also achieved sufficiency, in that the data reached saturation after 16 interviews and the participants from the target population accurately represented the diversity of junior-enlisted females in the Marine Corps. Thus, transferability in this study was established by describing the data in such a way that it could be compared to females in other branches of service who also could describe lived experiences with leadership. Due to these factors, the study is transferable to all females in the Marine Corps, and likely, to females in other branches of the U.S. military as well.

Dependability/Reliability

Dependability is based on the assumption that if the same research is conducted multiple times, it will yield similar results. Dependability was ensured throughout the

study, as described chronologically in this chapter. First, an audit trail, documenting every aspect of the research process was presented. Second, an interview protocol and script to ensure stability in the data (Appendix D) was strictly enforced throughout the interview process. Adhering to interview protocol so that all participants were offered an equal chance to answer each question was important, thereby ensuring consistency in collecting the data from all participants, and reliability. Third, data collection and analytic procedures were clearly documented, noting any changes to the procedures as outlined in Chapter 3. Fourth, a comprehensive codebook was created to document all of the findings for each participant (Table 3), and memos and field notes were taken and recorded (Appendix H), for use and cross-reference throughout data collection, analysis, and forming conclusions.

Confirmability

Confirmability in qualitative research is necessary to validate that the findings of the research are a result of the experiences of the participants of the study and not of the opinions of the researcher. Confirmability is the neutrality, or the degree findings are consistent, and could be repeated (Polit & Beck, 2014). Prior to each interview, participants were informed of possible research biases and were instructed to answer each and every question from their own perspective. Engaging in the following procedures ensured the confirmability of the study findings throughout the research process. First, during the coding process, codes were clear and well-defined, reflecting patterns identified in the data. Second, evidence to support claims by the use of verbatim quotations from the participants, as detailed in the comprehensive codebook presented in

Table 3. Third, an in-depth methodological description allows for the integrity of the research results to be analyzed. Finally, throughout the entire research process, the use of journaling and memos to document research observations and ideas during the research process, so as to understand any research reflexivity. Memos made during the data analysis process are found in Appendix H for reference.

Study Results

In the following section, the study results are presented in two frameworks. First, the analysis of the findings for each of the three research questions, giving an in-depth account of each participant's perceptions, beliefs, and experiences. In the study, four themes were identified, each of which directly addresses the research questions. Thus, the following section is organized according to research questions, where Theme 1 addresses RQ1, Theme 2 addresses RQ2 and Themes 3-4 address RQ3. Together, these themes address the overarching research problem, which concerns the negative impact that leadership has on the decisions of junior enlisted female Marines to separate or stay in the Marine Corps, focusing in particular on interactions with leadership.

Research Question 1

Participants were asked directly why they decided to separate from the Marine Corps. There were five main themes that resulted from this analysis: (a) Conflict with family responsibilities, (b) military sexual trauma, (c) no upward vision, (d) poor leadership, and (e) unrealistic standards (Table 4). A comprehensive codebook containing all coding for this research question is found in Table 3. Each of these themes will be discussed, in turn.

Table 4*Participants' Reasons for leaving the Marine Corps*

Theme	Participants	Excerpt
Conflict with Family Responsibilities	P6, P9	“My command was [told me that] the Marine Corps didn’t issue [me] kids. I explained that I’m trying to be flexible, but you have to be flexible with me. I can’t predict if my kids are going to have hand, foot, and mouth disease. I’ll take leave but there was no flexibility, and it was just a toss-up of do I pick my kids or my career? My kids come first” (P6).
Military Sexual Trauma (MST)	P11, P13	“They handled my MST poorly. I was dealing with severe depression. They handled that poorly, and I was like, why, why am I doing this to myself?” (P11).
No Upward Vision	P2, P5, P12, P14, P16	“You take the promotion, and you’re right back to the grind and back to the same place. [You’re] around the same people and around the same mindset that kind of pushed you away in the first place. And so that was, that was a difficult decision for me because you are torn between that rock and a hard place of there [being] opportunities outside the Marine Corps, and then there is an opportunity right there under your face, to be the thing that you never had” (P14).
Poor Leadership	P1, P3, P4, P5, P7, P9, P10, P11, P12, P15	“I really wasn’t happy. It’s not that I did not like the job, but I didn’t like the people around me. We’re not supported and mostly from NCOs because it starts at the head and it comes down. They just gave me no reason to stay. There was nothing that I needed to aspire to, and I definitely didn’t want to be like the [leadership]” (P15).
Unrealistic Standards	P1, P8, P13	“I was unfortunately placed on the body composition program, and no matter how much I tried, how much I worked out, and how much I did what my leadership wanted, I just couldn’t meet the standard the way they wanted me to. I ultimately decided to leave before they could strip me of my benefits” (P13).

Theme 1: Conflict with Family Responsibilities

Two of the participants (P6 and P9) reported the main reason for leaving the Marine Corps concerned conflicts with familial responsibilities. Indeed, both P6 and P9 had children, with P6 having children prior to enlisting in the Marine Corps and P9 becoming pregnant while enlisted on active duty. As shown in Table 4, P6 reported flexibility issues with being a parent as the main reason she chose to separate from the Marine Corps. In this spirit, P6 further explained:

[I left because of] the complete inflexibility with having a family. I feel like the military in general is really built around this really outdated concept of there's a [man] in the military and his wife stays at home with their kids. Therefore, there's no reason for the military to do anything that's family related, or be flexible. If someone has an emergency [and] if both of us are in the military, that doesn't really work (P6).

Thus, P6 felt as if there was a constant conflict related to choosing between work responsibilities and familial responsibilities. For P6, this conflict was irreconcilable and she did not choose to pursue another term in the Marine Corps. P9 had a similar experience to P6, with respect to conflicts with familial responsibilities, except with greater difficulties. P9 became pregnant while on active duty and had difficulty with leadership granting her six weeks of maternity leave and six weeks of primary caregiver leave. P9 reported that their command denied her primary caregiver leave. P9 reported that their commanding officer stated, "Your husband, he can stay home and take care of them because [your] husband is a civilian" (P9). However, the command neglected the

fact that only females can lactate and nurse the child. Ultimately, P9 decided to leave the Marine Corps to meet family obligations, “One of the big factors was [the Marine Corps] not thinking that I first had an obligation to my child. That was a real big [factor]. I got tired of the constant [runaround]” (P9).

P9’s experience in the Marine Corps and the reason she decided to separate from the Marine Corps are juxtaposed with the reason she joined the Marine Corps. P9 cited the reason she joined the Marine Corps was wanting to create a better life for herself and her family. P9 recounts, “I guess I was lost in what I wanted to do. I was going to go to college and then decided that wasn’t the route I wanted to go. I needed to get out of my previous home environment and find myself.” It is unclear from the interview whether P9 views her time in the Marine Corps as having served the goal of providing a better life for herself or her family, especially considering that P9 cited the primary reason for leaving the Marine Corps as needing to provide for her family.

Theme 2: Military Sexual Trauma

According to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), MST refers to assaults and harassment experienced during military service (VA, 2022). MST includes any type of sexual activity during military service performed against a person’s will or when they have no choice but to engage (VA, 2022). There is a pervasive MST problem among men and women across all branches of the U.S. military (Wilson, 2018). Approximately one-in-three female Veterans who served in the military have reported experiencing MST during their service to their Veterans Administration (VA) health care provider (VA, 2022). Although the DOD recognizes the problem and has made some

strides toward prevention, instances of MST are still on the rise (Myers, 2022). The percentage of female service members reporting MST is at the highest recorded rate of 8.0% since the military began tracking incidences of MST in 2004 (Myers, 2022). Similarly, to previous years, the extrapolated estimates indicate that women in the Marine Corps face the highest rate of unwanted sexual contact incidents (13.4%, up from 10.7% in 2018), and men in the Navy are most affected by 2.1%, up from 0.9% (Myers, 2022).

Two of the participants (P11 and P13) reported being the victims of MST and this was cited as a major factor for why they decided to separate from the Marine Corps. P11 reported being sexually assaulted while in the military, and when she reported it to her commanding officer, the event was disregarded as not being a true sexual assault, as stated by P11:

[It was] probably the worst experience I had because [my command] was very biased. They would rather take care of the person that [sexually assaulted] me than take care of me. They were trying to take the middle road and basically, they were just disregarding what I was trying to say to the point that they [told me] it wasn't sexual assault. They came to that conclusion in an email and [tried] to bring it down as if it [was] not that big of a deal (P11).

P11 further expanded that this was her main reason for choosing to separate from the Marine Corps. She said, "It had always been [an important] thing for me before I really was dead set on leaving because of the sexual assault that happened." Thus, the reason for P11's decision to leave the Marine Corps was poor leadership regarding the handling of a traumatic sexual assault, in her opinion.

P13 had a similar experience to P11. In the aftermath of her sexual assault, which she defined as rape, P13 explained her mental and physical health, saying:

I started taking sleeping pills because once I got off of work, I just wanted to sleep and not deal with anything until I just had to. I had to be up for PT or I had to be up to go to work. I got really dependent on sleeping pills for a while. I contemplated suicide. I had to then go to group therapy for depression, which in itself was horrible because you're sitting there with all of these Marine wives or Navy wives who are all talking about how they're so depressed because their Marine [husbands] were deployed. But, when I talked about things that were happening to me, their thoughts were 'Oh my God. You're one of those females who is sleeping with people's husbands in the Marine Corps' (P13).

Throughout the interview, P13 described a series of leadership failures with respect to how her MST was handled. She described a lack of support from her commanding officer and she also described the mandatory therapy as being degrading and of little use for her physical or mental health. Like P11, P13 cited MST as being one of the main reasons why she decided to separate from the Marine Corps, adding:

Everything from being able to get adequate medical care because people who were over me thought it would not be to the benefit of the Marine Corps. Not being able to be promoted because my body composition would not allow for me to be in the unrealistic body and weight standards of the Marine Corps that pull down females. Not being listened to and not believed when I came to them with sexual assault. In fact, I was belittled on a daily basis (P13).

Thus, P13's experience in the Marine Corps was likely negative, and how leadership handled the MST tainted her experience with the Marine Corps, driving her to the decision to ultimately separate.

While MST was cited as the reasons why these participants decided to leave the Marine Corps, the participants also believed that poor leadership regarding handling of their MST played a role in their decision. Both participants reported that their leadership did not believe their claims of MST, which drove both participants into deep depression. Both participants reported being belittled because of their claims, isolating them from the help they needed. As such, this theme represents a mixed reason why the participants decided to leave the Marine Corps, namely MST and the response to MST by leadership.

Theme 3: No Upward Vision

The second most prevalent answer from the participants regarding their reasons for leaving the Marine Corps was a lack of upward vision, meaning that the participants could not envision themselves staying in the Marine Corps for their entire careers. Five of the participants responded in this manner (P2, P5, P12, P14, and P16). Participant 12 felt the effects of no upward vision early in her term with the Marine Corps. She recounted:

[I knew I didn't want to reenlist] after a year and a half into being at my first duty station. Part of my MOS was one year of training and then four years at the duty station. In my first year of training, I did have some moments where I [felt] 'I don't want to do this for life.' So, my reasoning was 'what's the point of continuing this for the next 15-20 years? If this is how I'm going to be treated for the next 15-20 years' (P12).

Thus, P12 felt disconnected from the idea of pursuing her career in the Marine Corps early in her duty station assignment. After one year of her initial enlistment, she thought the way the Marine Corps treated her as an employee and as a person could not sustain her for an entire 15-20-year career.

