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Ladies, Who Wants to Be a General Officer?

*What factors affect female officers' retention beyond 20-year
retirement eligibility?*

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Foreword

I am an American, fighting in the forces which guard my country and our way of life. I am prepared to give my life in their defense. This – Article I of the Code of Conduct of the United States Armed Forces – is one of the first of many lines I was required to memorize as a Plebe, first-year student, and Midshipman at the United States Naval Academy in the heat of July 2002. At the time, sweating and screaming, I was fully aware that I had signed up to serve my beautiful and powerful country during a time of war – The War on Terror – and that almost assuredly I would find myself deployed into harm’s way in support of that endeavor. I did just that in 2007. I did not realize until much later the duality of “giving one’s life” as a daily sacrifice of self in a calling that ethically places the individual, family, community, and state lower in priority to that of the security of the nation.

I once told my USNA roommates, “I’m not the smartest, but I sure do work hard” in a twangy Pennsylvania farm country accent, a phrase that they never let me live down. Any time after college when I found myself in a room surrounded by genius, the paradigm came back to me, and I was reassured that my hard work would eventually pay off. The evidence of this truth was the fact that I was already sitting in the room.

I recall a day when I sat around a conference room table as a Captain, a company grade officer. I noted how every field grade officer at the table, all male, had graying hair, crows-feet, smile-lines, furrowed brows, and puffy eyes. I said to myself “no way, not me, never!” While aging is an inevitable natural process, I am convinced that the physical appearance and slightly stiffened gait of field grades-and-above testify to the significant strain borne in defending the American people and securing the nation, its interests and its allies. Although, it is a likely story that few service members were actually thinking of the long-game when they first signed on the dotted line as 18, 19, or 20-somethings and realized only later that they desired to make military service a career.

More recently, I served a tour at Headquarters Marine Corps where I had the opportunity to meet and daily assist many Marine Corps general officers in their missions. The degree to which these officers varied in their perspectives and personalities was vast, unexpected and illuminating. I began to consider whether I had what it takes to stand in their shoes. It became clearer to me that in spite of what I always assumed as a junior officer, there was no single mold for these outstanding men and women. At the same time, I observed that figuratively speaking, they put their pants on the same way as everyone else. Maybe, just maybe, if I did the same and kept my gig line straight, then I could make it too.

I am now a Major at the 15-year mark in my career in the Active Component. I am the grand-daughter of a World War II veteran of the Battle of Okinawa and the daughter of a United States Marine Corps Reserve Lance Corporal. I am married and a 38-year-old mother of four children ages one to ten years. In comparison to my single Second Lieutenant self, I am exponentially more aware of the personal sacrifices required by a commitment to a career in the United States Marine Corps. I know that daring greatly will have a cost should I choose or be chosen to continue past retirement eligibility at 20 years time in service in the active component. I courageously, yet cautiously, weigh the merits; and I know I am not alone.

Abstract

This thesis covers the topic of retention of women in a male-dominated, hierarchical, military organization. I explored 14 areas of policy that have changed since 2016 that may or may not have significant impacts on mid-grade Marines' retention choices. Nearly 18 percent of all DoD servicemembers are women, yet only eight percent of Marines are women. Since women were first allowed by law to attain to the rank of General Officer in the mid-1970s only about 12 women out of hundreds of Marine Corps General Officers (GOs) attained the ranks of Brigadier General, Major General, or Lieutenant General. While other services have promoted several women to the rank of General, the Marine Corps has yet to promote a woman to 4-star General. The Commandant of the Marine Corps has Talent Management as one of his top three priorities for the Corps, particularly the talents of women and other minorities. Given these facts, it seems that the playing field is wide open for more women to aspire to the highest ranks. I searched the literature to understand the metaphor of the labyrinth with barriers that still inhibit women from continuing and excelling in male-dominated organizations. Historically, women Marines have seen their share of organizational structure and culture changes that have influenced how they shape their identities. This thesis gave six professional women field grade officers in the ranks of Major, Lieutenant Colonel, and Colonel serving over 20 years time in service in the active component Marine Corps an opportunity to have a voice and share their gender perspectives through individual qualitative interviews asking about these 14 areas of policy change and the affects on their retention decisions. Then, I held the results up against organizational theories and identity theories to gain a greater depth of understanding into the cultural and personal factors that affect retention. I found that these women have a passion for the Marine Corps and perseverance, yet the areas of physical fitness, health, working hours, inclusion, and occupational specialty limitations were the greatest challenges to their promotion to the GO ranks; while empathetic, engaged leaders and the opportunity to contribute and mentor were some of the most rewarding factors towards continuation to max retirement, regardless of rank.

Acknowledgments

This thesis would not have been possible without the six women who answered the call of vulnerability. Thank you for allowing yourselves to be examined for the sake of greater learning and understanding toward achievement of the individual Marine and the Corps.

My inspiration to write on the topic of female field grade officer retention in the United States Marine Corps toward the end result of increasing percentages of female general officers kick-started with a 267-page dissertation by retired Marine Corps Colonel Marianne S. Waldrop, Doctor of Philosophy. I reached out to Colonel Waldrop to understand how I might build on the foundation she had already laid as a researcher in this realm. Her support in framing the problem and encouraging further pursuit of a solution significantly focused and expedited my work.

Colonel Emily Swain, for contributing to and conditioning my research of removed and existing structural barriers for women in the Marine Corps and connecting me with the “data” people at Headquarters Marine Corps, I am sincerely grateful.

International students, faculty and staff at the Norwegian Defense Universtiy College in Oslo, Norway. Your career and academic insights as well as administrative trouble-shooting throughout the strange first year of studies during a pandemic made the second year of thesis-writing more realistic.

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1 Introduction

“It’s hard to be what you can’t see, but you’ll soon see.”

– President Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 47th President of the United States of America

1.1 Background

On International Women’s Day, 8 March 2021, the President announced his nomination of two general officers to be confirmed by the Senate as the second and third women in the history of the United States Armed Forces to lead U.S. combatant commands as four-star generals. He went on to describe the meritorious careers of these United States Air Force and United States Army Officers and said, “it is going to take an intensity of purpose and mission to really change the culture and habits that cause women to leave the military” (U.S. Office of the Press Secretary, 2021).

Organizational change can take time and is not always smooth. Murray Davies, author of *Commanding Change: War Winning Military Strategies for Organizational Change*, wrote, “Change is a battlefield...There are moments of dramatic and decisive action and long periods of apparent inactivity (Davies, 2001).” Davies’ description corroborates the case of the Defense Women’s Health Research Program, for example, which did tremendous work as early as 1994, on matters from family planning to G-force effects on female pilots. However, when the time and funding ran out, the project folded without any sort of enduring infrastructure to manage a portfolio that focused on servicewomen’s health (Sisbarro, 2021).

Approximately 18 percent of the Department of Defense total force is female (DACOWITS, 2020). Over the last half century, the role of U.S. servicewomen has expanded due to the elimination of restrictions on females serving on active-duty, including combat (SECDEF, 2013). A study of female active-duty servicemembers from 2004 through 2018 revealed that the likelihood of separation for female service members is 28 percent higher than that of males. While the DoD agrees that diversity is important, the services do not have plans that include goals, performance measures, and timeframes to guide and monitor current or future efforts to recruit and retain females (GAO, 2020). There is continuing concern that “higher attrition rates of female active-duty servicemembers than male servicemembers will result in a disproportionate impact to mission readiness if left unresolved” (House Report No. 115-676, 2018). The President of the United States is not merely checking the diversity and inclusion box by highlighting the underrepresentation senior women leaders within the

DoD. Rather, he calls for immediate action to strengthen United States National Security as we poise to challenge a near-peer competitor (Biden Jr., J.R., 2021; Lloyd III, 2021; Berger, 2020).

However, in its 246-year history, the United States Marine Corps has never had a female four-star general. Only 13 women attained to the Marine Corps' general officer ranks in the five decades since President Johnson signed into law Public Law 90-130 allowing permanent promotion of women to colonel (O-6) and permitting women to hold temporary appointments to flag/general officer when serving in designated billets (Stremlow, 1986). As of 2020, there are four active force and one reserve female general officers serving among 92 total in the USMC (DACOWITS, 2020). That is to say, only four percent of Marine Corps general officers are female; yet markedly, this is the highest ever number of female women generals serving simultaneously in both the Active Component (AC) and Reserve Component (RC) of the Corps.

The problem is that relative to the percentage of male general officers in the Marine Corps, the percentage of female general officers is not commensurate with the eight percent of female Marines in the AC. As a result, female Marines are underrepresented in the Marine Corps leadership, and women remain an undertapped resource in the defense of the Nation (Robinson, 2021). To change this situation, the Commandant of the Marine Corps has prioritized talent management, particularly that of women, among his top three priorities for the Corps. It would seem then, that the playing field is wide open. Therefore, I ask the question "Ladies, Who Wants to Be a General Officer?". At the same time I wonder how does one "be what they cannot see?", and are there other factors that need to be addressed to ensure equity in the U.S. Marine Corps leadership?

While the metaphorical glass ceiling (Hymowitz and Schellhardt, 1986) preventing women from attaining the rank of brigadier general has been shattered, the path to the top is more like a labyrinth (Eagly and Carli, 2007) full of barriers that today's women must negotiate. The top six reasons women reported for leaving the military were work schedules, deployments, organizational culture, family planning, sexual assault and dependent care (United States Government Accountability Office, 2020, May). Further, the Military Leadership Diversity Commission (MLDC) Final Report of 2011 recommended that the Services increase the racial/ethnic and gender diversity of senior leadership by eliminating barriers that disproportionately affect their advancement, which can be done by educating all servicemembers about the promotion process early in their careers and mentoring them at all stages of the career process (MLDC, 2011).

In 2016, retired Marine Corps Colonel Marianne S. Waldrop, Doctor of Philosophy researched and published a thesis entitled, *Understanding Women Leaders in a Male-Dominated Profession: A Study of the United States Marine Corps' Women Generals*. She explained the historical background that shaped womens' existence in the Marine Corps and how that initial systemic lag behind male counterparts continues to impact womens' progression into the highest ranks. Then, she interviewed eight of the then ten female Marines who had attained the ranks of brigadier-, major- and lieutenant general. One was deceased and the other declined to participate. In spite of the volumes of previous work on what prevents women from rising to leadership top-levels, she focused on learning what success strategies these women themselves implemented to navigate challenges and attain top ranks in the male-dominated organization. She concluded that there does not appear to be one predictable or repeatable path for a female to become a general officer in the Marine Corps. However, the few females who successfully negotiated the labyrinth shared three common factors. For one, these general officers had a willingness to settle for short term career goals. They were jacks (rather jills) of all trades who took the side streets, taking advantage of reachable educational opportunities or special assignments. Two, they privileged their Marine identity over other important identities like wife, mother, daughter, sister, etc. - to which a female Marine officer could have laid claim. These ladies placed the title 'Marine' first and highest for themselves. Three, they had a strong affinity with many of the Core Values in the Marine culture (Waldrop, 2016). Ideally, adaptation and application of these and other strategies might serve to preserve talent and retain more female Marine Corps officers.