Some of the participants felt that the Marine Corps did not offer them enough opportunities in terms of career or advancement. P16 stated that she decided to leave because of “limited opportunities.” She saw her opportunities as being limited in what she could accomplish in the Marine Corps. The sentiments of P14 are shown in Table 4. She also expressed that the Marine Corps forced individuals into a fixed mindset, working with the same individuals, thereby limiting her growth and creativity. This ultimately resulted in her choosing to separate from the Marine Corps. P2 expressed similar concerns about remaining in the Marine Corps for her entire career. Indeed, she felt like there was a large “let-down” after her recruitment. She explained:

I think there was a letdown because, when you're in DEPs, your recruiters invest a lot of their time in interviews. They tell you about all the great things you can do and accomplish and how much they believe in you. So, there was that build-up and then I don't know. I just couldn't see a future for myself in the Marine Corps and I had planned on doing 20 years. I think that build-up of motivation just hit the floor and right off the bat, I felt like this is where careers go to die. It was just a huge letdown for everything that I thought I could accomplish or I saw myself accomplishing. So that's when I decided I would get out (P2).

Like P11, P2 knew early in her tenure in the Marine Corps that she did not want to reenlist. She felt limited by the opportunities, expressing it as “this is where careers go to die.” Thus, in order to fulfill her motivation for upward career mobility, she decided to separate from the Marine Corps. Many of the participants felt the same way, and lack of upward vision was the second most prevalent answer regarding why the participants separated from the Marine Corps.

Theme 4: Poor Leadership

The most prevalent reason given by the participants for why they decided to leave the Marine Corps was poor leadership. Ten of the sixteen participants responded in this manner. Some participants, including P1, recounted that her commanding officer did not respect her time outside of work and often denigrated other colleagues in discussions with her. P1 said:

His attitude was so negative and when I was in the Marine Corps at OCS, I was married. I lived about an hour and a half from the base. I would get phone calls at six or seven o'clock at night when I'm trying to go on a date with my wife. He would literally, just for hours straight, berate me and talk [degradingly] about Marines in the shop. That's not what I expect out of a leader; they should not be literally [complaining] to another subordinate leader. Some days, I would come home from work crying my eyes out because the stress from this man was so unbelievable to the point where I didn't want to come back to work the next day. I thought a couple of times that I wanted to go UA or some stress from him would carry over into my marriage... I can remember one time I got in my car; I got on

the highway and I floored it. I said I don't care anymore. I couldn't do this anymore. Luckily, I was able to talk myself off a ledge (P1).

In this way, P1's leadership forced her into ethical conflicts between her obligations to the Marine Corps and her obligations to herself and family. This conflict was counter to her mental health, which was a major reason why P1 decided to leave the Marine Corps.

Some of the participants described situations where they had a lack of leadership or a large distrust in leadership. P10's experience with leadership led her to feel isolated and separated from other colleagues. She described herself as having no effective leadership, reporting:

I had no leadership at the time. I had come back from a deployment and I had injured myself. So, they stuck me at a work center where I was working, but I didn't have someone to report to. I was essentially just reporting to the division chief and because there was no direct leadership, I was working on my own. I just lost the connection that I had prior to going into that work center (P10).

P10 describes a situation where she was being punished for getting injured while on deployment; after the injury, she was placed in a work center with little to no connection to others or linkages to the mission. In a team-oriented environment, like the military, a sense of detachment can adversely affect individuals both personally and in their work performance (Dixon et al., 2003). Unlike P10, P3 reported directly to a commanding officer, but reported their leadership to be largely absent. P3 said

They did not treat me as well as they did before. Then, it was a waterfall effect of just hatred of day-to-day things. It didn't make being there any better. Then, I was

supposed to leave Moscow and throughout the whole COVID [pandemic], I was supposed to leave four different times. I didn't hear from [my command] once. It was such a disappointment from somebody that I thought that I trusted and that I thought had our best interests in mind (P3).

Lack of communication and connection similarly left P3 feeling alone and isolated amid the COVID-19 pandemic (years 2020-2022). Taken together, these participants felt isolated from their leadership, which negatively affected their mental health, and likely their job performance, both of which contributed to the participants wanting to separate from the Marine Corps.

Other participants did not describe a lack of leadership, but rather a large distrust in their leadership because of their poor treatment. For example, P15 said,

I really wasn't happy. It's not that I didn't like the job, but I didn't like the people around me. They were not supportive and mostly NCOs because it starts at the head and it comes down. They just gave me no reason to stay. There was nothing that I needed to aspire to and I definitely didn't want to be like them.

Other participants described their leadership as being unsupportive and treating them unfairly. For example, P4 said, "The leadership was the final straw, seeing how certain situations were handled. I was [berated] whenever like I made minor mistakes and other situations were blown out of proportion. But, then, the same situation that affected me negatively was swept under the rug." P5 had similar experiences and thoughts to P15, saying "One of the main reasons why I'm getting out is due to poor leadership and not having really anybody to look up to." P7 had an interesting perspective on truth in

leadership. Her main problem with leadership was not necessarily that she did not trust her command, but that she did not perceive her command as trusting her:

That Captain really put a negative taste in my mouth being surrounded by officers. I expected it to go differently. Having leadership that didn't listen to their enlisted counterparts was very difficult. He was a prior enlisted Marine and I guess when I came to [the east coast], I thought that he would understand a little bit more. But he was on a high horse and he didn't listen and didn't trust anything that I had to say even though I had been working in the field for three years at that point. He just didn't trust what I had to say. That really turned me off from re-enlisting and I didn't really want to go through that again-experiencing leaders not trusting me (P7).

The descriptions provided by the participants show similar trends, with subtle differences. P15 and P4 distrusted their leadership because they believed their commanding officers did not care about them or their best interests, whereas P7 described her leadership as not trusting her. However, both situations regarding lack of trust were cited as main reasons why participants chose to separate from the Marine Corps.

Some participants described situations where leadership denied them access to resources to meet their physical needs, including medical care. This was a common theme throughout the interviews. Indeed, in an earlier excerpt when describing her MST, P13 described that she was denied access to medical care because, in her view, it was not in the best interest of the Marine Corps. P12 had the same experience, saying:

I [decided to leave because of] restrictions not only from the Marine Corps, but from leaders as well. There would be moments where I would try and do something as simple as go to a medical appointment and I would have to do a bunch of stuff in order to be able to go to a medical appointment. This threw me off because I was trying to take care of myself for me to be good. My command wasn't allowing me to do that (P12).

Thus, being denied access to medical care was a prominent reason why at least two participants decided to leave the Marine Corps. In summary, various aspects of poor leadership was cited as a reason why ten of the 16 participants chose to separate from the Marine Corps early in their careers. The poor leadership situations included a lack of management, unfairness, unsupportive actions, and distant leadership that was maligned. These factors resulted in the participants, and their colleagues at the time, developing a lack of trust in leadership and all levels: tactical, operational, and strategic.

Theme 5: Unrealistic Standards

Many of the participants believed that the height and weight standards for females in the Marine Corps were unrealistic and unachievable. Three participants (P1, P8, and P13) cited the main reason for leaving the Marine Corps to be height and weight standards they were consistently unable to achieve, or maintain. For example, in order to attempt to meet the height and weight requirement, the participants reported putting their physical health in danger. P1 said,

A lot of my friends left the Marine Corps because they were considered fat and it's not fat. When I went into the Marine Corps, I was 166 pounds. I was lean, but

I was right at my max body weight and for height and weight standards. I'd have to starve myself for about a week to make sure that I would make weight. I wish leaders who are in those positions would make changes (P1).

P1 recalled starving herself in order to achieve the weight standards. Other participants utilized different methods to try to lose weight necessary to not receive sanctions. P13 recalled,

I was over height and weight standards. They legally could say that they did not want to promote me and that is what they did. So, when I left the Marine Corps, I had time in grade, time in service and I had my cutting score. Everything was good to go, but I was denied because I was considered a fat body. I was drinking stuff for two or three days before [my weight in] so that I was [explicit word] my life away so that I could try to make weight. I struggled to make weight or I would make weight, and then gain five pounds back the next day because I was drinking water (P13).

P8 highlighted a different aspect of not being able to achieve the height and weight standards. P8 cited this as her main reason for leaving the Marine Corps, saying:

I was unfortunately placed on the body composition program and no matter how much I tried, how much I worked out, how much I starved myself, how much I did what my leadership wanted, I just couldn't meet standard the way they wanted. I ultimately decided to leave before they could strip me of my benefits.

These participants felt constantly on-edge during their tenure in the Marine Corps, always worrying about their next weight check. They reported poor physical health as a result of

starving themselves or using laxatives to dehydrate their bodies. They recalled their mental health suffering as a result of the procedures, and they were scared that if they did not leave the Marine Corps, they would not receive the benefits for having served.

Summary of RQ 1

There were five main reasons that the participants cited for why they chose to separate from the Marine Corps. These reasons were the five themes presented for this research question and included: (a) conflicts with family responsibilities, (b) MST, (c) no upward vision, (d) poor leadership and (e) unrealistic standards. The most prevalent and identified reason for leaving the Marine Corps was poor leadership. The participants cited specific examples of poor leadership including lack of leadership, disrespectful or distant leadership, untrustworthy leadership and leadership that denied the participants their mandated benefits.

The second most prevalent reason why the participants separated from the Marine Corps was no upward vision, meaning that the participants could not envision themselves remaining in their current positions or even in leadership positions for the duration of a full career in the Marine Corps. The other themes were not as prevalent, but are equally important as reported by the respondents. Some participants reported not reenlisting due to conflicts with family responsibilities, while others left due to mishandling of MST. Therefore, the participants highlighted a variety of reasons why they decided to leave the Marine Corps; the majority of which concerned being surrounded by poor leadership and poor handling of difficult, or challenging, situations.

Research Question 2

With an understanding of the reasons *why* junior-enlisted female Marines chose not to re-enlist after a first or subsequent term, I next asked the participants *what* factors influenced their decision to separate from the Marine Corps. The majority of the participants cited reasons surrounding leadership, as discussed in the RQ1 Section. In fact, three of the four themes found in analysis of this question surrounded the concept of leadership. The four themes that emerged from this analysis were: (a) lack of support from leadership, (b) lack of passion for their job, (c) the leadership itself, and (d) the Marine Corps' leadership general expectations of their personnel. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Factors Influencing the Participants' Decision to leave the Marine Corps

Theme	Participants	Excerpt
Lack of Support from Leadership	P2, P3, P8, P10	"Things happen where I just didn't feel supported like the leadership I had in the past. I didn't have the support, and I just started feeding into negative talk and the idea of getting out because I didn't have someone to help me make decisions. Getting leadership and guidance was really hard for me at that time. So, I just decided to get out" (P10).
Lack of Passion for Their Job	P4, P11	"I was selected to do recruiting. That was just something that I didn't want to do, and I also knew that I wanted to focus on school. So, I thought it was my time to leave because I knew that I wasn't going to enjoy recruiting. I also knew that I wouldn't excel at something that I wasn't passionate about" (P11).
Leadership Itself	P1, P3, P5, P6, P7, P12, P13, P14, P15	"It became a kind of mantra. 'Well, this is why I'm not going to stay in because the leadership is so terrible.' They don't care about you. It's all about the mission. I understand the mission is important overall, but the mission doesn't happen without the people. So, if you don't care about the people, you don't care about the mission" (P6).
Marine Corps' Leadership Expectations	P1, P11, P13, P16	"I was not having my voice heard when I called him out on his [mistakes] – outside of course and not in front of the other Marines and not in front of other leadership. It was just me and him and his initial reaction was to yell at me and berate me and

(Stemming from Poor Leadership)

make me feel less than human. I would think to myself. I didn't sign up for this. He killed it. It just made the entire experience of the Marine Corps less than what I was seeking, and that's why I got out" (P1).