Recent studies since 2016 describe policy and program changes aimed at improved inclusion of women and gender integration in the Marine Corps. These changes span from the design of female uniforms to the monumental Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule (DGCAR) rescission, which allowed women to serve in all military occupational specialty fields and in all units. The Marine Corps Exit and Milestone Longitudinal Survey implemented in 2017 is available to Officers before Officer Candidate School graduation, at acceptance of career designation, at selection to each field grade rank, and at end of their active service (DACOWITS, 2020, p.17). While there has been an overall increase in retention of female Marine Corps officers, it is too early to tell if any recent policy and program changes are having a positive or negative retention outcome among the next officers in line to compete for promotion to general officer – the field grades. However, it is important to constantly evaluate if the Marine Corps is doing enough or the right things to ensure better gender balance in leadership, and to investigate if women in the Marine Corps themselves experience that the possibility to become general officers is open to them and what they believe

their own contributions need to be. To join the conversation by informing women who have negotiated the labyrinth for the past 15 to 19 years, who will soon make a decision to retain or retire from the USMC AC with an aim to increase gender equity among the general officer ranks of the future, this thesis picks up where Colonel Waldrop's left off in 2016 and will investigate factors that continue to affect gender balance in the Marine Corps

1.2 Thesis Statement

The research question of this study is "What factors affect female officers' retention beyond 20-year retirement eligibility?". The factors that will be investigated will focus on the organizational structure and culture, and the individual factors that enter into AC female field grade officers' calculated decision, who choose to retain after 20 years when they otherwise could retire. Ultimately the thesis will investigate if one of these reasons to retain is their propensity to promote into the general officer ranks or whether or not the organization is doing what is needed to support that end.

1.3 Limitations

This thesis aims to find out what factors affect female officers' retention beyond 20-year retirement eligibility. I limit my quest to those female officers serving in one branch of the Department of Defense (DoD), the United States Marine Corps. I do this because, out of all the services within the DoD, I am most familiar this branch. Further, I have limited my approach to one of two service components, namely I have chosen the Active Component (AC) over the Reserve Component (RC). Again, I do this because I am most familiar with the AC. I could have chosen to include the RC, however the model for retirement is different and likely does not drive the same timeline for major career decisions concerning retention or separation as in the AC. Because of the variances in structure, history, organizational culture, leadership and followership, a study involving the entire U.S. DoD would have been well beyond the scope expected of a masters thesis. Although, it is certainly possible that the results of this study might help explain the problem of relatively few female field grade officers retaining and promoting to general officers in other components and services.

The limitation on the data and policy reviewed falls between the years of 1990 and 2021. I chose this time frame because the majority of the population of female AC U.S. Marine Corps officers currently serving at the field grade and general officer levels have been most affected by policies set and changed within the past three decades. For the purpose of this thesis, anything that occurred before

1990 is now a part of the history of women Marines, who have separated or retired from the service. While understanding the impetence and trajectory are interesting, the information is not as relevant towards explaining how today's female officers are still realing from or thriving due to major policy changes that occured in the year 2016, for example.

1.4 Thesis Structure

In order to describe the type of institution and the individuals within which to be studied, I will make a brief presentation of the US Marine Corps as an organization, with focus on information relevant to this study in Chapter 2. Chapter 2, Part 1 will be an extensive literature review relevant to factors that prevent retention of women in the US Marine Corps before I present the results from the individual interviews in Chapter 5. The theoretical foundation this study is based on will be presented under two main headlines: Organizational theory and Identity theory in Chapter 3. In Chaper 5, the analysis of my results will be tested against the theories before I draw conclusions in Chapter 6. Finally, enlightened by my findings, I will suggest a real-time approach toward increasing the proportion of women in the general officer ranks in the U.S. Marine Corps and recommend areas for further study in Chapter 6.

2 The Marine Corps as an Organization

Structure

The Corps prides itself on being America's "force of choice" (Berger, 2019). Its structure is light, expeditionary, and lethal. Comprised of approximately 185,415 Active Component (AC) and 102,492 Reserve Component (RC) personnel, it is smaller in comparison to the other U.S. service branches (ODASD, 2018). Unlike the Air Force and the Navy, it does not contain its own medical or chaplain corps. These are both borrowed from the Navy. Its smallest element is the squad of 12-15 Marine infantrymen, and the remainder of its elements in the Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) are comprised in a unique combined-arms fashion to support the troops on the ground. According to the 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps,

"The Marine Corps will be trained and equipped as a naval expeditionary force-in-readiness and prepared to operate inside actively contested maritime spaces in support of fleet operations. In crisis prevention and crisis response, the Fleet Marine Force – acting as an extension of the Fleet – will be first on the scene, first to help, first to contain a brewing crisis, and first to fight if required to do so (Berger, 2019)."

In order to accomplish this mission, the Corps places an extreme importance on readiness. The Five Pillars of Institutional Readiness, are the lens through which the Service, as an institution, views the distribution of resources and requirements to generate preparedness, ability, and capacity to fulfill its statutory obligations. They are: 1. High Quality People, 2. Unit Readiness, 3. Capability and Capacity to Meet Requirements, 4. Equipment Modernization, and 5. Infrastructure Sustainment (HQMC, 2014). It is ultimately each commander's responsibility to ensure their unit is ready for combat; they lead, train, and equip Marines. Readiness does not happen overnight. Readiness is the result of a continuous process. It begins, ends and repeats with the basics.

Unlike any other service, "every Marine is, first and foremost, a rifleman" (General Alfred M. Grey, 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps). One of the most sacred rites of passage to earning the title *Marine* is achieving the minimum qualification as marksman by shooting a course of fire from a range of out to 500 yards with an approved service rifle. Additionally, all Marine Corps officers attend the Marine Corps Basic Officer Course at The Basic School in Quantico, Virginia before entering the Fleet Marine Force. Upon graduation, every officer is capable of leading as a Rifle Platoon Commander. Advanced instruction on infantry skills is obtained through Infantry Officers Course (IOC) and the Infantry Training Battalions (ITB) at the School of Infantry (SOI) for enlisted Marines while all other non-infantry military occupational specialties attend Marine Combat Training (MCT), all Marines progress from basically trained Marines to Marine warriors.

Culture

All Marines are indoctrinated with a warrior ethos. From the moment young civilian men and women set foot on the yellow foot-prints at Marine Corps bootcamp, their drill instructors begin the process of imbuing them with the Marine Corps' Core Values: Honor, Courage, and Commitment.

Furthermore, Marines commit to memory the 14 Leadership Traits using the acronym J-J-DID-TIE-BUCKLE: Justice, Judgement, Dependability, Initiative, Decisiveness, Tact, Integrity, Enthusiasm, Bearing, Unselfishness, Courage, Knowledge, Loyalty, and Endurance. If that is not enough to keep in mind, great leaders of Marines apply the 11 Leadership Principles: Know yourself and seek self-improvement. Be technically and tactically proficient (MCWP 6-11, 2002). Develop a sense of responsibility among your subordinates. Make sound and timely decisions. Set the example. Know your Marines and look out for their welfare. Keep your Marines informed. Seek responsibility. Take responsibility for your actions. Ensure assigned tasks are understood, supervised, and accomplished. Train your Marines as a team. Employ your command in accordance with its capabilities.

Personal Values

In 1999, General Charles C. Krulak, 31st Commandant of the Marine Corps, understood that in spite of the time honored history and traditions of Marines who had served, it was possible for leaders out of their humanity to tire and fail to apply these high standards of conduct. He warns and reminds in his foreword to *Sustaining the Transformation*:

Our Corps does two things for America: we make Marines and we win our nation's battles. Our ability to successfully accomplish the latter, of course, depends upon how well we do the former. We make Marines through a process called transformation. During this process, we change young men's and women's lives forever by imbuing them with our nation's highest ideals...we have refined and strengthened this process in pursuit of increasingly higher standards. Those who earn the title "Marine" have been polished and honed by attentive mentoring and the application of our time-proven leadership traits and principles. Transformation does not end at the conclusion of entry-level training; it continues throughout a Marine's service—whether that service ends after a single enlistment or lasts 30 years. Marines maintain standards that are consistent with our core values of honor, courage, and commitment, and they are held accountable for maintaining the legacy of valor established by the sacrifices of those Marines who preceded them... Young Marines enter our Corps today with as much spirit and enthusiasm as ever in our proud history. They carry within their hearts the burning embers of zeal and devotion that were lit during their first meeting with a Marine... Sometimes, this burning flame of enthusiasm reaches its crescendo immediately following the entry-level training pipeline, only to dim during a Marine's service... Sustaining the transformation process ensures that the flame of enthusiasm does not wane, and it allows the Corps to capitalize on our most precious asset—the individual Marine... Every Marine must possess the intellect, skill, and solid moral foundation to fight in the increasingly chaotic battlespace...characterized by rapidly changing threats across the spectrum of conflict... Every Marine must understand: what the transformation is, the benefits that can be derived from it (for the individual Marine, for the unit, for the Corps, and, ultimately, for our nation), his or her place in it, and the multitude of ways he or she can effect the transformation... [so that] we provide a command climate in which all Marines can succeed...Success in our ultimate mission—victory on the battlefield—depends upon our commitment. Our Corps and our nation deserve nothing less (MCRP 6-1 1D, 1999).

While earning the title *Marine* and serving in the Marine Corps is often seen as a calling more than a career, Marines do eventually transition from their service as warriors back to civil society and the civilian workforce either upon separation or retirement. Thought and consideration into the timing, practicality, and preparation for this transition is critical to ensuring that Marines are as much successful in uniform as they are after they hang it up.

Retirement

Like pay, housing, health insurance, leave and travel, retirement is a significant consideration in anyone's career choice. As much as the practicality of earning enough money to support oneself and or support one's family may have been a reason for earning a commission and retaining, so is the

consideration of how one might continue to do so after military service in the Marines has ended. AC Marines are subject to one of two retirement systems, either the legacy system or the Blended Retirement System (BRS).

Under the legacy system, Marines who separate prior to 20 years time in service (TIS) receive no pension. Marines who retire after 20 years TIS receive a monthly annuity of 2.5% times the number of years served times retired base pay by rank. Options for collecting retired pay are as a full retired pay monthly annuity for life or as a lump sum plus reduced retired pay as a monthly annuity for life. If a Marine wanted to start saving for retirement at any point prior to 20 years to supplement a potential pension, then it was up to his or her own motivation and/or leader mentoring to understand the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) and opt to save a portion of their monthly paycheck.

An outcome of the Fiscal Year 2016 National Defense Authorization Act, the BRS provides the military with a modernized retirement plan built for retirement savings (NDAA, 2016). All AC Marines who had fewer than 12 years of service from their Pay Entry Base Date on 31 December 2017 and RC Marines with fewer than 4,320 retirement points on 31 December 2017 had the option during 2018 to opt-in to the BRS or remain in the legacy retirement system. All Marines who entered service on or after 1 January 2018 were/are automatically placed under the BRS. The BRS provides automatic (1%) and matching TSP contributions (at the start of 3 years), as well as a mid-career compensation incentive, in addition to monthly retired pay for life at 2% instead of the legacy 2.5% (DoD, 2016).

A total of 84,324 active-duty Marines, 59.4 percent of its eligible population, opted into the BRS, double the rate of nearly every other service (Philpott, 2019). The Marine Corps attributed its success to its leader-led culture that ensured every Marine was informed of and elected one of the two options. The plan lops 20 percent off of lifetime annuities for those who serve full careers, which saves the U.S. government money in the long-run. The Director for military compensation in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness said that the primary intent of the BRS was not to save money rather to ensure members would be vested in and receive government-provided retirement benefits whether or not they served the full traditional 20-year career (Philpot, 2019). On average, only 19 percent of the active-duty force and 14 percent of reserve component personnel serve 20 years to qualify for a lifetime annuity. Bottom line, what the DoD has done is essentially built more flexibility into the military's retirement system, which translates to taking better care of veterans and their families, all citizens of the nation, who could go on to work in the civilian sector after their obligated service.

On that note, servicemembers do often seek out a second career after retiring from military service. Part of the calculus for retirement decisions includes whether a Marine believes he or she will find themselves marketable in the civilian sector or as a civilian working in the military sector. The longer one serves in the Marine Corps, the more challenging it might be to hire on, as age-discrimination is still a threat.

While the factor of retirement timing and benefits is not necessarily gender-specific in the Marine Corps, this section is included to demonstrate how vital consideration of the subject is for AC Marines when deciding on their desired length of service, career goals, and financial needs in compilation with the other factors that will be explained in the next chapter.

The inability of the Marine Corps to retain female Marines, especially female Marine Officers identifies a breakdown in the transformation sustainment process. The structural, cultural, and personal barriers they navigate often run counter to the organizational values outlined above. Like cells, tissue, organs and appendages are to an entire body, each part of the Marine Corps organization plays its vital role in accomplishing our national security mission. That is exactly why setting conditions for even the small percent of the force who are female to perform to their highest level is worth the time and effort. Failing to take care of Marines is a readiness issue, and readiness is a national security imperative.

In the next section, this thesis will explore the most recent known structural, cultural and individual factors affecting retention of female Marines specifically found in the literature.

2.1 Literature Review

The research and data collected and disseminated by organizations internal and external to the Marine Corps on female Marine attrition and retention is extensive. I will start by presenting the literature on the policies and programs that affect female field grade officers today and how they are changing with an aim to increase percentages of those retained. The policies and programs reflect issues at all three of the structural, cultural and personal levels sometimes simultaneously. This chapter will reflect the extent to which individual women leaders in the Marine Corps must adapt and overcome the obstacles and what the Marine Corps as an organization has done so far to remove or mitigate them. This chapter will summarize the work and major finds of Colonel Waldrop's study of the previous women Marine Corps General Officers. Then, it will explain the policies and programs that affect female field grade officers today and how they are changing.

2.1.1 Understanding Women Leaders in a Male-Dominated Profession: A Study of the United States Marine Corps' Women Generals

In May 2016, Marianne S. Waldrop submitted a dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of San Diego. She, having served as a Colonel in the United States Marine Corps AC, recognized that the contemporary organizations needed to “tap into the underutilized half of the population—women” (Waldrop, 2016). She also subscribed to Eagley and Carli’s theory that because of the achievements of a few women, organizations no longer contain a metaphorical *glass ceiling* where women can see to the top but cannot obtain it due to laws and structure. Rather, today’s organizations are *labyrinths* full of barriers that women must negotiate on the way to achievement of top-level positions. She applied this theory to the Marine Corps and tested it by interviewing eight of the then ten female Marines who had attained to the general officer ranks.

Colonel Waldrop’s exploratory case studies and cross-case analysis provided, for the first time, a qualitative and in-depth understanding of the career trajectories and barriers these particular women experienced in the context of the male-dominated Marine Corps. While a “yellow-brick road” or blue-print to be followed was not to be found due to the unique paths each general officer walked, the study serves to instruct the reader who might see connections and similarities to their own situation and draw encouragement going forward. By analyzing personal, organizational, and cultural influences, Colonel Waldrop’s study found three themes: 1) a willingness to settle for short-term career goals, 2) the privileging of their Marine identity, and 3) a strong affinity with the core values of the Corps’ culture.

Settling for short-term career goals means that the female general officers in this study did not have a long-term strategy for success. Rather, they claim to have had no strategy at all. For example, Lieutenant General Loretta (Lori) E. Reynolds, USMC explained, “I did none of ‘this’ deliberately. I went where the Corps told me to go.” The women had developed a two- to three-year outlook based on the next set of orders that were available at the time. Similarly, Lieutenant General Carol A. Mutter, USMC Retired, described herself as a ‘keep-your-options-open’ kind of person.

Privileging one’s Marine identity means that officers or enlisted, who have gone through the Marine Corps’ legendary enculturation process through basic training “assume the organizational or collective identity as “Marine” above all others” (p.199). Colonel Waldrop subscribes to social

identity theory where “identity development impacts women’s sense of belonging in and commitment to a male-dominated institution in which they are a visible minority” (p. 199). Brigadier General Reals Gail M. Reals, USMC Retired, stated during an interview, “I worked awfully damn hard, made a lot of sacrifices, setting aside my personal life. A large part of my life was the Marine Corps. That is the price you pay, always putting the Marine Corps first” (p.77). Reals remained single and without children, yet other female general officers who were married and/or were mothers made similar statements about putting their Marine identity first.

Having a strong affinity with the core values of the Corps’ culture means that these women Marine generals believed wholeheartedly in honor, courage, and commitment as a way of life. Major General Angela (Angie) Salinas, USMC Retired, stated in her interview, she “believes that the character traits consistently promoted in her household were those culturally embodied in those core values of, “honor, courage, and commitment,” which bonded her with the institution (p. 123).

In addition, Colonel Waldrop narrows down the findings of the literature review on success strategies to these five: 1) develop a leader identity, 2) become visible, 3) develop yourself, 4) challenge yourself, and, 5) communicate effectively (p. 46). Beyond the three main themes mentioned earlier, “the women generals attributed their success to an array of differing strategies, motivations, and decisions” (p.20).

The significance of Colonel Waldrop’s study is partly “to re-orient the discussion about women in leadership from one of victimization and defeat to optimism and inspiration for future women leaders” (p.20). Other goals are to inform the “behavior and thinking” of future women leaders and to provide insight to leaders of organizations and leadership development professionals. She also hoped that the findings and hypotheses from the study would provide a foundation for future research (p.20).

Colonel Waldrop’s study of the testimonies of female Marine Corps General Officers until 2016 showed that structural laws and policies can change, yet organizational culture can be slow to catch up. She writes, “the Marine Corps’ historical and social context provides valuable insight into the factors that support, but also challenge women Marines. The Marine culture and their laws and regulations are powerful determinants, and changes related to these may help to account for women’s success in this male-dominated profession” (p.18). In the next section, I shine a light on the

most recent policies that affect servicewomen and many more evidence-based recommendations for changes to policy. One policy can both help and hinder retention. Changes in policy are meant to solve a problem, yet often when one problem is solved, new problems spring up. We call these ‘second and third order effects.’ Furthermore, policies are not people, and we know that no matter how well-written a policy may be, it is only as good as its implementation by the leaders who are charged to carry out the order and by the Marines who have an equal responsibility to comply. In the same spirit as Colonel Waldrop’s study, I do not wish to bog down and disillusion the reader with a deep dive into what can quickly become a dark and dismal discussion on barriers. However, it is important to show that the challenges are real, and if the goal is to manage talented female Marines, then knowing what the barriers are is the first step in preparing these future leaders to either go around or over them, as previous leaders have done, or even to explode through them, as the next generation might do.

2.1.2 Programs and Policies

No doubt as a result of the world’s great power competition and shifting socioeconomic situation of the nation, the DoD has experienced a renewed energy behind change initiatives for female service members that is translating down to the services, and the other services are collaborating more and more on programs and policies that affect female Marines. Organizations external to the Marine Corps such as the GAO, MDLC, the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS), the Women Marines Association (WMA), and the Marine Women’s Initiative Team (WIT) as well as internal organizations, such as the Marine Corps Center for Advanced Organizational Culture Learning (CAOCL), help inform Congress, the DoD, and the service(s) on, among other items, what causes servicewomen to attrite or retain. In a search of these and other sources, I have compiled a list of concerns and their descriptions to paint the picture of what barriers today’s active duty female field-grade officers could be facing. Many of these factors and more become part of the calculus when making their retention decisions beyond the 20-year point of retirement eligibility under the traditional retirement system.

Uniforms and Grooming Standards

Uniforms. The need for the Marine Corps’ to procure and distribute uniforms suitable to the female gender dates as far back as the first female Marine. Both male and female uniforms undergo modifications as recommended to and reviewed by the Marine Corps Uniform Board. While some modifications tend towards achieving greater uniformity between the working and ceremonial

clothing of both genders, others are simply specific to the needs of either gender. For the sake of appearance and uniformity while considering differences in the female form, effective 1 October 2018, female Marines were authorized to wear either the current womens blue dress coat or a new blue dress coat (designed with a high collar and gold buttons just like the male coat yet with contours for the female form). The current womens blue dress coat (which many have likened to that of flight attendants) will be deemed obsolete effective 30 September 2022 (HQMC, 2018). In contrast, for the sake of functionality and professional appearance, yet exact uniformity with male clothing set aside, Marine Corps Systems Command managed to design and roll out improved maternity uniform items in under nine months from the September 2020 date of the DACOWITS recommendation (Gonzales, 2021). Expecting Marines will be able to wear a series of modified service, dress, combat and physical training uniform items which addresses capability gaps involving fit, comfort and appearance.

The impacts of these seemingly small changes transcend beyond looks, feel, and function, as one Marine major expressed, “I am so excited and grateful for these new and updated maternity items. It goes to show that our leadership really does care about all Marines (Gonzales, 2021).”