Theme 1: Lack of Support from Leadership

Four of the participants (P2, P3, P8, and P10) cited a lack of support from leadership as being the main factor that influenced their decision to separate from the Marine Corps without reenlisting for a subsequent term. As shown in Table 5, P10 felt disconnected from her leadership and her fellow Marines. She reported believing that her leadership did not support her. This experience was compounded by the fact that her leadership removed her from a position and also assigned her to a work center with little interaction with others from her home Division. In this case, the lack of leadership support left her feeling isolated and alone, ultimately influencing her decision to leave the Marine Corps. P2 had similar experiences, describing that she had to make her own opportunities because her leadership did not seek out opportunities for her. She recalled:

I'm sure they were good leaders for others, but for me, to small victories or achieve any advancement I had to seek out any opportunities myself. I had to actively seek [them] out myself. There was nothing [from leadership] and no one pushed me in any direction. You don't know what you don't know, and so I missed out on a lot of opportunities that other people would get. Also, I never got recognition for the things I did do, but other people would get recognized for a fraction of what I did. They would get recognition for it, but I wouldn't (P2).

Thus, P2 describes an unsustainable situation where some Marines would be given opportunities for advancement, and she would not be given the opportunity, even though

in a similar circumstance. Moreover, due to not knowing what opportunities were available, she would miss out on situations to showcase her skills and advance her career. In this way, her leadership did not support her career advancement, this in turn made it difficult for her to envision an entire career in the Marine Corps.

Other participants reported different forms of lackluster support from leadership. For example, P8 stated, “My unit at the time were definitely exhibiting the ‘I’m going to advance my own career by any means necessary’ type of leadership.” P8 describes that her leadership was more interested in advancing their own careers than helping those that served under them. This represents an egregious lack of support, in her opinion, when leadership utilizes the people below them to serve their pursuit of advancement. While P8 described leadership that utilized the skills of those under them for their advancement, P3 described leadership that did not support her personal pursuits necessary for her well-being: “When he didn’t vouch for me to go home on time to attend my sister’s wedding, that hit home. I had to go back to work only for him to tell me to my face that that I was a piece of [explicit word]. That was it.” P3’s leadership did not afford her the opportunity to return home amid a long stretch without leave during the COVID-19 pandemic. P3 further explains that this took a toll on her mental and physical health, as she became so distraught with her leadership’s lack of initiative and empathy. Therefore, one of the main reasons why some of the participants chose to separate from the Marine Corps was a general lack of support ,from a leadership perspective.

Theme 2: Lack of Passion for Their Job

While not a prevalent theme, two participants (P4 and P11) did report that a factor influencing their decision to leave the Marine Corps was a lack of passion for the job chosen for them. Some positions within the Marine Corps, including becoming a recruiter or drill instructor, are mandated, meaning that once an individual is chosen for that position, they must perform that duty. P1 was chosen to do recruiting, but due to her negative experiences with the Marine Corps, she did not feel passionate about being a recruiter (Table 5). This development consequently influenced her decision to separate from the Marine Corps. P4 similarly describes a lack of passion for her position at the time she decided to separate. She said:

I quickly met my leaders. I'd say probably six months into being in at my duty station, I don't want to say depressed but I was so distraught. I feel like I needed to see a therapist and regulate how I was feeling. For me, I didn't enjoy my MOS and job field. If those were the people that I was going to keep running into because it's such a small field that I didn't like, I didn't want to stay. I wanted to just take my experiences and go (P4).

P4 highlights an important idea; namely, that her lack of passion for her MOS (assigned at boot camp) was largely due to the influence of the people around her, including her leadership. She recounted that she did not enjoy her MOS because of the people with whom she interacted. Thus, leadership did not inspire her passion, which influenced her decision to leave the Marine Corps.

Theme 3: Leadership Itself

Nine of the participants cited the leadership itself as a factor that influenced their decision to leave the Marine Corps. P12, for example, reported having a fantastic leader at the beginning of her career, subsequent leaders never measured up to her first leader. She recalled:

My last supervisor was great. He was wonderful. I had him in the schoolhouse as well, and he's a big reason why I kept pushing through anything and everything. I wanted to emulate him in my career and in my life in the Marine Corps. Then, when I didn't have that in the fleet, it completely discouraged me from continuing with the Marine Corps (P12).

P12 was somewhat unique among the participants in that she reported having good leadership. However, once that benchmark was set in her mind, her subsequent leaders never met the leadership benchmark that she expected. This tainted the remainder of her experience in the Marine Corps and influenced her decision to leave the Marine Corps. P7 had a similar experience to P12, in that she was highly motivated by her recruiters, who led her to believe that the leadership in the Marine Corps shared similar values. She recounted:

[The recruiters] gave me the impression that the Marine Corps and their leaders were all very compassionate – that they were all motivating when they needed to be motivating, but were down to earth when they needed to be down to earth. I expected compassion. I expected leaders who were knowledgeable and their fields and knowledgeable about the Marine Corps as a whole. Or at least be able to

guide you if they didn't know something. But, [my leaders] were just cold. If you didn't know something, then you were worthless (P7).

Thus, both P12 and P7 experienced good leadership from their first leader and their recruiter, respectively. When subsequent leaders were unable to achieve the standards set by the good initial leadership in the Marine Corps, the participants felt like separating from the Marine Corps was the best decision.

Other participants reported that their leadership made them feel they had to choose between Marine Corps and any other aspect of their personal lives. For example, P14 stated:

I think if it had been shown to me or demonstrated that I can do more than one thing at once, I think I would have continued. When I realized that, as soon as I tried to pursue something outside of the Marine Corps, I basically had to start choosing whether to completely leave one behind or pursue the other. I do think that that's a result of leadership and this mentality if you're a good Marine, [the Marine Corps] should be all that exists in your life. I definitely think that that affected my particular choice for retention (P14).

P14 attributes the mentality that life in the Marine Corps is all or nothing to her leadership. She believes that her leadership promoted the idea that the Marine Corps had to be chosen at the exclusion of all other personal activities, including having a family. This vision was unfortunately not the same she had for herself, which influenced her decision to separate from the Marine Corps, and not serving another term.

Many of the participants decided not to pursue an additional term in the Marine Corps due to poor daily treatment by leadership. In fact, many of the participants described being verbally berated or put down by their leadership. P13 recalled that she “was belittled on a daily basis” by her leadership. Similarly, P3 reported that her leadership would “tell me to my face that that I was a piece of [excrement].” When P1 discussed her leadership, she described a leader who not only belittled her, but also disparaged other Marines. P1 said, “[He would] straight up berate me and talk [explicit word] about Marines in the shop.” P1 further explained that her experience with leadership reversed her motivation to pursue a career in the Marine Corps. She expanded by saying, “I was the most motivated sergeant you would have ever met. I came to work with a nicely pressed uniform. I gave my all to the Marine Corps and I was fully prepared to do 20 years because I loved it so much. It gave me purpose but that one rotten scenario was just enough for me to say that I deserve better than this. That’s why I got out.” Thus, for these participants, poor treatment on a daily basis negatively influenced their decision to remain in the Marine Corps at the time of re-enlistment.

Theme 4: Marine Corps Did Not Meet Expectations

The final theme that influenced the participants was that the Marine Corps did not meet their expectations; especially with respect to leadership. P1 describes her experience with leadership and expectations of the Marine Corp, stating:

I’m pretty sure I have PTSD from this [leader] because of the way that he verbally assaulted everybody in the shop except for his girlfriend who at the time was a

Lance Corporal. It just made the entire experience of the Marine Corps less than what I was seeking. That's why I got out (P1).

For P1, the Marine Corps' inability to meet her expectations was directly related to leadership failures in that her leadership chose to berate his followers, rather than provide opportunities and inspire them through motivation. P11 also described the leadership in the Marine Corps as not meeting her expectations, which influenced her decision to leave before completing another enlistment term. She said, "I was expecting to be able to learn from being people I could trust. When I joined the Marine Corps, I was very naive. I trusted everybody completely and over time, I learned that I needed to be wary of certain people. I needed to make sure that I knew who I could count on and who I couldn't. I got tired of the constant games." Thus, like P1, P11 described leadership as untrustworthy, leaving her with a feeling of constantly "walking on eggshells." She ultimately decided, due to this factor and a confluence of other leadership-related factors, to not pursue another term in the Marine Corps. Many of the participants, in one way or another, reported feeling like the Marine Corps did not meet their expectations, both in general, and specifically with respect to leadership, influencing their decision to separate from the Marine Corps.

Summary of RQ 2

RQ2 interrogated the factors that influenced the participants to not pursue another term in the Marine Corps. Almost all participants reported leadership failures as being a main reason for their decision not to reenlist. The perceived leadership failures came in different forms. Some participants reported that they lacked support from their

leadership, which left them feeling isolated and without opportunities for advancement. Other felt like the Marine Corps gave them promises with respect to their careers, as well as with respect to leadership, that were not kept. As such, expectations for their careers in the Marine Corps were not met, leaving them feeling unfulfilled and looking for more outside of the Marine Corps. Still, the majority of the participants cited leadership itself as being the main factor influencing their decision to separate. The participants reported being berated, belittled, and verbally abused. They also reported a lack of respect for their time outside of work, resulting in a poor work-life balance that permeated all aspects of their mental and physical health. These results, taken together, leads to the conclusion that leadership was a large factor in influencing the participants' decisions to leave the Marine Corps. These thoughts will be further explored in the discussion of RQ3.

Research Question 3

Two important aspects of the Marine Corps' leadership, as viewed by the participants, are important for addressing this research question. First, the participants described different challenges with leadership (Table 6) that influenced their decisions to leave the Marine Corps. These challenges can be directly juxtaposed with the participants' expectations for leadership in the Marine Corps (Table 7). Throughout the discussion of this research question, the participants' challenges with leadership will be discussed in terms of their expectations to allow for a comprehensive understanding of the impact that leadership had on the decision for female Marines to separate. The data for leadership challenges is presented in Table 6, while the participants' expectations of

leadership is presented in Table 7. The discussion in this section will intertwine data from both tables.

Table 6*Participants' Challenges with Leadership in the Marine Corps*

Theme	Participants	Excerpt
Confrontational Leadership	P3, P16	“There was a senior NCO that was not the nicest but it wasn’t just me. It was to everyone. He was horrible, because of his leadership practices, and he was very confrontational with the NCO in our opinion” (P16).
Dismissive Leadership	P11, P13	“I wanted to go back to the command that I was [previously] attached to. It was probably the worst experience I had because they were biased because they would rather take care of the person than me. Basically, they were just disregarding what I was trying to say to the point that they said, no, there wasn’t sexual assault. And it was an email complete kind of thing. [They] tried to bring it down if it’s not that big of a deal” (P11).
Racist or Sexist Leadership	P4, P5, P6, P9, P12, P13	“I did have a staff Sergeant supervisor, who was very racist, and he was also misogynistic. He would make a bunch of racist, comments about, everyone’s ethnicity. We had a ginger marine, and he would call him the Devil Spawn. For me, I’m Mexican, he would call me a beaner. As a female, he would say we were entitled and we are very entitled with having children. We were not upheld to the same standard as males because we were women and he was a very bad leader” (P12).
Unsupportive Leadership	P2, P3, P4, P6, P13, P14	“ I never got [positive advice] because all the leadership I experienced was very willing to take and take and take and take, and as long as it was serving their purpose. That was fine with them, and nobody ever ended up really seeming to be concerned about me, as the Marine or as the individual” (P14).
Used Rank Improperly	P1, P5, P7, P8, P15	“I had a male staff and a male CO. The CO thought that his rank could dictate how the shop was run. He could use his rank and his power to manipulate marines, and basically, just take advantage of what’s in front of him. He ended up sleeping with one of my junior marines and was giving her all the time off. He basically making us feel like we were less than human” (P1).

Theme 1: Confrontational Leadership

Two of the participants (P3 and P16) reported that it was challenging to work under confrontational leadership. These participants found this particular leadership style not to be conducive to a good working and productive environment. P3 described her leader as confronting her and calling her lazy. She said:

After four or six months, my Gunny pulled me aside and told me that it felt like I just didn't care, when it was exactly the opposite. I did care, but he said, 'Well you don't really go out of your way to do things. He said I was going to be the next Marine he mentioned in our shop that just is lazy. Then, he had to choose one of us to go to the next higher qualification and he didn't choose me. I didn't have a problem with that. I liked being a part of the team. It was fun for me. But for him to pull me aside, to tell me that I was just lazy and that he was going to make an example of me was too much. He just made all kinds of assumptions about me (P3).

P3 reported that her leader made assumptions about her work ethic without talking to her. He then tried to motivate her by embarrassing her in front of her colleagues by publicly calling her lazy. As such, he acted in a confrontational manner. P3 reported that her expectations of leaders were for them to lead by example and to be professional (Table 7). With respect to her expectations, she said, "I expected the person that was above me or even any rank above me to lead by example. They did not have to have a direct impact on my career, but I observed everything." Making an example out of her in front of colleagues is not generally perceived as professional or leading by example. Thus, for P3,

her leaders did not meet her expectations by having confrontational leadership styles, which, in turn, negatively impacted her decision to remain in the Marine Corps.

Similarly, P16 described her leader as being conformational. She stated, “There was a senior NCO that was not nice, but it wasn’t just me. It was to everyone. He was in for over 20 years and made sure everyone knew it. [He was a] horrible leader because of his leadership practices. He was very confrontational with the NCO, and with us.” When asked about her expectations of leadership, P16 did not explicitly state her expectations. However, in describing her leadership as horrible, it stands to reason that confrontational leadership was not within her expectations of the leadership at the Marine Corps. Thus, for these two participants, the confrontational leadership style of their superiors made an impression on them in such a way that they did not want to pursue another term with the Marine Corps.

Table 7*Participants' Expectations of Leaders*

Theme	Participants	Excerpt
Approachable	P7, P10	"I looked for honesty and people who like held high standards. Good leaders have an open-door policy so they're really approachable. They listen" (P10).
Compassionate, Firm	P1, P7, P8	"I expected my leaders to be compassion, firm, but compassionate. and, you know, have equal treatment to everybody, not just, you know, someone who you have a fling with compared to like other people in the shop" (P1).
Fair	P1, P8, P9	"I definitely didn't want anybody to just hand things to me. I definitely think work hard for what you get but good leaders [give] credit when credit is due" (P9).
High Standards	P3, P9, P10, P11	"I expected them to hold up to their standards. Obviously, a lot of people don't do so, which is very shocking to see over time. They'll say one thing, but they won't practice what they're preaching" (P11).
Invested	P2, P5, P6, P10, P13, P15	"I always expected my leaders to care for me as a person and not just like a body that follows the rules. I expected them to give me opportunities to succeed" (P6).
Professional	P1, P3, P8, P9	"You just expect professionalism out of leaders that you serve with" (P1).
Trustworthy	P4, P11	"I was expecting to learn from being able to trust [leaders] when I joined the Marine Corps, I was very naive. I trusted everybody completely, and over time, I learned that I needed to be wary of certain people, that I needed to make sure that I knew who I could count on and who I couldn't" (P11).

Theme 2: Dismissive Leadership

Two participants (P11 and P13) described their leadership as being dismissive. Both of these participants discussed dismissive leadership with respect to their leaders' handling of MST, as discussed earlier. Both participants highlighted that their leadership dismissed the claims that they had been sexually assaulted or raped. P13 further discussed that her leadership dismissed her from the beginning by citing that a female could not be an armor, thereby dashing her hopes and motivation of her first day. P13 said:

I said 'I'm here. I'm the new armorer.' And he said, 'Well, you can't be the new armor because I've never seen a female armorer.' He literally said 'I've never seen a female armorer so you can't be the armorer.' Then, he made me strip and M16. He made me strip an M9 [pistol]. He made me attach a two or three grenade launcher to an M16A2 service rifle to make sure that I knew what I was doing because he had never seen a female. That was my introduction to leadership in the fleet. This gentleman, who was just very abrasive and dismissive (P13).

When asked about the qualities she expected in a leader, P13 responded that she expected leaders to be invested in the success of their followers, saying, "I expect leaders that care enough about you to say, "Hey are you okay? Mentally? Are you okay, physically? Are you okay?" However, P13's first experience with leadership went against that expectation in that her leader was not invested in her success. In fact, her leader did not believe she could do her job simply because she was a woman.

While P11's first day did not begin with a leadership failure, as discussed previously, after she was sexually assaulted, her leadership did their best to deny that she

was actually assaulted, giving off the perception that she was lying. P11's expectation of leadership was that leaders should be trustworthy and have high standards for all of their followers (refer to Table 7). A leader is trustworthy when their followers genuinely believe they can trust their leaders in both good situations and otherwise. In the act of being dismissive, P11's leadership did not prove themselves worthy of her trust, thereby failing P11's expectations of them. Importantly, her leadership's dismissive attitude was one of the main reasons that P11 chose to leave the Marine Corps.

Theme 3: Racist or Sexist Leadership

Other participants (P4, P5, P6, P9, P12, and P13) reported that their leadership was either racist or sexist. P13's experience with sexism related to being a female armorer has already been presented. Other participants had similar experiences with their leadership. For example, P12 said:

I did have a Staff Sergeant supervisor who was very racist and he was also misogynistic. He would make a bunch of racist comments on everyone's ethnicity. We had a ginger Marine and [the Staff Sergeant] would call him the Devil Spawn. For me, he would call me Mexican; he would call me a beaner and as a female, he would say we were entitled. He thought we were entitled to having children and we were not upheld to the same standard as males. He was a very bad leader. Along with racist misogynistic comments, he would also assign duties according to his personal preferences (P12).

Thus, P12 was assaulted with racist and misogynistic comments regularly at work. Her expectations of leadership did not fall into an explicit theme described in Table 7.

Instead, she expected her leadership to create a team environment. She further stated:

Something that my recruiter in particular had said was that the Marine Corps is a family and we work on building each other up. We work on being the best because that's like that's who we are as Marines. We pride ourselves on being the best. We have the better uniforms; we have the better standards and we are just better. Part of being better is helping each other be the best because that's what we do and what leadership should do (P12).

In this way, P12 expected leadership to create a family-type-team atmosphere where each individual worked for the betterment of themselves, as well as the betterment of the Team. Her encounter with leadership was divisive, which is counterproductive to a positive and healthy team environment. Her leader, rather than trying to bring everyone together, attempted to tear them apart by highlighting their differences with respect to gender and race.

Unlike P12, whose leader was male, P4 reported sexist behavior coming from her female leaders. She said:

I had like female Staff Sergeant. I always looked forward to having female leaders, but they really didn't want to see me succeed. Everything we [females] did was under a magnifying glass. It's like we would receive negative counseling for things that weren't a big deal for other people. Everything we did was just heavily filtered or heavily like criticized. I think those are the biggest challenges

that I faced - just poor talent management and also bias from the female leaders that I did have (P4).

In this way, P4 reported that her female leaders treated her and other female Marines more harshly than their male counterparts. This was especially upsetting for P4 because she envisioned that true leadership could be encountered with female leadership the Marine Corps. Unfortunately, she experienced the opposite, finding that her female leaders were harsher to females and provided less guidance. This experience was also inconsistent with P4's expectations of leadership, which was based on trustworthiness. P4 had an enormous amount of trust that female leaders in the Marine Corps would share her same values in wanting to excel as a team. However, these expectations were not met, as her female leaders were harsh and placed heavy scrutiny on other female Marines, more than the male Marines in similar circumstances.

P5 described her first leader as being confrontational and singling her out because she was female. She recounted:

My first real leader in my section was a prior 03. He came from the infantry unit and he was super awful to me. I didn't know at the time but I should have filed complaints against him because he basically caused me to get an eating disorder. Anything I would eat in the office you would constantly like to harass and bash me in front of my entire section even though I was never even close to going overweight or underweight. I was always in the middle. He constantly tried to find me in the gym and then he would accuse me in front of my peers of not actually working out. Just because I was female (P5).

Thus, P5, like many of the other participants, describes unfair treatment due to her gender, which was compounded by her leader being confrontational and publicly degrading. Moreover, P5's expectations of leadership were similar to those of P12. Due to her recruiter's influence, P5 expected the Marine Corps leadership to create a family-like-team environment. To this end, P5 stated:

At the beginning, it was very family-ish and the recruiters there really made it feel like they were there for you and we were just part of like one big happy family. So going into the Marine Corps, I expected to feel really connected right away. I expected leaders to make something feel like a family, when I never had one really of my own (P5).

Also, like other participants, the family-oriented-team atmosphere never came to fruition, as P5's first leadership experience was with a leader who publicly put her down, which, according to her beliefs, was for no other reason than her gender. This prevented her from feeling fully-connected to her coworkers, to her leadership, and to the Marine Corps. Thus, P5 and many of her fellow participants reported being targeted due to race or gender, which prevented them from having a fulfilling experience in the Marine Corps.

Theme 4: Unsupportive Leadership

Many of the participants reported challenges with their leadership being unsupportive of their success in a variety of ways. For example, P14 described her leadership as unsupportive in that they did not care about her as an individual. She explained:

I feel like leadership should step in as the wiser and older, more experienced Marine and say, 'hey, Marine you're doing a thousand percent more than you need to be doing and you're going to burn out. Let me mentor you. Let me tell you what you really need to be doing. Here are the things that you need to focus on. Here's how you can well round yourself so that you don't reach that burnout.' I never got that talk. I never got that because all of the leadership that I experienced was always very willing to take and take and take and take, and as long as it was serving their purpose. Nobody ever ended up really seeing to be concerned about me, as the Marine or as the individual (P14).

Thus, P14 describes her leadership as being exploitative to the point where she experienced burnout; at the time, she did not know or understand it, and then her leadership kept pushing her for more to an unhealthy end. Other participants described a general lack of support in a different way. For example, P2, like P13, whose leadership could not fathom a female armorer, had challenges with her gender being supported from her first day. She recalled:

So right out of boot camp, it was 2014 when they were first testing out females in the infantry. I decided to join conventional training and basically, the entire leadership told me from the very beginning that they didn't agree with it. That just started out my entire career really on a bad foot. Because from there, there were a lot of people overlooking me or who were not really happy for my success. No one was pushing me or investing time and energy into making sure that I was successful (P2).

P2 describes an unsupportive environment where leadership did not believe in or support her goals. This is contrary to what P2 reported as her expectations of leadership; namely, that leaders should be invested in the success of their subordinates (refer to Table 7). Thus, from her first day in the Marine Corps, she did not have leaders who invested in her success. Thus, while some of the participants had supportive leadership, others reported a severe lack of supportive leadership that influenced their decisions to leave the Marine Corps without reenlisting.

Theme 5: Used Rank Improperly

Using rank improperly was the last theme that emerged from analysis of the participants' views regarding whether leadership impacted their decision to separate from the Marine Corps (RQ3). P1 recalls that her leadership was having an intimate relationship with one female Marine, which caused him to exhibit favoritism towards her, while putting the rest of the Marines under him down (Table 6). P1 also explained that her expectations of leaders were to be compassionate, but firm, fair and professional (Table 6). She said "I expected my leaders to be firm, but compassionate. I expected them give equal treatment to everybody, not just someone who you have a fling with compared to like other people in the shop. You just expect professionalism out of the leaders that you serve with." P1's experiences with leadership were contrary to her expectations, as her leadership did not exhibit compassion, fairness, or professionalism by initiating a relationship with a subordinate. P15 described her leader as using rank improperly by ignoring the responsibilities to his unit. She described:

The thing that stands out vividly to me is the XO decided that we were going on a 3- or 5-mile hike and he was nowhere to be found. We were in the last piece of it and he drove down the middle, where I guess he had an appointment, but it just kind of seemed like he skipped out on it because it was exercise. My opinion was that he should have been there (P15).

In P15's opinion, her leadership skipped mandated physical training, which was using his rank improperly, but also was not creating a supportive environment for those under him, or a good example. P15's expectation for leaders were to invest in their followers' success (Table 6), a situation contrary to the one described by P15, earlier.