Grooming standards. These standards generally refer to Marines’ ability to meet their occupational demands and maintain a professional appearance and more specifically to neatly groomed hair. “Adherence to grooming standards can be more complex for female Service members because of variance in the length, texture, and bulk of their hair,” DACOWITS reported, “attempts to adhere to certain grooming standards are causing irreversible hair loss and potential long-term health concerns. Hair loss from traction alopecia and other follicular and scarring disorders are associated with permanent disfigurement, emotional distress, and decreased quality of life (DACOWITS, 2020, p.44). The Committee asked the services simply to pay closer attention to the needs of servicewomen in this area as a concern that has largely been overlooked, even by women themselves as something they accepted as a result of their choice to serve in the military (Sisbarro, 2021). The Marine Corps leadership has paid attention and released in the Marine Corps Uniform Board 218 Results as early as November 2019 the authorized wear of “half ponytails that provide a neat and professional military appearance...for medium hair length only for physical training purposes.” Long hair is still required to be “secured in a ponytail, free-hanging braid or worn up” during physical training. The Marine Corps has also made allowances for multiple braids in women with ethnic hair types, among other changes. However, the service has not adopted the same ease in standards allowable in other services, such as the United States Army that now allows “short

ponytails at all times, and long ponytails in combat and in training when a bun might otherwise interfere with equipment” (Philipps, 2021).

The author of the U.S. Army article highlighting the grooming standard changes captures the significance: “While permitting ponytails may seem tepid in the freewheeling world of civilian fashion, for women in uniform the changes offer not only welcome flexibility, but a growing sign that the Army is listening, and slowly moving away from military standards that in the past generally let them serve only to the extent that they agreed to look and act like men” (Philipps, 2021). To this point, organizations such as DACOWITS and the WIT have the topics of uniform and grooming standards on their radars.

Equipment and Gear

Properly fitting equipment such as oxygen masks, helmets, and G-suits for female aviators has been raised as a concern by all services, including the Marine Corps. DACOWITS said it will continue to monitor challenges with proper design and fit and timely procurement of these items and that delays in procuring these items may degrade readiness and impact an aviator’s quality of service (DACOWITS, 2020). The U.S. Air Force is working to incorporate female anthropometric range measurements into the design of flight equipment worn by women aviators including a female variant of the Army Aircrew Combat Uniform, maternity flight suit, Next Generation Fixed Wing Helmet, and Next Generation Ejection Seat. The Air Force is also working on devices to make in-flight urination easier for Women (DACOWITS, 2020).

For females Marines in the ground occupational specialties, there has been a demand for body armor that fits. In April 2020, the Marine Corps rolled out the Plate Carrier Generation III, a lightweight plate carrying system that guards against bullets and fragmentation when coupled with protective plates. Marine Corps Systems Command increased the variation of sizes to fit almost 15,000 more Marines of both genders than the old armor. The PC Gen. III fits closer to the body, increases protection and decreases the risk of injury due to improper fit, and was designed to fit individuals of all sizes and statures. The protective plates themselves accommodate chest and abdomen size. While Marine infantry units will be the first to receive the new armor supplies, the program office expects to reach the entire force by fiscal year 2023.

The update and fielding of body armor that is lighter and provides greater mobility with the same amount of protection is great news for all Marines. The fact that the load is now 25 percent lighter than the legacy armor (Gonzales, 2020) is a step in the right direction given previous

recommendations from those concerned with injury prevention, such as the Defense Health Board (DHB). The DHB's November 2020 report recommended that, "the DoD should define and ensure procurement and distribution of gender-customized equipment to reduce injuries and improve the health, performance, and readiness of Active Duty Women" (DHB, 2020, p. 64). Female Marines' bodies need to withstand the test of time. The next sections will discuss matters of physical fitness, body composition, healthcare, pregnancy and postpartum concerns that interrelate and if well-managed can make the difference towards long-term retention.

Physical Fitness

The Corps' expeditionary combat culture regards physical strength and endurance as essential to every Marine's performance. The Marine Corps Physical Fitness Program (MCPFP) "provides a comprehensive approach to total fitness, while integrating the Marine Corps martial arts, water survival, general and occupational fitness, nutrition, and Sports Medicine and Injury Prevention (SMIP) programs in order to improve the overall health, physical fitness, and combat readiness of individual Marines and units." The endstate is "a physical fitness program that incentivizes Marines to take a holistic approach to fitness, and dedicate themselves to preparing their bodies and minds for war. The program will result in Marines who are fit, resilient, and more lethal on the modern battlefield (MCO 1600.14, 2018)."

Structure. Since 2016, there has been increasing pressure for female Marines to perform to the same physical fitness testing standards as males, yet even today, standards are lower for women. The semi-annual physical fitness tests have undergone numerous changes to that end. In 1999, the 1.5-mile run, the cardiovascular fitness component of the test, changed to a 3-mile run requirement for all Marines, yet allowable run-times and scores still varied between genders. The muscular strength and muscular endurance components of the test included flexed-arm hang and sit-ups. Then in 2014, females were highly encouraged to begin training to perform pull-ups like their male counterparts in preparation for an anticipated shift in the testing requirements; however, females were still allowed to continue to perform the flexed arm hang. Full implementation of pull-ups as the new standard for demonstration of upper body strength for both genders began in 2015, and as of 1 January 2017, a pull-up/push-up hybrid is in effect, yet scoring remains tiered to adjust for differing abilities between genders (Le, 2016). The Corps also adjusted the scoring of abdominal crunches, requiring a Marine to perform more crunches to obtain an equal or greater score than in previous years.

Culture. In her thesis, Colonel Waldrop identifies the enormous paradigm shift in the Marine Corps' physical fitness standards for women throughout the (then) 73 years since the enlistment of the first female Marine and the rescission of the Combat Exclusion Policy when all positions including combat arms and special force occupational specialties were opened to women:

“in an integrated Marine Corps where women have long been prohibited from qualifying for and holding combat jobs, the culture of fitness and its underlying assumptions have been increasingly applied to both genders. This has proven to be a greater challenge for the more recent women Marines due to the expansion of opportunities, the more intense effort toward gender equality, and resulting higher fitness standards for women in order to sufficiently perform and serve in more demanding jobs and environments” (Waldrop, 2016).

A group of female commissioned officers in a 2020 article on the challenges of the Body Composition Program also noted the increase in requirements for all Marines including the addition of the Combat Fitness test in 2018, which replaced the second semi-annual physical fitness test. They write, “the PFT evolved into a 3-mile run, pull-ups and crunches or planks, along with a combat fitness test (CFT) conducted during the second half of the year, which includes events such as carrying a Marine of similar weight over a sprinting distance and lugging a combat load through a dynamic maneuver course (Sisbarro et.al., 2020).”

The addition of pull-ups in particular and the rapid manner in which it came about have affected Marine cohesion and cause individuals to question their own value to the Marine Corps. A March 2018 Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Project Report by the Marine Corps Center for Advanced Organizational Culture Learning found:

“While all Marines saw the value of high levels of fitness, there were many different opinions about how fit Marines should be and the perceived inequalities in how Marines are measured physically against one another. Marines raised concerns about how the extreme emphasis that some Marines put on fitness, especially pull-ups, may overshadow other more important factors in what makes a Marine valuable to the Marine Corps. While not a comprehensive overview of all that was said on the topic, these prominent points of contention represent potential barriers to Marine cohesion. The divergent viewpoints likely arise from varying interpretations and partial misunderstanding of actual Marine Corps policy and the intent behind it. Complex as the arguments on all sides are, some Marines believe that much of this could be rectified through transparent and purposeful messaging on the practical value of a more diverse and less divided Marine Corps.” (Lane et.al., 2018, p. 38)

Individual. Absent from the press articles, yet evident in comments on closed social media forums whereby I have access, women share expressions of stress and anxiety felt by individual Marines to meet these more rigorous physical fitness challenges given natural life-cycle circumstances. It seems the Marine Corps' ever-reforming physical fitness and body composition standards can be a barrier for women, especially those caught at peculiar moments in their lives and careers during these years

of organizational transition. For example, consider women who were pregnant, post-partum, or lactating during any part of the two-year period between first notification of the pull-up changes, for example, until its implementation. These women, some Majors with whom I had the honor to serve, devoted time, energy, and focus towards learning a new skill and performing it well or well enough likely at the expense of the same toward their child. Another percentage, women facing promotion boards the year of full implementation braced themselves and eaked out the two pull-ups required for a passing score of 70 points out of a possible 100 points only to be compared to their male counterparts who have been practicing for years and who performed more pullups for a higher score. Yet a third group, women who were nearing retirement at 40 plus years of age, who came into the Corps under much different circumstances, yet were either not quite eligible for retirement or planned to retain past retirement, had to shift their training regimen or risk embarrassment as senior leaders who are charged with setting the example for their subordinates. It is not that the Marines shirked at the challenge or even the sacrifices of striving to achieve the new higher standard that was the issue.

The CAOCL report found in their discussions with Marines two important themes: 1) the idea that the value of an individual Marine is directly tied to their ability to perform on the PFT, in particular pull-ups, and 2) the thought that women have an unfair advantage in how their PFT is scored” (Lane et.al., 2018, p. 38). Policies aimed at equalizing the playing field in the area of physical fitness are still unequal and are doing women no favors.

Body Composition & Appearance

Sisters to the increasing complexity in physical fitness standards are body composition and physical appearance standards. Implemented 1 January 2017, the USMC changed the Body Composition Program (BCP) to include an increase in the height and weight standards for females, better equipment for determining height and weight for all Marines, and the BCP waiver authority was passed from the deputy commandant of Manpower and Reserve Affairs to the first general officer in a Marine’s chain of command. However, “female service members have long recognized the DoD tape test is inaccurate and does not provide the safety net it does to most male service members, so they take extreme, often drastic, measures to make weight, at an expense to their health and the readiness of the force” (Sisbarro et. al., 2020).

The same small team of female officers mentioned in the previous section (Sisbarro et.al, 2020) have noted in their research that the current DoD Instruction 1308.3, whereby the Marine Corps follows the minimum allowable height for weight standards – is outdated. It was signed nearly to decades

ago and is based on statistics of 1983 Navy sailors, whereby post-partum female sailors were likely not included as restrictions on the retention of pregnant servicewomen were lifted in 1976. The data also likely does not account for a significant shift in anthropometrics of today's servicewomen due to improvements in modern medicine, easier access to medical care, shifts in physical fitness styles, and advances in nutrition. Finally, it does not take into consideration the muscle mass required to meet more rigorous physical fitness standards now that they can serve in all occupational fields as a result of the repealed Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule (Sisbarro et.al., 2020).

Research evidence has shown that the first measured determinant of body composition, Body Mass Index (BMI) is a weight-for-height calculation, which was developed in the 1830s using a non-diverse, Belgian population sample is no longer the best indicator of individual performance or long-term health (Sisbarro et.al., 2019; Svan, 2019).

The second measured determinant of body composition is the body fat percentage. The Marine Corps only uses this second determinant if Marines fails the standards in the first measurement. However, as of 1 January 2017, "the Marine Corps has taken physical performance into consideration when considering BCP. Marines scoring 285 and higher on both the PFT and CFT will now be exempt from height and weight standards. Marines who score between 250 and 284 will have their maximum body fat percentage increased by one percent. For example if a Marine has a maximum body fat percentage is 19 percent, with a score between 250 and 284 on both the PFT and CFT, he or she will be allowed to go up to 20 percent body fat (Le, 2016)." The major argument with this gracious bump is that a majority of Marines, males or females, but especially females and minority groups within the female subgroup are not served by the "safety net" (Sisbarro et.al., 2020). They will often measure beyond the allowable body fat even with the kick.

Because the circumference measurements that make up the bodyfat calculations are taken from the neck, waist, and hip measurements with an automatic tension measuring tape and because the outcomes differ greatly between males and females, females learn to achieve the weight for height standard no matter what and avoid the tape measure like the plague. These tactics include any one or a combination of severe calorie restriction, intense exercise, and/or dehydration in the months and weeks leading up to a weigh-in period (DHB, 2020).

Dr. Neal Baumgartner, PhD., Chief of the Air Force Exercise Science Unit, briefed DACOWITS in March 2019 about his ongoing research relating to aerobic fitness and body composition. He said, he is

using “the latest and best science to address the ... inextricable relationship between aerobic fitness and the location of fat in the body” (Svan, 2019). Since 2004, the Air Force has used the abdominal circumference as a measure of “the most “dangerous” fat in the body – visceral fat, located in the trunk region” which is “associated with various disease states that progress more rapidly the more abdominal fat (central atiposity) one has,” said Baumgartner (Svan, 2019). He sees body fat more as a matter of overall health indication, which has impacts on long-term retention and eventual medical costs per servicemember, veteran, or retiree. Dr. Baumgartner’s major claims are:

“1) Exercise science is a discipline and servicemembers should see an exercise scientist for their prescription and see their medical physician/provider for Clearance II exercise; 2) keep in mind the hierarchy especially in Tier I, cardiorespiratory endurance aerobic fitness is more important body comp, which is more important than muscular endurance; 3) Health and fitness are not separate stovepipes, they are not a dichotomy; 4) VO2 is the king whether you’re an olympic champion or trying to fight off COVID-19; 5) Cardiorespiratory endurance is not the same as cardiovascular endurance, it’s the long term, consistent training that you have to do to maintain VO2; 6) Body mass standing on a scale and your height are not measures of body composition (i.e. if I have two female Marines that are both 5’6” and weigh 130 pounds, I have no idea who has better performance capability, I have no idea who is healthy)” (Sisbarro, 2021c).

Likewise, many Marines view body composition more as a means to protect the image of Marines’ overall professional physical appearance. Dr. Baumgartner talks about the “skinny fat” population, who looks great in uniform and might be able to perform moderately on physical fitness requirements, but they are ticking time-bombs for common diseases. The problem is that given the latest physical fitness requirements of Marines geared towards combat-lethality, the slender Marine who looks smart in her service and dress uniforms that the Corps and public envision on posters is incongruent with the muscular, looking just as smart warrior in her camouflage utilities with tightly rolled sleeves.

Female Marines, especially those post-partum, have been caught in a values dilemma to either meet the needs of the organization or look out for their own health and well-being and even the health of their breast-fed babies. Leaders of female Marines struggle to mentor and motivate, unsure of what advice to offer the Marine who desires to balance both. Bottom line, the Marine Corps must focus on a more evidence-based and potentially tiered approaches to solving the formula for Marines’ body composition in relation to physical fitness performance standards and positive health outcomes. There is more to be learned on female health in the next section.

Female-Specialized Healthcare

The DoD charged the Defense Health Board (DHB) to recommend strategies to improve accessibility and quality of health services that would enhance Active Duty Women's (ADW) medical readiness. Specifically, the DHB was to review and make recommendations to improve ADW's health and care to include a special focus on musculoskeletal, reproductive, and psychological health. It reviewed DoD women's health services, relevant health policies, subject matter expert interviews, and civilian and foreign militaries' models over a one-year period to inform its findings and recommendations. The DHB found that "ADW have been incorporated into all military occupational specialties and have proven themselves critical to DoD mission success. Yet they continue to experience health care and operational challenges that reviews and reports over the past 25 years have identified, evaluated, and made recommendations for improvement." That means that the Marines who are currently serving in the ranks of field grade and above have, on the whole, been underserved in the area of healthcare. This section will look at common and current concerns among ADW, and Marines, where specific that no-doubt have impacted or will impact AC female field grad officers going forward.

Contraception. Some of the barriers that hinder ADW's reproductive health are the lack of qualified medical personnel who are specifically educated on women's health and licensed practitioners trained to educate women regarding contraceptive options or licensed to perform procedures to insert contraceptive devices. As well, refilling medications for contraceptives and stigmatization associated with seeking health services is a barrier to management of family planning (DHB, 2020, 96).

Urinary Tract Infection. UTI symptoms (painful urination [dysuria], frequency, and urgency of voiding) interfere with focus and concentration during mission duties, work availability, and overall well-being. Compared to non-deployed ADW, ADW in deployed or field environments experience more UTIs. Fortunately, self-testing kits for urogenital conditions are available for field environments to decrease the incidence of medical evacuations. In addition, the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA's) approval of special devices affords ADW the safety and privacy to void in austere environments. (DHB, 2020, p. 84).

Infertility and Reproductive Services. "Over the past several decades, demographic and socioeconomic trends have resulted in an increase in the absolute number of women seeking pregnancy in their late 30's and early to mid40's. In addition, a significant number of women in this age group are seeking evaluation and treatment for infertility. Factors influencing the tendency for a

woman to delay childbearing are reflected in recent socioeconomic trends, including: 1) later age at first marriage, 2) increased level of education, and 3) increased percentage of women employed outside the home” (ASRM, 2021). However, the conscious delay while laser focused on one’s career or in the pursuit of a mate does not always meet with biology’s timing and may require assistance. Current as of 18 June 2018, TRICARE may cover some types of assisted reproductive services. The service must be medically necessary, which means it is appropriate, reasonable, and adequate for the condition, and combined with natural conception. Services include: diagnosis and treatment for an illness or injury of the male or female reproductive system; correction of any physical cause of infertility; care for erectile dysfunction if it has a physical cause; diagnostic services such as semen analysis, hormone evaluation, chromosomal studies, immunologic studies, special and sperm function tests, bacteriologic investigation. It is also important to be aware of what fertility treatment services are not (or not yet) covered. These services, which must be procured privately, are: artificial or intrauterine insemination; any costs related to donors or semen banks; reversal of tubal ligation or vasectomy unless medically necessary; care for erectile dysfunction from psychological causes including depression, anxiety, and/or stress; non-coital reproductive procedures; services or supplies including in vitro fertilization, gamete intrafallopian- , zygote intrafallopian- , or tubal embryo transfer; fertility preservation or surrogacy. If a male or female service member was seriously ill or injured on active duty and has a lawful spouse, then he or she may be entitled to sperm or egg retrieval, in vitro fertilization, artificial insemination, or blastocyst implantation, and cryopreservation and storage of embryos (TRICARE, 2020). Marines have always been aware of racing against the biological clock while pursuing a full-time military career and of the age risks with respect to pregnancy, however, it can be a comfort to understand that support and services are increasingly available and free of cost to TRICARE beneficiaries. Concerns requiring future advocacy are affording AC Marines (and their AC spouses) sufficient limited duty status and Permissive Temporary Additional Duty (PTAD/TAD) when and while infertility treatment is ongoing.

Disorders related to eating and weight loss. Non-Hispanic White junior-ranked female Marines have the highest eating disorders rate. Thirty-eight percent of female Marine Corps recruits reported high body dissatisfaction and seventy-seven percent reported previous abnormal eating behaviors. Studies suggest that service members perceived stigmatization and the career-ending consequences such that eating disorder diagnosis goes underreported and underdiagnosed to a great extent. A “stuff your face” eating culture, strict service-specific physical fitness and body composition regulations, and the regimented lifestyle are all factors that contribute to eating disorders and disordered eating behaviors in the military. ADW, often resort to non-physician recommended

methods such as crash dieting, extreme exercising, and various alternative approaches (e.g., body wraps, sauna suits) (DHB, 2020).

Mental and Behavioral Health. “Mental health is characterized as a sense of well-being that stems from an awareness of one’s abilities and an ability to manage life stressors, function as an efficient employee, and contribute to one’s community (DHB, 2020, p. 102)”. ADW experience the following stressors: financial, ideological and spiritual, preventive care, nutritional, physical, psychological, and social domains and can accumulate to reduce resilience and mission accomplishment. “Gender differences in physical capabilities due to musculoskeletal injuries and pregnancy “may be extrapolated to devalue the abilities of ADW, undermining resilience to mental health conditions” (DHB, 2020). Sexual assault and sexual harassment are some of the most pressing and significant threats to mental health readiness (DHB, 2020).”

Pregnancy and Postpartum

Since the mid-1970s, women have been afforded the privilege of continuing to serve following a pregnancy diagnosis when previously the service discharged pregnant Marines to go home and be mothers. Still, the pregnant or postpartum Marine faces a surmountable set of situations and circumstances apart from those who are not. According to data from Marine Corps Manpower and Reserve Affairs, Manpower Military Policy Branch, as of 8 August 2020, 705 AC Marines were pregnant and 805 were postpartum. Of the total pregnant population, 9% were officers (139 with an average 12.1 service years); of those, 5% were company grade officers (with 7.5 average service years), 3% field grade (with 13.9 average service years), 1% warrant officers (with 14.9 average service years), and the remaining 91% were enlisted (A. Brannon, personal communication, Jan 5, 2021). That is approximately 21 pregnant AC field grade officers. Considering there are roughly 400 female AC field grade officers, 20 percent are pregnant at any given time. Since field grade officers are relied upon to serve in command and staff billets across the Marine Corps any detractor to those policy-enforcing and policy-writing positions can have severe impacts on the mission. Recent changes in policy for pregnant Marines and partners can be viewed positively or negatively, depending on one’s perspective and placement of value.

For one, the new policies have resulted in more leave, yet increased time away from the mission can negatively impact the unit, and progression of career skills. Marines were once entitled to six weeks of maternity leave. Now birth parents are entitled to 42 consecutive days of non-chargeable maternity convalescent leave, which can be followed by 42 more days of continuous absence, including weekends and holidays named “Primary Caregiver Leave (PCL)”. The Marine Corps updated

MCO 5000.12F Change 1, *Marine Corps Policy Concerning Parenthood and Pregnancy* signed effective 10 March 2021 with one very recent and very significant change. Post-partum Marines who were once required to meet physical fitness, physical appearance, and body composition standards no earlier than 6 months from the date of birth – later changed to 9 months – is now 12 months. Overall, these changes have afforded Marine mothers more time to bond and establish breastfeeding and other routines with their new babies, and more time for a gradual return to pre-pregnancy fitness in support of the mission. Yet there is a sentiment held by some in the Corps that pregnant Marines are dead-weight that must be moved out of the warehouse, for example, and to a desk-job leaving the unit to pick up the slack (MCOCL, 2018).