P8 described a far more egregious example of improper use of rank by leadership. She, like others, experienced this lapse in leadership capacity early in her career with the Marine Corps. She recalled:

My issues with leadership actually started in the very beginning of my Marine career. I was stationed at the time overseas in Japan and again the leadership just was looking for any reason to punish the Marines. It was a lot of mentality of the lower enlisted against the upper enlisted and officers. There wasn't any faith and trust in the command, which ultimately resulted in an inspection from the Inspector General (P8).

P8 paints a picture of upper leadership against lower enlisted Marines, where the lower enlisted Marines were punished for any reason - true or fallacious - the upper enlisted leadership could find. This type of behavior was ultimately warranted an investigation,

which speaks to the seriousness of the lapses in leadership. Thus, improper use of rank was a common occurrence in the participants' experiences.

Summary of RQ 3

RQ3 examined two aspects of the impact of the participants' leadership on their decision to separate from the Marine Corps. First, the participants highlighted the challenges that they experienced with respect to leadership, which did indeed contribute to the participants' decisions to not reenlist for another term. These challenges included (a) confrontational leadership, (b) dismissive leadership, (c) racist or sexist leadership, (d) unsupportive leadership, and (e) leadership that used their rank improperly. These experiences by the participants were juxtaposed with their expectations for leadership in the Marine Corps. Many of the participants expected leadership to be fair, firm, trustworthy, and professional.

Summary and Transition

Chapter 4 begins with a presentation and detailed account of the data collection and data analytic procedures used in this study. These included the use of semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions with 16 female junior-enlisted Marines who chose not to reenlist for a subsequent term. The interviews explored reasons why these Marine chose not to reenlist and evaluated the potential role of leadership in their decisions. Data analysis was conducted using thematic and trend analysis to generate themes/factors and find similarities among participants responses, while still highlighting differences in perspectives that were important for the study. Next, the chapter evaluated evidence of

the trustworthiness of the study by examining credibility (validity), transferability, dependability (reliability), and confirmability.

Chapter 4 then presented a discussion on the findings of the three research questions, and the sections are organized in this way as well. In RQ1, the reasons that female junior-enlisted Marines decided to leave the Marine Corps were broached. While not the sole reason cited for leaving, leadership was a major reason cited for why the participants decided to separate from the Marine Corps. RQ2 examined the factors that led to female junior-enlisted Marines deciding not to reenlist for a subsequent term. Not surprisingly, many of them were related to leadership, specifically, leadership not fulfilling the participants' expectations. Finally, in RQ3, the impact of leadership on the participants' decisions not to reenlist was broached, finding that there were a wide variety of leadership challenges experienced by the participants. When these leadership challenges were juxtaposed with the participants' expectations for leadership, the participants' leaders proved to be overwhelmingly lacking. This discussion paves the way for Chapter 5, where I will place the study's results in the larger context of the literature, examine the implications of this study for further research, and make recommendations to improve the Marine Corps approach to retaining first enlistment females in their ranks.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and better understand the impact and influence that leadership in the Marine Corps had on the decisions of junior enlisted female Marines to separate from the Marine Corps. This study placed a priority on junior enlisted females who separated before becoming eligible for re-enlisting for a subsequent term. Many of the participants did not reenlist for a second term, and no participants reenlisted for a third term. The study used two theoretical frameworks to understand the differences between stages in the careers of the participants, their perceptions of leadership, and whether or not leadership impacted any enlisted female retention: Steers and Mowday's (1981) turnover model and Herzberg's (1966) two-factor model. To understand the potential role of leadership in the decision to leave the Marine Corps, semi structured interviews were conducted with 16 participants who met the inclusion criteria of the study. The results of the interviews indicated that leadership in the Marine Corps is linked with junior enlisted female Marines' decision to leave the Marine Corps rather than re-enlist. In this chapter, I will analyze these findings within the context of the theoretical frameworks and place the findings within the context of the literature.

Interpretation of the Findings

This study was guided by two theoretical frameworks: Steers and Mowday's (1981) turnover model and Herzberg's (1966) two-factor theory. In this section of Chapter 5, I will place the findings of this study within the context of those two theoretical foundations to understand the role that leaderships play in either promoting or

dissuading junior enlisted women in the Marine Corps from reenlisting for a subsequent term. To do so, I will first include a review of each of the theoretical frameworks and then analyze each theme arising from analysis of the research questions in the context of those frameworks.

Review of Theoretical Frameworks

Steers and Mowday's Turnover Model

Steers and Mowday's (1981) turnover model considers three major variables that influence an individual's intention to either leave or stay in their employment position: job expectations and values, experienced organizational reality, and job performance. As such, Steers and Mowday's turnover model incorporates both the reality of the workplace situation and the employee's perception of the workplace as well as potential mismatches between the two constructs. In essence, discrepancies between an employee's expectations and their actual experiences lead employees to make conclusions about whether they wish to remain in their current positions. The structure of this model can work in two directions. Employees who have high expectations working in an organization that does not meet those expectations are likely to be dissatisfied, leading to employee turnover, whereas employees with low expectations working in an organization that exceeds those expectations may choose to stay with that organization, leading to employee retention. In this study, many of the participants reported being dissatisfied with the Marine Corps due to mismatches between expectations of the Marine Corps and the actuality of working in the Marine Corps, which will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Steers and Mowday's (1981) model also includes job performance—an additional factor that influences employee turnover, with important implications for employee feelings of self-efficacy and self-actualization (Lee & Mowday, 1987). For example, employees with exceptional performance who are praised for their efforts are likely to feel valued by their organization, leading to employee retention. On the contrary, employees with either exceptional or poor performance who are put down for their efforts are not likely to feel valued by their organization, leading to employee turnover. In this study, job performance was addressed by some participants, where they thought that they did not receive praise for their performance compared to similar or better performance that led to praise for peers. Thus, job performance and recognition of good performance was a factor that led to job dissatisfaction in the interviewed female Marines.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Model

Herzberg (1966) argued that there are two separate categories of factors that explain why employees are satisfied or dissatisfied with their jobs: hygiene and motivation. The two distinct types of factors are mutually exclusive from one another and each has its own dynamic within an employee's drive for retention for turnover. Hygiene factors tend to be related to other factors such as working conditions, relationships with supervisors, pay, and among others organizational culture (Alshmemri et al., 2017). In the context of this study, relationships with supervisors exemplifies relationships with leadership, which includes organizational culture. Thus, leadership directly affects the hygiene factors that can lead to employee dissatisfaction, and consequently, employee turnover. Employee motivation is also critical to job satisfaction because it exemplifies

the need for employee growth within an organization and self-actualization (Herzberg, 1966). Motivation factors include a positive outlook on one's job, belief in the potential for advancement, recognition, satisfaction in the work itself, and achievement (Adair, 2006). In Herzberg's model, the ideal situation occurs when hygiene is high, namely that they have no complaints about the hazards of the workplace, and are motivated to work for the organization. The worst situation for organizations is when employees are not motivated to complete their work and they have serious concerns and complaints regarding their health within the workplace, which could be defined as emotional health, as well as physical health. Motivation and hygiene factors were both elucidated as issues, stemming from leadership in the female Marines interviewed in this study.

RQ 1: Why do junior enlisted female Marines leave the Marine Corps?

Conflict with Family Responsibilities

Two participants described that their main reason for leaving the Marine Corps was family responsibilities, specifically with children or child care. The participants reported that the Marine Corps was not flexible with their children's needs, forcing them to leave. This theme supports Herzberg's (1966) two-factor theory. The hygiene or dissatisfying workplace component is the conflict with these family responsibilities, leading to low employee satisfaction and in these cases, leaving the job (Herzberg et al., 1959). Though not related to the specific job to be done, it is a factor that creates an unmotivated and dissatisfied work environment. This situation also is consistent with Steers and Mowday's (1981) turnover model, as the participants reported not expecting

the Marine Corps to give them difficulties with maternity leave or caregiver leave. Similarly, other participants reported that their supervisors called them continuously outside of working hours, which caused conflicts between the female Marines and their spouses. The participants reported not expecting the leadership of the Marine Corps to violate their personal time and space, leading to a mismatch between expectations, and reality. Thus, leadership directly influenced the job dissatisfaction of junior enlisted female Marines under both the turnover model and the two-factor model, which directly led to the decision of the female Marines to not reenlist for a subsequent term.

Military Sexual Trauma

Two participants reported being the victims of MST, describing it as a significant factor for why they decided to separate from the Marine Corps. Previous research has confirmed that MST is a significant problem across each branch of the military (Wilson, 2018). Combined with both the Marine Corps acknowledging that the MST occurred and the lack of support after the MST, this theme supports the Herzberg two-factor theory, as the participants' experiences led to significant dissatisfaction with the workplace (Herzberg et al., 1959). In particular, MST leads to physical, psychological, and emotional damage an individual, constituting a significant health hazard in the workplace. Thus, MST can be considered both a low hygiene factor as well as a low motivating factor, leading to the worst-case scenario in Herzberg's two-factor model.

Furthermore, leadership has a significant impact on the prevalence and response to MST. Thus, in this situation, lack of leadership significantly contributes to the low hygiene and low motivation factors that lead to employee dissatisfaction, as well as

employee turnover. Some of the participants reported that their leadership did not believe them regarding the occurrence of MST, to include both rape and assault. Many of the Marines reported joining the Marine Corps to join something with purpose and to serve their country. They reported expecting their coworkers and leaders to share the same ideals. Thus, when faced with a situation where they were not believed when they encountered trauma, as well as the trauma itself, Steers and Mowday's (1981) turnover model would indicate that their ideals were again mismatched with the reality of what they encountered in the Marine Corps, leading to job dissatisfaction and subsequent employee turnover. Leadership had an opportunity to help these female Marines by first believing them, and second, by finding them the help and resources they needed, which may have led to different outcomes with respect to their decision to reenlist. This logic stems from Steer and Mowday's model, which indicates that mismatches between expectations and reality can influence job satisfaction.

No Upward Vision

The second most common reason mentioned by participants for leaving the Marine Corps was a lack of upward vision or the inability to envision oneself remaining in the Marine Corps for the duration of their career. Five participants cited this specific response. Finally, sentiments of sameness, lack of opportunities, and unfulfillment resonated throughout the participants' responses. This theme can be understood according to Steers and Mowday's (1981) turnover model, as these participants' expectations were not met or were mismatched with what the Marine Corps could offer them. The participants entered the Marine Corps believing they could make the Marine

Corps a life-long career, only to be met with conditions in which they were put down. Importantly, this is a direct mismatch with the *Semper Fidelis* motto of the U.S. Marine Corps, as the junior enlisted female Marines thought that the Marine Corps held no faith in them to perform their jobs and grow within the organization. This theme can also be understood according to Herzberg's theory as there is a lack of motivation originating from lack of opportunities and upward mobility (Herzberg et al., 1959). In these cases, leadership failed to inspire the junior enlisted Marines to continue their careers in the Marine Corps.

Poor Leadership

Ten participants cited poor leadership as the primary factor for their decision to leave the Marine Corps. One participant explained that a commanding officer did not value time away from work and frequently disparaged coworkers in conversation. Disparaging coworkers, as well as the Marine herself, could lead to poor job performance according to Steer and Mowday's model, as employees who are not praised for exceptional work or effort often become dissatisfied with their places of employment. Indeed, in this case, the participants became dissatisfied with their hard work and never achieving success, leading to job dissatisfaction and the desire to separate from the Marine Corps. Other participants cited that their commanding officers were not supportive leaders. This theme has implications for Herzberg's two-factor theory as the quality of leadership declined, and the want or act of leaving increased (Herzberg et al., 1959). Additionally, in relation to the theory, there was a lack of satisfaction indicators such as a poor recognition and support from leadership, which ultimately led to a lack of

motivation for the junior enlisted female Marines. In addition, the Marine Corps' leadership has an obligation to lead their employees properly, professionally, and with care, as the Marine Corps is a military operation that frequently deals with life and death scenarios. As such, lack of leadership or poor leadership, has a significant consequence for low hygiene according to Herzberg's model and could be a health hazard to the Marines.

Unrealistic Standards

Several participants cited that the height and weight standards for females in the Marine Corps were unrealistic and unachievable, leading to participants experiencing restrictions to benefits and opportunities, and ultimately relating in their decision to leave the Marine Corps. This theme aligns with Steers and Mowday's (1981) turnover model, as the Marine Corps had unrealistic expectations of their female weight and height standards, causing female employee turnover. This situation led to the female Marines starving themselves and over-exercising in order to meet the weight and height standards, which led to poor job performance in some cases.

Unrealistic expectations and standards can also be understood with Herzberg's (1966) two-factor theory. Starving oneself and withholding hydration, or taking laxatives to dehydrate the body, constitutes a significant health risk to the female Marines. As such, unrealistic standards of the Marine Corps constitute a significant hygiene risk for those Marines who go to extraordinary measures to meet them. For example, one participant recalled not eating or drinking for 3 days prior to a scheduled weigh-in, which resulted in her passing out while on duty. Furthermore, such standards can demoralize the

female Marines who are constantly trying and failing to meet the standards. In support of this supposition, one participant recounted that it was better to leave the Marine Corps with her benefits than to try to meet the standards and possibly be stripped of her hard-earned benefits. Thus, the unrealistic standards of the Marine Corps led to Herzberg's worst-case scenario: low hygiene and low motivation.

RQ 2: What factors contribute to the decision to separate from the Marine Corps before becoming eligible for re-enlisting for a subsequent term?

Lack of Support from Leadership and Leadership Itself

Most participants indicated leadership-related reasons for leaving, as described in the RQ1 section. Three of the four themes identified in this question's research centered on leadership. Following Herzberg's two-factor theory, ineffective leadership can negatively impact an employee's motivation and job happiness. For example, if a leader fails to acknowledge and compensate employees for their accomplishments, tasks lose significance and employees become disheartened. Additionally, employees may feel devalued and unmotivated if a leader disregards hygienic elements such as wages, perks, and the otherwise positive work environment. Ineffective leadership can also generate a hostile work atmosphere where employees feel their opinions and contributions are not valued (Herzberg et al., 1959). This can also result in discontent and a lack of motivation, which was the case with several participants, as exhibited in Chapter 4. Specifically, participants reported feelings of disconnect and isolation from their commanding officers, citing an 'all or nothing' mindset in situations. Additionally, many reported a lack of leader support concerning advancement opportunities and overall team collaboration.

In accordance with Steers and Mowday's turnover model (1981), lack of leadership leading to demotivation can have a significant effect on the want of an employee to remain in their position. When the female Marines reported feeling devalued, at first, they were highly motivated to improve. However, when making improvements and working hard had no effect on their level of praise or beratement, decreases in job performance ultimately ensued, as they believed that no matter how hard they worked the situation would not change or improve. Thus, according to Steers and Mowday's model (1981), lack of leadership, in this case, led to a decreased morale, and in turn, decreased job performance and satisfaction. Employees were no longer able to have high expectations for themselves, leading to further demotivation and dissatisfaction.

Marine Corps Did Not Meet Expectations

Steers and Mowday's (1981) turnover model implies that a gap between employee expectations and work experiences causes employee turnover. The concept states that when an employee's expectations are not satisfied, they will experience unhappiness and a desire to quit. For example, four participants stated that the Marine Corps' leadership did not meet expectations, leading them to leave or not reenlist. Specifically, one participant described that the Marine Corps' inability to meet her expectations was directly related to leadership failures in that her leadership chose to berate followers, rather than provide support to the team. As discussed previously, many of the participants had similar experiences, where their ideals and expectations were high for the Marine Corps. They believed, upon entering the Marine Corps, that they were

entering a family and cohesive environment that rallied around the goal of protecting their country and one another. When they found an environment that was degrading, demotivating, and unnecessarily dangerous, this led to significant job dissatisfaction due to mismatches between their ideals and expectations and their experienced reality. Thus, Steers and Mowday's model would predict that these female junior enlisted Marines would have significant turnover, which was found to be the case.

RQ 3: What impact did leadership have on the decision for female Marines to separate?

Confrontational, Dismissive, and Unsupportive Leadership

Throughout the execution of the interviews, junior enlisted female Marines described their leadership as being confrontational, dismissive, and unsupportive. As discussed earlier, the confrontational nature of leadership was contrary to the *Semper Fidelis* environment that the Marines were expecting based on interactions with their recruiting officers. Many of the participants reported that their recruiting officers painted a picture of a cohesive environment where everyone helped each other in an effort to achieve a common goal. The female junior enlisted Marines found the opposite of this expectation, to include leadership that was confrontational and berated them, dismissive of their needs, ideas, and unsupportive by withholding opportunities for growth within the organization. All of these factors contributed significantly to their decisions to ultimately separate from the Marine Corps.

When analyzed within Steer and Mowday's turnover model, the female junior enlisted Marines encountered significant mismatches between their expectations of a supportive Marine Corps and the reality of an unsupportive and dismissive Marine Corps.

The organization itself may not be unsupportive, confrontational, and dismissive, but the leadership that the participants encountered did have these qualities. As such, the only leadership with whom the participants had contact led to an overview of the organization as confrontational, dismissive, and unsupportive. Accordingly, the female junior enlisted Marines were intentionally placed into situations where the employee turnover rate would be expected to be high, due to significant mismatches between the Marines' expectations and their objective realities.

Finally, with respect to Herzberg's two-factor model, the confrontational and dismissive leadership is not motivating and does not support growth. Thus, with respect to motivation, the junior enlisted female Marines were not in a motivating situation and as such, their motivation to continue in the Marine Corps was lacking. With respect to hygiene, poor leadership in the military led unnecessarily to life and death situations at home, in training, and in combat. Having the knowledge that their leadership was not accountable and was not proficient, resulted in participants living in constant fear for their health and safety. Thus, the poor leadership encountered by the female junior enlisted Marines led to the worst-case scenario in Herzberg's two-factor model. The Marines had low hygiene due to health and safety concerns and had low motivation due to constantly being confronted, berated, dismissed, and unsupported. All taken together, poor leadership led to a confluence of the elements needed for job dissatisfaction, leading to employee turnover and the decision to separate from the Marine Corps before enlisting for another term.

Limitations of the Study

No study is without limitations. In this study, I was limited by the virtual nature of the interviews, which limited the amount of interpersonal interaction that I had with a participant, and possible increased feudality of data and information. The virtual nature of the interviews also prevented me from fully observing non-verbal cues and communication from the participants. That fact notwithstanding, it was clear during the interviews when the participants encountered an emotionally charged subject, as many of the participants began to cry when recounting their experiences. This also served as a limitation with respect to my reflexivity. I personally experienced many of the same situations reported by the participants in the study but decades ago, and it saddened me during the interviews to hear that many of the factors that led me to separate from the Marine Corps as still present in the organization, despite the improvements in general society towards equality for women. I worked hard to mitigate this limitation by accurately taking reflexivity notes during the course of the interviews to account for my own feelings and bias as a researcher. I firmly believe that the reflexivity process allowed me to put my own feelings aside and collect and analyze the data objectively and with a clear understanding of the factors and elements of the research.

Sample size was not a limitation in this study. Data saturation was reached after approximately ten participants. Six more interviews were conducted to further ensure that saturation had been achieved. Saturation is evidenced by the small number of themes that were elucidated by the majority of the participants. A potential limitation of this study is generalizability. All of the participants were junior enlisted female Marines who decided

to separate from the Marine Corps before enlisting for a subsequent term. As such, the results of this study may not be generalizable to other military populations, including junior enlisted females in the Army, Navy, Coast Guard, Space Force, or Air Force. The findings here may be specific to the culture of the Marine Corps and more research is necessary to determine if junior enlisted female personnel in other military branches have the same or different experiences from the participants interviewed in this study. This could serve as an area of future research and serves as a recommendation for future research. It would be interesting to understand if other branches of the military have the same culture with respect to junior enlisted females, or if the observed culture in this study is unique to the Marine Corps.

Recommendations For Practice

There are many recommendations for practice that can be made based on the results of this study. First, there needs to be a continuous review of the system and process for promotion to leadership in the Marine Corps. It is my conclusion that individuals are being promoted too soon, before they have significant experience to hold leadership positions. Many of the leaders in the Marine Corps are young and male, less than thirty years old; many of these leaders have no experience with leadership and are not ready to lead personnel, regardless of diversity-related challenges. Thus, one recommendation is to ensure that Marine Corps leaders have fulfilled at least two terms in the military before making the transition to a leadership position or billet. Such a rule would allow Marines to experience at least two different leaders between their first and second terms, which would collectively constitute approximately eight to nine years in

service. It is my belief that promotion to leadership after only one term in the Marine Corps is too soon, leading to young leaders who are ill-equipped to successfully lead a diverse workplace.

Time-in-service also allows for the building of essential communication skills that are necessary for successful leadership. Moreover, time-in-service would also enable future Marine Corps leaders to possess experience serving with junior enlisted female Marines. In this way, future leaders may come to understand the unique needs and skills of junior enlisted female Marines that make them an asset, not a liability, to the Marine Corps. Such a policy may also provide female Marines with an equal chance for leadership positions, as they will similarly have ample time to grow within the organization, learn team-building skills by experiencing them, and learning the essential communication skills and other leadership competencies require for excellent.

An important consideration in the current Marine Corps is that females have only been integrated into bootcamps and trainings for a relatively short period of time. Therefore, many of the current leaders in the Marine Corps did not train directly with any junior enlisted female Marines. As such, these leaders have little experience observing the skills and work ethic of female Marines. While this policy has changed, and female enlisted Marines now complete bootcamp and training with their male counterparts, current leaders may have a *Marine generational gap* that male leaders have no experience with female Marines. Another important consideration is that growth in any organization, including the military, always involves change, including investing in new leadership methodologies. It may be that the old style of leadership where Marines are

broken down and put back together as a Team, is no longer functioning as expected. Indeed, the female junior enlisted Marines in this study did not describe a team environment in many of their recollections. Thus, it may be that the Marine Corps should reevaluate their leadership positions and the qualities necessary to be an effective leader across the full spectrum of employees and their differing characteristics.

It is also imperative that more females be placed into leadership roles in the Marine Corps. These females should be held to the same standards as their male counterparts for the acquisition of leadership positions. This, however, requires that females be given ample opportunities for advancement. In the current climate, equal and ample opportunities for advancement of female Marines seem to be scarce, at least according to the participants in this study. Furthermore, and ironically, the female Marines that did recall having a female leader found those female leaders to be colder and more hostile than some of the male leaders. This may be due to a perception held by female Marines that, once they obtain a leadership position, they must act similar to their male counterparts in order to keep advancing within the organization. This climate, however, does not create a conducive environment for junior enlisted female Marines to further their advancement and may be more discouraging to encounter female leaders who are equally abrasive and dismissive as male leaders.

It is imperative that the Marine Corps invest in leadership development and training for any individuals who seek leadership positions. Just as every student may not have the skills necessary to be an effective teacher and every elite athlete may not have the skills necessary to teach the fundamentals of their sport, time-in-service and simply

being a good Marine does not always indicate the ability to be a good leader. Good leaders must first be effective followers, and they also must be avid and active learners. Leadership development courses and training programs teach the leadership competencies necessary to become effective leaders. Such competencies include mentoring, team building, investing in followers, aligning values, addressing health and well-being, conflict management and stewardship, among others. Many of these leadership competencies were neglected or unaddressed by the leaders of the participants in this study, indicating a lack of leadership training. Therefore, it is essential that all individuals who seek leadership positions prepare to be leaders by first being followers and then by training to be leaders, who ultimately are in service to their followers and their retention in service or active duty.