Second, there is a sentiment held by some that women get pregnant in order to get out of deployment (MCOCL, 2018). However, family planning remains tricky business as conception does not occur on-demand and likelihood wanes with age. Healthy women in their 20's have a 25% chance of conceiving each month, followed by 20% for healthy women over 30, and 5% for those over 40 years of age (ASRM, 2021). While this concept is held primarily by enlisted Marines who have nearer contact with the aforementioned 91 percent of all pregnant Marines who are also enlisted, not much is required for it to permeate the officer culture.

Pregnancy Discrimination. Recognizing the challenges of thoughts, words, and deeds, the DoD took a giant stride recently on codifying “pregnancy discrimination” within its *Equal Opportunity Policy*. Begun in the civilian establishment, the law now applies to the military and finally makes stigmatizing situations illegal with repercussions that hold servicemembers accountable.

Miscarriage and Stillbirth. The Marine Corps currently has no specific policy for the honorable and careful handling of Marines who miscarry, their grieving partners, and their physical recovery. The order on parenthood and pregnancy addresses miscarriage, yet states “the Marine’s commander and Health Care Provider will coordinate to determine the best course of action (HQMC, 2021b). For a commander who has been serving in command for two or less years, who is likely male, who may never have experienced personally or professionally this type of traumatic loss, he is greatly disserved by the eventual loose interpretation of this order as currently written. The health-care provider, as well, will only be as competent as their training and manuals allow. Additionally, TRICARE has been criticized for its definition and method when making a gestational age determination related to service coverages for the remains of the child, which led to increased trauma and financial loss (Sisbarro, 2020b). Simply put, the Marine Corps Order is lacking in this area and requires change.

Pregnancy Fitness. In March, 2020 the Marine Corps Training and Education Command (TECOM) published a *Pregnancy and Postpartum Physical Training Guidebook*. As a follow-on effort and in concert with the updated parenthood and pregnancy policies came the publishing of a shorter *Pregnancy and Postpartum Physical Training Handbook* in February 2021. The material was written for commanders, fitness instructors, and Marines to assist in planning an exercise regimen throughout pregnancy and the postpartum period (DHB, 2020, p. 66; HQMC, 2021). The program is self-guided and outlines components, like nutrition and physical activity modification, taken from national and international professional public health associations for pregnant ADW to maintain health and readiness. The purpose program is stated “to empower a pregnant or postpartum Marine to design her own PT regimen during this natural life event” (DHB, 2020, p. 66; HQMC, 2021).

Selection of OBGYN care, delivery and tricare coverage. The Marine Corps Order on parenthood and pregnancy states that “local MTFs shall designate the location for prenatal care and delivery upon confirmation of pregnancy. Marines shall consult a MTF prenatal HCP when out-of-hospital birth (e.g., freestanding birth center or homebirth) is desired. Consultation shall include discussion of the associated risks and benefits, as well as requirements for TRICARE coverage” (HQMC, 2021b). Where you will deliver usually depends on your TRICARE plan. This could be a: Military hospital ; Civilian hospital; Office-based or freestanding facility; Home birth. If you’re considering an in home birth: There are associated costs, referral, and prior authorization requirements. Contact your regional contractor for specific guidance (TRICARE, 2020).

Breastmilk and Breastfeeding Considerations. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends mothers exclusively breastfeed infants for six months (i.e., no supplementation of formula), then breastfeed for six months to a year while introducing solid foods, and then continue breastfeeding based on mother and infant preferences. Breastfeeding provides significant health benefits for infants and mothers especially after childbirth. Women who are breastfeeding experience faster weight loss, and reduced susceptibility to ovarian and breast cancers, diabetes, and coronary heart disease. Breastfeeding rates among ADW are below those of the general population. Mothers cite Returning to work is cited as a barrier to continued breastfeeding. As a means to the ability to continue breastfeeding while returning to work, the availability and financial coverage of a quality breast pump and supplies is paramount. The Affordable Care Act (ACA), signed into law in 2010, requires most health insurance plans to cover breastfeeding support and supplies. Since 1 July 2015, TRICARE covers breast pumps, breast pump supplies, and breastfeeding counseling at no cost per birth event, including mothers who adopt an infant and plan to breastfeed (TRICARE, 2020).

While access to supplies and health care support are available, timing and location of pumping breaks is still challenged and can be stigmatizing. According to the DHB, some military leaders incorrectly perceived that mothers taking breaks for pumping breast milk was a way to avoid work obligations (DHB, 2020, p. 82). The Marine Corps' policy states, "supervisors and ADW shall determine the minimum amount of time required for breastfeeding based on factors like amount of milk pumped and location of lactation rooms. ADW are provided a clean, private area that is not a restroom and has access to water" (DHB, 2020, p. 90). In comparison, the Navy policy specifies a recommended duration and frequency of 15-30 minutes every 3-4 hours, and the Army goes as far as to state that this is scaleable depending on the age of the child and should be allowed to endure at a minimum through the first year of life. The Marine Corps has always tended towards ensuring leaders have the latitude to lead and make decisions that "take care of Marines". However, without any more specific evidence-based guidelines in Marine Corps policy, the burden of informing the commander that even the basic requirements of a lactation room are inadequately met by the unit rests on a courageous female who is willing to advocate for herself and others. Standardizing the expected duration and frequency of breastfeeding and/or pumping breaks would help to fight stigma by providing a woman the back-up and basis of policy to have the often awkward conversation with her superior on how she plans to stay committed to her duties as both mother and Marine (MCOCL, 2018).

Postpartum Care and Return to Full Duty. To date, the time allowed for a Marine's postpartum recovery is very much constrained by the order unless directed by a doctor. Some argue that a postpartum Marine should be treated like a Marine with any other illnesses that requires a graduated vs. fixed recovery timeline (Sisbarro, 2021a). A new initiative called the "Artemis Program" on Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, California was launched on 4 February 2021. This program is a Navy-medicine and research-informed program that is tailored to where female Marines and Sailors are at in their career and where they are at in their prenatal and postpartum experience (Sisbarro, 2020b). The program's purpose is to sustain fitness and health during pregnancy for a Marine's readiness and the health of her baby and to assist her during recovery and get what she needs to recover readiness, operational peak potential, while all the while continuing to be the best mom she can be. The program includes organized workouts, sharing information and providing support; access to resources and education; and Artemis Mentors – other moms who have experience in being a warrior and a mother (Sisbarro, 2020b). This program has been addressing local issues of insufficient lactation areas and providing pelvic floor therapy and treatment for diastasis recti (the partial or complete separation of the midline abdominal muscles, which is very common

during and after pregnancy). Brigadier General Roberta “Bobbi” Shea, the Commanding General of 1st Marine Logistics Group, who was leading the roll-out of the program, explained that often commanders want to do the best by their Marines, but they may not always have the knowledge or resources at their disposal to connect the Marines with the support they should have. The program has been an effort to collaboratively align services that were already available, improve contacts and connections, and effectively speed to the need of the individual Marine and her unit.

Parental & Family Leave

The Marine Corps has made strides in providing parental and family leave entitlements that enable individualized accommodations and support the diversity of family situations, including custody concerns, single parents and blended families. However, there are certain disparities in policy and implementation that challenge individual female Marines and their families. Previously, only Marine females were granted maternity leave and servicemen were allowed to take paternity Permissive Temporary Additional Duty (PTAD). Under the latest *Marine Corps Policy Concerning Parenthood and Pregnancy*, two servicemember parents may decide which of them is primary or secondary caregiver, yet caregiver leave is often “use or lose”. If a Marine does not take the entire amount of authorized leave all at once, then they are not able to use a portion of it at a later date. “The implementation of flexible (noncontinuous) primary and secondary caregiver leave policies supports servicewomen’s needs by facilitating a greater balance of the demands of military service with parental responsibilities. Updating these policies will help improve women’s retention rates (DACOWITS, 2020, p.54).” While the DoD authorizes up to 21 days of Secondary Caregiver Leave (SCL), the Navy and Marine Corps only allow a maximum of 14 days. “The presence of these policy differences are highlighted to Service members in assignments to joint bases or organizations, where different Service policies may cause increased administrative and personnel conflicts and reduce morale for Sailors and Marines when compared with their Soldier, Airmen, and Coast Guard peers (DACOWITS, 2020, p.56).” The Committee has requested that the Navy and Marine Corps reconsider the current policy and seek to match the other services.

Childcare and Work-life

A U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) study of female active-duty servicemembers from fiscal year 2004 through 2018 found that the likelihood of separation was 28% higher for servicewomen than for servicemen. The GAO noted that access to quality child care was one of two major factors in that decision (GAO, 2020). One major driver influencing servicewomen’s decision to separate was the overall amount of time they spent away from their children due to extended work

hours or deployment. While this may be the nature of a military career, other childcare and work-life concerns can certainly be prevented, mitigated or improved. According to respondents in the GAO study, there is a demand for childcare development centers on military bases to ensure opening hours are compatible with varying work schedules; ensure consistent quality of care, and to be diligent about solving capacity issues to shorten waitlists. There exist concerns about the quality of care at on-base childcare development centers. The quality of employees is not consistent across installations and the centers primarily provide day-care but no structured educational activities in comparison to off-base options. Lastly, some female servicemembers cited problems setting up childcare with childcare development centers post-partum and still being wait-listed upon the end of their maternity leave (GAO, 2020). The 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps identifies the need to create more flexibility for Marine parents (Berger, 2019).

Finances

Women get the same pay as men in the USMC for the same job. Whereas in the civilian sector, that is not the case. Service members receive a pay raise almost annually to keep up with inflation rates. Other entitlements include Basic Allowance for Housing, Basic Allowance for Subsistence, Hazardous Duty Pay, Hostile Fire Pay for deployments to a combat zone and Temporary Additional Duty expenses for lodging and subsistence while assigned away from home for training.

The MDLC 2011 and the CMC are both proponent of bonuses and benefits to enhance retention of critical billets. They include, for example, Military occupational specialty signing bonuses (aviation pay; foreign language proficiency bonus). Another financial benefit that is also an education benefit is the Transfer of Educational Benefits program (new 9/11 GI Bill), where members can divide their tuition for a next higher degree among their lawful dependents.