Finally, a last recommendation is that the Marine Corps utilize outside entities to evaluate the climate of units. Such entities need to be unannounced, so that leaders and their followers do not alter their behavior because they are being observed. Such entities must have the ability to observe the general climate of units, identify potential problems within units, and notify the chains of command of any identified issues or inconsistencies. This would allow for objective, outside observers, with no connection to the Marine Corps, to evaluate and understand the dynamics between leaders and followers, as well as between male and female leaders and female junior enlisted Marines. It is only through observation and understanding can changes and recommendations be made. As such, this study is significant in that it adds a significant number of observations from junior enlisted female Marines to the literature and its gaps.

Implications for Social Change

This study found that poor leadership is one of the main factors that cause women to leave the Marine Corps. This finding has far-reaching ramifications for social change. The Marine Corps is a highly prominent example of an organization that has traditionally been perceived as a male-dominated organization, and its problems with retaining female personnel might substantially impact how the public perceives the Marine Corps and the military as a whole (Dickstein, 2020). Women's departure from the Marine Corps due to inadequate leadership demonstrates the need for increased gender diversity and inclusion measures. To maintain a more diverse and equal organization, the Marine Corps must actively pursue the recruitment and retention of talented female personnel (Dickstein, 2020; Farrell, 2020). This may involve expanding mentorship and career development opportunities for female Marines and creating policies and programs to ensure that female Marines have equal pay and opportunity (Farrell, 2020).

In order to ensure that women are afforded equal chances within the Marine Corps, it may be necessary to address underlying structural concerns, as shown by the existence of weak leadership. This could involve boosting the number of female officers in leadership roles and reexamining current laws and procedures to ensure they do not disproportionately affect female Marines. The conclusion that inadequate leadership causes women to quit the Marine Corps should be interpreted as a demand for a broader social transformation. The Marine Corps is only one example of a traditionally male-dominated organization. The findings are a striking reminder that we still have a long way to go in reaching true and provable gender equality. This can involve campaigning

for more excellent gender representation in other sectors and encouraging organizations to develop equal and inclusive work conditions for women. Overall, the findings that bad leadership causes women to quit the Marine Corps have substantial social change implications. In addition, the Marine Corps can serve as an example of how organizations can promote greater gender equality and equity by identifying the need for greater gender diversity and inclusion and actively working to address the underlying structural difficulties. Of course, achieving the optimal workplace improvements would also be accomplished while maintaining combat readiness and mission capabilities.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and better understand the potential negative impacts and influences that leadership in the Marine Corps had on the decisions of junior enlisted female Marines to separate from the Marine Corps. The study found that the leadership of the Marine Corps significantly impacted the decisions of junior enlisted female Marines to separate from the Marine Corps. These findings were analyzed utilizing the frameworks of Steers and Mowday's turnover model (1981), as well as Herzberg's two-factor model (1966). Analysis utilizing Steer and Mowday's turnover model indicated that there were significant mismatches between the expectations and ideals of the participants and the objective reality they found in the Marine Corps. Many participants expected to be welcomed onto a team, and found themselves berated and alone, leading to significant dissatisfaction with their employment in the Marine Corps and influencing their decision to ultimately separate. Job performance also suffered because the Marines encountered leadership that did not praise them or acknowledge

their accomplishments, even when their accomplishments and performance were significant and excellent. Analysis using Herzberg's two-factor model demonstrated that the participants were in workplace situations with low hygiene and low motivation, leading to the type of job satisfaction that would predict significant employee turnover. This was especially significant when considering that leadership was responsible for making life and death decisions regarding the participants. Taken together, the participants reported that poor leadership significantly impacted their decisions to not reenlist in the Marine Corps for a subsequent term, effectively eliminating capable Marines from the workforce.

It is my profound hope that this study will have positive societal implications and impetus for the U.S. Marine Corps. The findings of this study indicate that leadership in the U.S. Marine Corps needs to change their perception of what leadership is. Change does not happen overnight, but can happen slowly and continuously, if emphasized and prioritized. The United States Marine Corps has the opportunity, and perhaps the obligation, to make changes necessary for junior enlisted female Marines to feel safe while serving, and to feel fulfilled by serving their country. They should be offered all of the benefits and opportunities of working for the Marine Corps, including opportunities for advancement and the leadership training necessary for advancement. Such changes have the potential to create a more diverse, equitable, and stronger military force, where all great minds can flourish.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Face-to-Face Interview Protocol

All interviews will be recorded for later transcription using NVivo 12 software.

1. Introduction: provide date, name of researcher, role in the study.
2. Remind participants that study is completely voluntary and will be recorded for later transcription and analysis of the data.
3. Start recording device.
4. Provide purpose of study.
5. Describe role of the participant in the study.
6. Explain benefits of participating in the study.
7. Provide ethics information.
8. Explain confidentiality information.
9. Ask participants if they have any questions before interview begins.
10. Conduct interview (Appendix E).
 - a. Researcher will read each question to participant and wait for a response.
 - b. After participant provides answer to question, researcher will move on to the next question and so on until all questions have been answered and recorded.
 - c. Researcher will ask additional questions if necessary.
 - d. Ask participants if they have any question before interview ends.
 - e. Researcher will answer any and all questions asked by participants.
11. Before concluding the interview, participants will be provided researcher contact information in case participants want to contact researcher for the results of the study.
12. Remind participants of confidentiality and anonymity.
13. Thank participants and conclude the interview.

Virtual Interview Protocol

1. Introduction: provide date, name of researcher, role in the study.
2. Remind participants that study is completely voluntary and will be recorded for later transcription and analysis of the data.
3. Because this interview is virtual and will be recorded, researcher will ask participants to turn off their camera to protect their identity.
4. Start recording device. (Computer and hand-held device)
 - a. Participants will not be asked to provide their names to protect their identity.
5. Provide purpose of study.
6. Describe role of the participant in the study.
7. Explain benefits of participating in the study.
8. Provide ethics information.
9. Explain confidentiality information.
10. Ask participants if they have any questions before interview begins.
11. Conduct interview (Appendix E).
 - a. Researcher will read each question to participant and wait for a response.
 - b. After participant provides answer to question, researcher will move on to the next question and so on until all questions have been answered and recorded.
 - c. Researcher will ask additional questions if necessary.
 - d. Ask participants if they have any question before interview ends.
 - e. Researcher will answer any and all questions asked by participants.
12. Before concluding the interview, participants will be provided researcher contact information in case participants want to contact researcher for the results of the study.
13. Remind participants of confidentiality and anonymity.
14. Thank participants and conclude the interview.

Participant Interview Script

Time of Interview:

Interviewer:

Participant ID:

Date:

Location of the interview:

Opening: Introductory Interview Protocol

Welcome and thank you for your participation today. My name is Iris Esquilin. I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am conducting a study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a PhD in Public Policy and Administration, specializing in Public Management and Leadership. My study is titled Retention Rate Factors of Junior Enlisted Females in the U.S. Marine Corps. This study aims to explore the potential impact that leadership has on the decision-making process for junior female Marines. This interview will be recorded via zoom and with a digital voice recorder, for later transcription. The digital voice recorder will allow me to accurately document the information you convey to me during the interview

[May I begin the recording?] [Before each interview, read the following script:]

Do you have any questions regarding the consent form you received via email, to participate in interviews in this study? You have read and acknowledged the conditions in the informed consent form. The informed consent explains the purpose of this study.

You are encouraged to ask any questions or seek any explanations as you deem necessary. The interview will be no longer than one hour and include a set of open-ended questions regarding your experiences with the Marine Corps as it relates to leadership role. All of your responses are confidential and are only used for the purpose of my study.

You may refuse to answer any questions and are free to withdraw before, during, or after I collect the information. Your identity will be kept confidential and anonymous and will be assigned a unique Participant ID. Do you have any questions regarding the study before we begin? If you agree to be interviewed as described in the consent form, please say “yes” at this time for the audio-recording.

[Begin Open-Ended Interview Questions Appendix E]

[Concluding Interview Remarks]

Thank you for your participation in this study. I will call on you to participate in the process of member checking after I have a chance to form some initial interpretations from the data I am collecting. Would you still be willing to make yourself available for the member checking process? If so, I will plan to send you via email a summary of my initial

interpretations for your evaluation, added input, or clarifications you feel might add to this study. This should take about 25 minutes.

[Member Checking Correspondence]

Greetings, I appreciate your contributions to this study and am contacting you again to participate in the member checking process. Attached to this email, you will find my initial interpretations of the data. I would like you to review this summary and comment on these initial findings. Please feel free to refute, clarify, add, or explain any of these initial findings to enhance the trustworthiness of this study. Suppose you would like to review and email your added thoughts, meet in person to discuss your added input, or talk over the telephone. In that case, I am glad to do so at your convenience. I would like to add your input from this member checking process within the week to be able to continue with the final data analysis steps for the study.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What gender do you identify as?
2. What is your age?
3. Please specify your ethnicity.
4. What is the highest degree or level of education you've completed?
5. Where is your home located?
6. Why did you join the Marine Corps?
7. Were you discharged from the Marine Corps? If so, what was your characterization of discharge?
8. How long did you serve in the Marine Corps?
9. How many duty stations did you serve at?
10. What was the last rank you held while on active duty?
11. When did you decide to leave the Marine Corps?
12. What influenced you to leave the Marine Corps?
13. Did you experience any challenges with leadership?
14. Please describe that experience.
15. What qualities did you look for in your leaders?
16. How do you feel about the leaders you were exposed to during your career?
17. Were they good leaders, or bad?
18. Why do you consider them that particular type of leader?
19. Had your experiences been different, would you have considered staying in the Marine Corps?
20. Do you have any regrets about leaving the Marine Corps? If so, what are they?
21. Anything else you would like to share that you believe is relevant to this study?

Appendix C: Permission Request: Published Research Instrument

Subject Line: Permission to use Study Questionnaire

Greetings Dr. Patton,

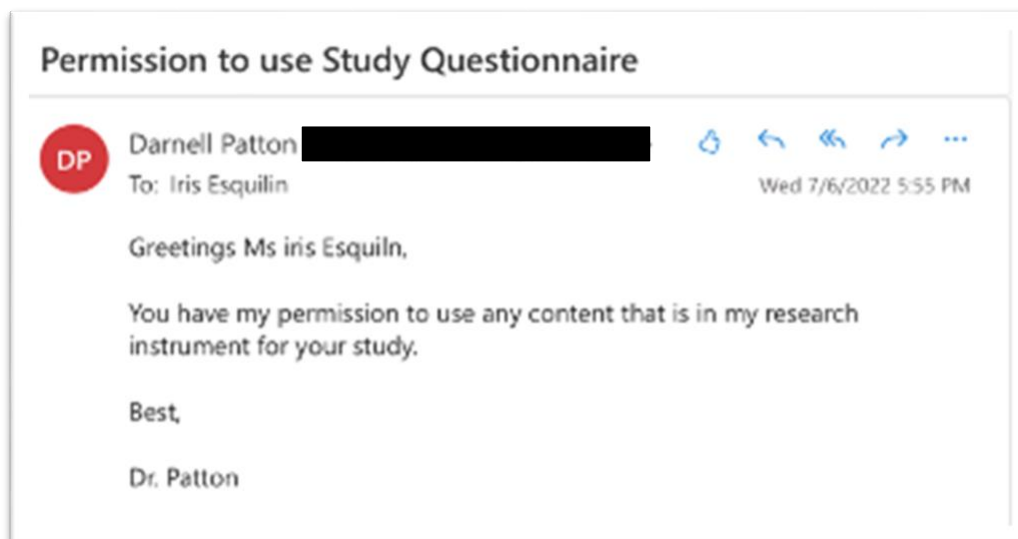
My name is Iris Esquilin. I am a doctoral student at Walden University's Public Policy and Administration Program. I am kindly requesting permission to use your research instrument published in your doctoral research study as a guide to creating my instrument to be used for my study titled: Retention Rate Factors of Junior Enlisted Females in the U.S. Marine Corps.

About the study:

The intention is to assess the possible negative impact leadership has on the decisions of junior enlisted females to separate after their first term. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Iris Esquilin, MA, Doctoral Student, Walden University



Appendix D: Permission Request: Social Media Post

Subject Line: Permission to Post on Facebook Page

Greetings,

My name is Iris Esquilin. I am a doctoral student at Walden University's Public Policy and Administration Program. I am kindly requesting permission to use your Facebook group page "_____ " to post my solicitation for participation for my study titled: Retention Rate Factors of Junior Enlisted Females in the U.S. Marine Corps.

About the study:

The intention is to assess the possible negative impact leadership has on the decisions of junior enlisted females to separate after their first term. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Iris Esquilin, MA, Doctoral Student, Walden University

Appendix E: Interview Memos

PARTICIPANT 01

[9:11] Participant #01: And he could, he could use his rank his power and manipulate marines, and basically, just take advantage of what's in front of him. And um, he ended up sleeping with one of my junior marines. And giving her all the all this like time off. And basically, making us feel like we were less than.

Researcher Notes: As P1 described what had occurred with one of her leaders at OCS, I remembered some similar occasions I experienced while on active duty. Ironically, some of those experiences also occurred while I was stationed at OCS. The difference between the two are the generations. The similarity is, it is STILL happening almost 3 decades later.

[16:26] Researcher: So, do you attribute your decision to leave the Marine Corps influenced by leadership? [16:33] Participant #01: Yes. [16:36] Researcher: Had your experience been different, would you have considered staying in the Marine Corps? [16:40] Participant #01: Absolutely. I love the Marine Corps. I was the most motivated Sergeant you would have ever met.

Researcher Notes: This makes me sad. The fact that one person can influence someone to make decisions they had not intended to make, it's just sad.

PARTICIPANT 02

[6:18] Participant #02: Yes. So right out of boot camp. It was 2014 when they were first. [6:25] Participant #02: Testing out females in the infantry. And I decided to join convention training and basically, the entire leadership told me from the very beginning that they didn't agree with it.

Researcher Notes: Instead of offering encouragement, these leaders in P2's early career were negative. This happens a lot in the Marine Corps. I made it a point in my career to always look at the positive rather than the negative. Especially where "baby" Marines were involved.

[9:56] Researcher: Okay. And at what point in your career did you decide to leave the Marine Corps? [10:02] Participant #02: Pretty much right when I hit the field. [10:06] Researcher: And tell me what influenced you to leave the Marine Corps. [10:12] Participant #02: I think just like the letdown because when you're in maps, your recruiters invest a lot of their time and interview and tell you like all the great things you can do and accomplish and how much they believe in you. So, it's kind of like that buildup and then, like um, I don't know. I just saw A future for myself, in the Marine Corps I planned on doing 20 years.

Researcher Notes: Again, we see here that individuals played a major impact on how this participant saw her career and why she decided to leave the Marine Corps.

PARTICIPANT 03

Researcher Notes: Nothing significant to report from this interview.

PARTICIPANT 04

[9:45] Participant #04: so, whenever I got to my second duty station, I had like female staff and SEOS that I think I always like look forward to having female leaders, but they really didn't want to see me succeed. And another person that I worked with who's also a woman, she kind of had a similar experience where it was like, everything we did was under a magnifying glass [10:09] Participant #04: It's like we would receive negative counselling's for things that for other people wouldn't be a big deal. We were just kind of like, we I don't know everything, we did was just heavily filtered or heavily like criticized, and I think those are the biggest challenges that I faced was just poor talent management and also just maybe just a little bit of bias from the female leaders that I did have.

Researcher Notes: As a female Marine, I can admit I was harder on my females. However, for the opposite reasons P4 describes. I was especially harder on my females so that they WOULD succeed. Here she describes her experiences where female leaders were not great mentors to her or any of the other junior females.

PARTICIPANT 05

[5:27] Participant #05: Yes, so I my first duty station, I was placed at Camp Pendleton. I've had. That's actually one of the main reasons why I'm getting out is due to poor leadership and not having really anybody to look up to you. [5:39] Participant #05: But my first real leader in my section was a prior 03. So, he came from like infantry unit and a lot moved into Um, he was super awful to me. I didn't know at the time but there were I should have as I became more educated like through the ranks and meeting people. [5:59] Participant #05: I should have filed complaints against him because he basically caused me to Get any eating disorder. Anything I would eat in the office you would constantly like harass and bash me in front of my entire section. Even though, like, I've never even close to, like, going overweight or underway, I was always find in the middle.

Researcher Notes: I recall my struggles with weight and how some of the other "leaner" Marines treated me. Specifically, some of the older male leaders were very hard on most females that didn't fit the "mold."

[8:55] Participant #05: That so my favorite marine I've ever met was back in Camp Pendleton and he was actually a lieutenant colonel. I met him when I was, I think Lance Corporal at the time like a newly this purple and this Marine for some reason just went the extra mile to show that he cared about what I thought and he just he didn't just care that I was like a new marine and like he actually cared about who I was as a person take the time to sit down and He wanted to know my story about like why I was here was. doing on the way, I grew up just anything personal, but, like, from a mentor type of limelight, and I

really miss him, and I really appreciated the fact that he especially Lieutenant Colonel with a lance corporal.

Researcher Notes: This last statement made by P5 gave me a warm feeling in my heart. Hope for other females in the Marine Corps. Not all leaders are bad.

[14:17] Researcher: What would have had to happen to influence you to stay in the Marine Corps with regards to leadership? [14:23] Participant #05: Oh, yeah, so if my leaders rather than blaming me for making the command to look bad, [14:32] Participant #05: I just feel like I would, If my leaders would have actually listened to me about what happened with that situation and would have actually listened rather than just hearing what they wanted to hear, they would have actually turned me out and listened and then that wouldn't affect my counseling and then pushed my promotion back. Then I, we would definitely be sitting and having a different conversation while how I would want to stand. But because of that, I don't.

Researcher Notes: I'm starting to see a trend.

[14:59] Researcher: Okay, so do you have any regrets about your decision to leave the Marine Corps? If so tell me about them. [15:08] Participant #05: I know I'll miss the Marine Corps a lot. I really loved that no matter what section I'm in. I've always tried to make whoever. [15:15] Participant #05: I'm working with a family, whether they liked it or not. Like we're gonna be a family. I'm gonna really miss love getting emotional, really gonna miss doing that.

Researcher Notes: Oh gosh, at this point Participant 05 started to cry. Made me so sad, I started to cry along with her. I asked if she needed a break, but she decided to continue with the interview.

PARTICIPANT 11

[4:04] Participant #11: I had an incident that happened. Well, I was not really deployed but like I was detached somewhere else for a month or two and a sexual assault happened to where I couldn't [4:23] Participant #11: I couldn't. Have faith in the command that I was attached to. So, I went back to my local bed and told them and they did everything that they could to me, whether it was seeking counseling, whether it was meeting tomorrow, whether it was making sure that I wasn't in the same room or same environment as the person that did it to me kind of thing. [4:49] Participant #11: So, I thought that was the best experience that I had overall. Number career was Knowing that my whole command was it was there to take care of me.

Researcher Notes: P11 described experiencing a sexual assault and not receiving support from her current command. She later stated that she went back to her parent command where she received the help she needed. It infuriates me to hear that leadership did not take care of her where the assault occurred, rather they sent her away for someone else to deal

with it. SMH. The care she received at her parent command; however, she described as a positive experience with leadership. This reminds me of a comment made to me by one of my male Senior Leaders when I was going through a similar situation. *This SgtMaj said to me “SSgt Esquilin, it is NOT the Marine Corps fault that YOU are in this situation.”*

Overall, this situation made my heart hurt.

PARTICIPANT 13

[10:37] Researcher: Tell me about the challenges that you may have faced with leadership while on active duty. [10:51] Participant #13: Oh, where do I start? Oh, well, this good stuff and yeah. There’s so much. Um, so [10:55] Participant #13: I mean, bootcamp was, was great. I had a wonderful Leadership. I had one staff sergeant, who was one of our green belts who just for some reason, hated every one of us.

Researcher Notes: This participant’s career started off on a bad note. This is possibly an indicator on the rest of her career.

At [31:47] P13 began describing a sexual assault she experienced while on active-duty. Information was too graphic to repost. P13 and I began to cry at that point.

[32:17] Researcher: Do you want me to stop the recording? Do you need a second? [32:25] Participant #13: I’m okay. I go to therapy for this. I’m fine. [32:31] Researcher: I’m so sorry. [32:40] Participant #13: it’s okay, it’s okay.

Researcher Notes: My heart is broken. I realized the things I experienced some 30 years ago are still happening. This interview was by far the most difficult for me to conduct. We took several breaks during the remainder of the interview. Interview lasted over an hour.

PARTICIPANT 16

Researcher Notes: Nothing significant to report from this interview.

Appendix F: Women Marines Leading the Way

The Marine Corps has a long and proud history when it comes leading the way (Utt, 2020). While the birth of the Marine Corps was on November 10, 1776 in Tun Tavern, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania by order of the Second Continental Congress, it wasn't until

1918 that women became a part of the organization (Utt, 2020). Since then, the role of the woman Marine has significantly changed.

- 1918 – Secretary of the Navy authorized women to serve in clerical duty. Opha Mae Johnson, first woman to serve during WWI, with 300 following that same year.
- 1943 – First female commissioned officer; Captain Anne Lentz. First enlisted female; Private Lucille McClarren.
- 1945 – First female detachment arrives in Hawaii.
- 1947 – First female to rate a hashmark; T/Sgt Mary Frances Wancheck.
- 1948 – First officer and enlisted females to be officially sworn into the Marine Corps. The Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948 authorized 100 female officers, 10 female warrant officers, and 1000 enlisted females.
- 1949 – First black female Marine to enlist; Annie Neal Graham. First female platoon formed in Parris Island for 6 weeks of training.
- 1950 – Females authorized to wear the evening dress uniform.
- 1952 – Marine Corps Women's Reserves participates in the raising of the colors at Marine Barracks, Wash, DC.
- 1953 – First female awarded a Navy and Marine Corps medal for heroism; SSgt Barbara Olive Barnwell.
- 1965 – First female Hispanic woman promoted to Chief Warrant Officer; Rose Franco.
- 1967 – First female to serve in a combat zone in Vietnam – Master Sergeant Barbara Jean Dulinsky.
- 1970 – First female military judge; 1st Lieutenant Patricia Murphy.

- 1977 – First African American woman to hold the rank of Master Gunnery Sergeant and Warrant Officer; MGySgt Mary Vaughn.
- 1978 – First female officer promoted to General; Colonel Margaret A. Brewer.
- 1988 – First Latina promoted to the rank of Colonel; LtCol Lori Sadler.
- 1993 – First female accepted into Naval aviation training; 2nd Lieutenant Sarah Deal.
- 1998 – First 3 star General; Brigadier General Carol A. Mutter.
- 2002 – First black female combat pilot; 1st Lieutenant Vernice Armour. First female to die in the war on terrorism; Sergeant Jeannette L. Winters.
- 2005 – First females to die in Iraq; Corporal Ramona M. Valdez and Lance Cpl Holly A. Charette.
- 2006 – First female to be promoted to MGySgt in the Combat Service Support Chief 0491MOS; MSgt Kimberly Dawn Walker. Angela Salinas became the first Hispanic Brigadier General. First female officer killed in Iraq; Major Megan McClung.
- 2013 – First enlisted females to graduate from the infantry training course; Pfc Christina Fuentes Montenegro, Pfc Julia Carroll and Pfc Katie Gorz.
- 2015 – First woman to lead a Marine ground combat arms unit; Colonel Michelle Macander.
- 2017 – First female officer to graduate from the infantry officer's training course; 1st Lt Marina A. Hierl.
- 2018 – First female students arrived at the School of Infantry (SOI)

So many more accomplishments made by women, all of which have proven that women are an essential part of the Marine Corps. Today they continue to serve the Marine Corps proudly, making up about 8.3% of the Marine Corps population, serving in 93.0% of all military occupational specialties and 62.0% of all billets (NMMC, n.d.).