Sexual assault/harassment

The Department of the Navy's Equal Opportunity policy is "to prohibit harassment and unlawful discrimination against persons or groups based on race, color, religion, sex (including gender identity), national origin, or sexual orientation. This applies to, but is not limited to, recruitment, recruitment advertising, training, advancement and promotion, job assignments, collateral duties, transfers, and all other aspects of employment (ODEI, 2021)." Unfortunately, there are still beliefs that women are not as well suited as men to hold a place in the Corps. In spite of rank, technological advances have allowed for women in the Marine Corps to be harassed at a new level, through

bullying on social media platforms. As lately as 10 March 2017, General Robert Neller, 37th Commandant of the Marine Corps, published White Letter 1-17 titled *Recent Conduct on Social Media* addressed to “All Commanding Generals, All Commanding Officers, All Officers-in-Charge, and All Senior Enlisted Leaders”. He described, “we have received reports that within our ranks we have Marines who attacked other Marines on social media...who have primarily been female.” Among the intrusions, photos of women, in or out of uniform, with or without their consent, were posted for comment. He of course, called the behavior “inappropriate, disrespectful, and in some cases criminal” then went on to say the problem can be overcome “if we address the behaviors and attitudes that caused these unacceptable actions in the first place.” Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault remain among the greatest factors that drive female Marines’ attrition (Morrall, 2015).

April is Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month. In his April 2021 message to all Marines, the Commandant stated “We are committing every day of the year to building environments where Marines can succeed, sustaining a culture where we respect each other, and supporting programs that promote the well-being of Marines and their families. Leaders at every level play a role in strengthening unit cohesion by modeling behaviors of mutual respect and acting as empathetic leaders who support and assist those who come forward or ask for help. This is the type of behavior that exemplifies our core values of honor, courage, and commitment. “Taking care of Marines” means vigorously enforcing our high standards. When we fail to hold the standard, we establish new lower standards. We are proud to support our Marines with resources...that will allow us to better understand the issues, assist our teammates, and know where to turn for help or information, 24 hours a day. Marines fight for right. I am committed to ensuring that all Marines are supported each and every day of the year” (Berger, 2021).

The Marine Corps has been working toward gender integration since the 1970s, but not as quickly as at the other services. The Marine Corps Force Integration Implementation Plan (MCFIP), including gender integration of USMC Recruit Training is ongoing, while all other services have been integrated for years (DACOWITS, 2020). Female recruits have been trained in a separate nearly all-female training battalion at Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, South Carolina for decades. On 16 December 2021, three female drill instructors became the first to graduate from Drill Instructor School at Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego, California where male recruits have trained non-integrated since its establishment over 100 years ago. As male and female recruits train closer together than ever before, it is possible gender integration could have a long-term positive effect on the problem of dehumanization leading to sexual harassment and sexual assault.

Military Occupational Specialty, Selection, Promotion & Assignment

If AC female Marine officers overcome any or all of these barriers to continued service long enough to see the 20-year mark and they are still eligible to retain and promote, is there anything stopping them from becoming a general officer (GO)?

The DoD and Congress were hopeful that elimination of the Combat Exclusion Policy effective 1 January 2016 would be the secret recipe for reaching an acceptable percentage of females in the force (GAO, 2020). The MLDC report of 2011 stated that “these policies constitute a structural barrier that prevents women from entering the tactical/operational career fields associated with promotion to flag/general officer grades from serving in career-enhancing assignments” (MLDC, 2011, p. 71). More poignent, “the U.S. Marine Corps’ lack of women in high-level leadership positions seemed to point to the DOD’s inclination to promote those serving in combat arms professions to general officer” (Waldrop, 2016).

However, following the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule (DGCAR) rescission, Women in Service Restriction Review (WISRR), and subsequent Marine Corps Force Integration Implementation Plan (MCFIP) only slightly over 300 female Marines earned a previously-restricted MOS since integration began in 2016. This number represents about one percent of female Marines writ large and 0.1 percent of AC Marines (A. Brannon, personal communication, Jan 5, 2021). It is therefore, no surprise that as a minority in these fields, female Marines still meet with equality challenges in this male-dominated, combat-focused culture. Yet the reality remains that regardless of gender, a Marine must be ready at all times to deploy to a combat zone. For the United States Marine Corps, being ‘ready’ means having the right people, at the right place, at the right time with the right education, training, and equipment.

Military Occupational Specialty. Female officers have faithfully and successfully served in support MOS such as administration, intelligence, supply, logistics, and communications since the beginning of their history in the ranks of the U.S. Marine Corps. However, possessing combat arms experience by serving in a combat arms field seems to be a limiting factor toward consideration for nomination to general officer. With a dull outlook for women to access into and retain in combat arms communities any time soon based upon current statistics, either the Corps will accept failure to diversify at the highest ranks or it must seek to shift structural and cultural norms to value and accept the abilities and capabilities of general officers who were instead groomed in the ground support occupational fields, yet who possess combat deployment experience.

Another Marine Corps career field – aviation – has a whole other set of challenges to promotion and retention for females that DACOWITS has recommended all services work to improve (DACOWITS, 2020). Engineering improvements to cockpits and gear in this field, for example, might pave the way for a few additional females to attain to the general officer ranks and even toward earning a fourth star. Historically, male aviators have been able to overcome this unwritten and unspoken combat arms hurdle toward general officership. The 35th Commandant of the Marine Corps, General James F. Amos, was the first Marine Corps aviator to serve as commandant. Active duty female Marine aviators are working to catch up in order to secure career-enhancing promotion opportunities because only since 1993 were they able to be assigned to combat aircraft and serve in the same capacities as their male counterparts (DACOWITS, 2020). Additionally, the Marine Corps must accommodate the anthropometrics of today’s United States female population to ensure opportunities are open to the broadest spectrum of candidates while preserving safety. For example, “previously, applicants shorter than 64 inches or taller than 77 inches required an accession waiver for aviation training, which affected approximately 44 percent of the U.S. female population between ages 20 and 29 and had been cited as a barrier to female accessions” (DACOWITS, 2020). Given these gender-based service restrictions, career-enhancing promotion opportunities for women aviators were, and still are, limited until time and technology overcome earlier barriers.

Promotion. Marines need a career progression system that allows all Marines to compete equitably. In an effort to remove unconscious gender bias, the Secretary of Defense directed in a 7 July 2020 memorandum the removal of photographs from consideration by promotion boards and selection processes pertaining to assignment, training, education, and command. This is good news for subsequent Performance Evaluations and boards that today’s female AC field grade officers will endure, however some studies show that females officers may have been at a disadvantage since the very beginning of their commission.

Lineal standing is a factor that affects promotability and thus retention through the higher field-grade ranks, which ultimately impacts competition in promotion to general officer. Men on the whole graduate The Basic School with higher lineal standing than females. Lineal standing is determined by two factors, the date of graduation from a commissioning source, and the class rank achieved through the graduation requirements at TBS. A 2018 CNA study on Force Quality and Female Talent Management concluded that:

“Each year, the Marine Corps screens about 2,000 officer candidates through its Officer Candidate School (OCS). More than half do not become commissioned officers; either they fail to complete OCS, or they subsequently fail to accept a commission. The attrition is worrisome. It is expensive both to recruit and to screen officer candidates. OCS attrition has

been especially high among female and minority candidates. The differential in attrition continues at the next phase of officer training, The Basic School (TBS). Although about 95 percent of students graduate from TBS, the average class rank of minorities and women is lower than that of white men...Understanding higher female OCS and TBS attrition rates can be viewed as the first step in the female talent management pipeline (Malone, 2018).

Legal requirements to become a GO include: 1) Command as an O-5 Lieutenant Colonel; 2) Command as an O-6 Colonel; and 3) Joint Qualification. While there are opportunities for female officers to assume command at the O-5 (Battalion/Squadron) and O-6 (Regiment/Group) levels, earning joint qualification has historically been a challenge for female Marines officers.

Education Opportunities

The 38th CMC has placed a high value on education and training and ensuring that the Corps is affording Marines education that is up to speed with the information age (Berger, 2019). The completion of Professional Military Education (PME) is a pre-requisite for promotion to almost every rank in the Marine Corps. Since the number of resident PME seats are limited, the remainder of officers not selected for these PME programs are obligated to complete a non-resident course while continuing to perform their daily duties including deployment if the opportunity is available. Juggling reading volumes of warfighting and joint literature, writing essays, and attending seminars, including weekend operational planning exercises with off-duty life can be nearly as challenging as voluntarily tackling a masters degree from a civilian institution. To this end, the Marine Corps University (MCU) has collaborated with accredited colleges and universities across the nation to help PME students obtain a masters degree by enrolling in a masters program and completing the remaining required credits to earn the full degree. Obtaining a masters degree can ease a separating or retiring Marine's transition from active duty to a civilian career with little change in standard of living. Furthermore, when the Marine Corps invests in a Marine by sending them to formal PME, it expects a return on that investment through a certain number of years of obligated service, thus it serves as a retention tool and a way to increase knowledge as Marines grow to be more senior in rank.

Diversity & Inclusion, Talent, and Mentoring

Diversity and Inclusion. The Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI 1020.05), on Diversity and Inclusion Management Program effective 9 September 2020 expressed a clear message:

The DoD Components will incorporate appropriate D&I messaging (e.g., talking points, briefing material, various forms of media) throughout recruiting, accession, assignments, retention, promotion, and other elements of human capital management programs. The D&I messaging will emphasize that: a. Personnel with diverse backgrounds, experiences, outlooks, and ways of thinking contribute to effective agility, a key component of DoD's

ability to adapt to constant changes in a dynamic, complex threat environment. b. The DoD can achieve greater strategic advantages against adversaries by leveraging the background and thought diversity of all personnel, and by creating an inclusive environment in which leaders value and encourage personnel to provide ideas necessary to drive innovation and mission success. c. A more diverse workforce, to include diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and expertise, enhances overall DoD culture and enables DoD to address complex global security challenges and achieve other mission requirements.

While the Marine Corps works to create its own policy, the DoDI stands as interim guidance to Marines and their commanders.

Talent. In his 4 March 2021 Memorandum for All Department of Defense Employees, Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III, outlined three priorities: defending the Nation, taking care of our people, and succeeding through team-work. His first task under the second priority is “Grow our Talent”. He states:

Our most critical asset as a Department is our people. We remain the preeminent fighting force in the world because of our personnel in and out of uniform, and I have never had more confidence in our ability to meet the security challenges of today and tomorrow. To maintain that advantage, we will build opportunities for growth and development in the Department, invest in training and education, and create new opportunities for advancement that drive promotion and retention for our total workforce – civilian and military. We will focus our efforts on building out a range of skills and capabilities among the workforce and removing barriers that limit our people from realizing their full potential as partners in the work of the DoD (Lloyd, 2021).

The Marine Corps has a Talent Management Oversight Directorate which was established by the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps (ACMC) in 2018 in his role as the Talent Management Officer. It provides insight and information to inform strategic talent management guidance; assess and recommend changes to policy and programs; and oversee implementation in order to optimize the Marines Corps ability to attract, develop, employ and retain the talent necessary to achieve its institutional and strategic objectives. Likewise, the Talent Management Executive Council leveraged the work of the Talent Management Task Force stood up. The TMEC provides executive oversight in support of the Commandant and serves as a catalyst for ensuring the Marine Corps attracts, retains, and develops Marines in order to increase warfighting readiness and maximize individual potential (ACMC, 2021).

Mentoring. The GAO cited lack of mentorship as a reason that women departed the service.

In closing, this review yielded a laundry list of committees, research institutes, and activist communities poised to supply statistics and recommendations to support change, which is

encouraging. This literature review provided a detailed look into many, yet certainly not all, factors that affect the retention, advancement and employment of women in the Marine Corps and the policies that drive them. The institution is historically slow to change. For all their decades of effort weighed against results and tasks yet to be accomplished, it is uncertain what changes will gain ground and which will stagnate. The literature unfortunately shows that the metaphorical labyrinth still exists even after major policy rescission in 2016. It is up to today's AC female field grade Marine Corps officers to espouse the strategies of those who have gone before: to settle for short term career goals; privilege their Marine identity; and possess a strong affinity with many of the Core Values in the Marine culture. In short, they can choose to dare greatly and be the change they desire to see.

3 Theory & Concepts

Colonel Waldrop's thesis, focused on structural, cultural, and personal barriers within a male-dominated, hierarchical, military organization which she likened to a labyrinth full of barriers that women must negotiate to attain to the general officer ranks. She analyzed many of the factors and concepts laid out in Alice H. Eagly and Linda L. Carli's work, *Through the Labyrinth: The Truth About How Women Become Leaders*, as a way to provide an explanation for how women leaders in the Marine Corps negotiate the barriers. Her focus was mainly on the success strategies of women and minority generals as agents within the organization. To that end, she explored identity theory and social identity theory to see how they applied to the eight female Marine Corps general officers she interviewed. Her conclusions tell us that the barriers are numerous, that women have used various strategies to succeed as leaders, and that they identify strongly with the organizational values because of the values they hold for themselves. As long as the organization continues to be male-dominated, all women will face barriers and some will find a way over or around them in order to retain and promote to the general officer ranks.

Since 2016, the U.S. President, Secretary of Defense, and the Commandant of the Marine Corps describe and recognize in their speeches, strategies, and policies that the rapidly changing and dynamic world and military operating environment identifies the need for removing barriers, managing talent, and promoting diversity and inclusion for the purpose of creating and innovating faster than our near-peer competitors. Therefore, I would like to take a closer look at what *organizational theory* says organizations must do in order to retain women given this current operating environment and what women can do, not only to thrive as people in an organization but

also to influence organizational change as it breaks through harmful *organizational culture* paradigms along their journey to higher-level leadership positions. To do this, I researched theories and concepts, and I repeatedly came across these factors: diversity and inclusion; talent and talent management; critical mass and tokens; culture, values and leadership. This chapter will explore these factors as they apply to organizational theory and identity theory as possible explanations for why women Marines, after over 75 years of faithful service to our Corps, still face barriers to continued service beyond the traditional challenges of military life. These factors are often intertwined, which may lead to challenges in interpretation and implementation of the very organizational policies and practices in which they are contained. However, I offer both organizational and identity theories to explain the lack of gender balance in the USMC leadership, since the reasons often can be multi-layered and overlapping.

3.1 Organizational Theory

Organizational theory consists of the many approaches to organizational analysis (Wikipedia, 2021). Organizations are social units comprised of people who are managed in such a way as to enable them to meet organizational needs, pursue collective goals, and adapt to a changing organizational environment (Wikipedia, 2021). The first concepts of organizational theory date back to earlier than 1400 B.C., have evolved, and continue to adapt as organizations are highly influenced by the environment within which they operate. In order for an organization to survive and succeed, it must change old practices and develop new. Significant components of organizational theory are organizational structure and organizational culture. For the purpose of this thesis, I will prioritize organizational culture since it is tightly knitted to organizational identity, which is of significant importance to Marines and the United States Marine Corps. Rosabeth Kanter recognizes that talk about value is fashionable in corporate circles, but for ‘the vanguard companies [she and her colleagues] studied, values truly are a primary consideration’ (Kanter, 2008; 44). Pfeffer argues that the traditional sources of success – product and process technology, access to regulated markets, economics of scale, etc. – matter less today than in the past, ‘leaving organizational culture and capabilities, derived from how people are managed, as comparatively more vital’ (Pfeffer, 1994, 6).

Maculinity vs. Femininity and Leadership. Organizations can be described as being masculine, or male-dominated, as well as feminine, or female-dominated and are heavily influenced by national cultures. Attributes that the U.S. culture associates with masculinity are: winning, emotional control, risk-taking, violence, dominance, playboy, self-reliance, primacy of work, power over women, disdain

for homosexuality, and pursuit of status. In comparison, attributes our culture associates with femininity are: being nice, pursuing a thin body ideal, showing modesty by not calling attention to one's talents or abilities, being domestic, caring for children, investing in a romantic relationship, keeping sexual intimacy contained within one committed relationship, and using their resources to invest in their appearance (Mahalik, J. R., Locke, B. D., Ludlow, L. H., Diemer, M. A., Scott, R. P., Gottfried, M., & Freitas, G., 2003). Alice H. Eagley and Linda L. Carli, co-authors of the book, *Through the Labyrinth: The truth about how women become leaders*, explain theories related to leadership and how males and females are perceived differently within organizations and how that affects their ability to lead. They break down leadership types into the categories of *agentic* and *communal*. Agentic leaders embody more of the masculine characteristics, while communal leaders' traits are more feminine (Eagley & Carli, 2007). There exists an unconscious yet very real bias that women, due to their natural communal characteristics, are not as well suited to high-level leadership positions that are believed to require agentic leadership. However, having moved on from the industrial era into the information and service age, more and more organizations are realizing that they need to shift from their previous paradigms of what traits effective leaders must possess and are actually leaning more toward embracing the communal traits (Eagley & Carli, 2007).

In 2000, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security reaffirmed "the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, and stressing the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution." The Resolution "urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict" (UNSC, 2000).

Following suit in ensuring a National Action Plan in support of the Resolution, President Trump signed the United States Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security in 2019 which directed implementation by key departments and agencies including the DoD. It also stated that the Plan would be linked to the National Security Strategy and other national strategic guidance on matters of peace and security, including the National Defense Strategy (NDS). Notably, the previously signed and standing 2018 NDS does not include the word *women* whatsoever. Neither does it include *diversity* nor *inclusion*. What it does include is *talent*. The amount of terms packed into the NDS statement on talent requires a bit of analysis:

“Cultivate workforce talent. Recruiting, developing, and retaining a high-quality military and civilian workforce is essential for warfighting success. Cultivating a lethal, agile force requires more than just new technologies and posture changes; it depends on the ability of our warfighters and the Department workforce to integrate new capabilities, adapt warfighting approaches, and change business practices to achieve mission success. The creativity and talent of the American warfighter is our greatest enduring strength, and one we do not take for granted” (NDS, 2018).

Recruiting, developing, and retaining speaks simply to the manpower management of any organization. Lethality and agility – the ability to kill and the ability to adapt to rapidly changing situations – are highly valued warfighting capabilities. The passage does not define talent or talent management, yet simply states that the American warfighter needs two things to ensure the nation stays strong: creativity and talent. It did say that “developing leaders who are competent in national-level decision-making requires broad revision of talent management among the Armed Services, including fellowships, civilian education, and assignments that increase understanding of interagency decision-making processes, as well as alliances and coalitions” (NDS, 2018). We are left to infer that talented people both exist in the workforce and in greater society and that their placement in key positions is important, but this strategy as written does not make the linkage to WPS. It does not include women specifically nor their role in maintaining peace or security as talented members of the military arm of the government. While we wait for the new administration’s NDS (possibly including WPS-supportive language), President Biden’s 24-page *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* mentions the word *women* twice, the word *inclusive* four times in reference to the type of economic growth he envisions, and the words *equality* and *diversity* each appear seven times (Biden, 2021). This is evidence that we may be on the verge of a historical turning point for women’s role in national security but only if the National guidance can filter its way down through the organizational culture of the U.S. military, and further, the U.S. Marine Corps.

The United States is not the only country in the NATO alliance struggling with implementation of WPS. In her doctoral thesis, *Gender Perspectives in the Armed Forces and Military Operations: An uphill battle*, Lieutenant Colonel Lena P. Kvarving of the Royal Norwegian Air Force explains that numerous factors have prevented the implementation of UNSCR 1325 by the Norwegian Government and Armed Forces. These factors include: a lack of structures, especially in the operative domain; a lack of conceptualization, leadership command and control, new policies and processes, and proper monitoring, reward, and discipline systems; and an organizational culture that is resistant to change and tolerates an unproductive status-based hierarchy, misleading reporting, and the ridicule of both gender issues and promoters of the agenda. On the other hand, she notes that

expertise, education, and funding promote WPS implementation but only when progressed by individual enthusiasts. Meanwhile, the Armed Forces are not held accountable for their continued failure to implement tasks extending from UNSCR 1325, which calls into question the Government's commitment to the agenda. Kvarving found that government officials made speeches which seemed to confirm their commitment to WPS yet simultaneously blamed the culture of the Armed Forces for poor progress in implementing WPS initiatives. However, neither has the Norwegian Government provided sufficient capacity and support for transformational change nor has it imposed any disciplinary consequences for a lack of implementation. Furthermore Kvarving writes that NATO gender experts indicated in interviews for the study that

“factors similar to those facing Norway have played a role in preventing and promoting implementation of the WPS agenda within the Alliance. Norway is celebrated internationally for providing financial support and individual expertise to other militaries, and is perceived as being more advanced in gender perspectives in the Armed Forces due to a generally egalitarian society, yet some interviewees described several Norwegian military officers in the NATO structure as extremely immature in their understanding of and attitude towards gender perspectives” (Kvarving, 2019).

Likewise, if the U.S. Government would itself take UNSCR 1345 more seriously and ensure American women and gender perspectives are included in the verbiage of authoritative strategic documents such as the NAP, NSS, and NDS, then perhaps implementation could at least find a foothold. The next challenge after admitting that American women, as nearly half the U.S. population, are indeed valued in the agenda to maintain a secure world and nation is to ensure that those who do dare “to support and defend the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic” are treated with dignity and respect, which is ultimately dependent upon organizational leadership and culture.

Critical mass. Critical mass is a scientific term derived from nuclear physics that when applied to psychology and sociology it describes the discrete point at which the presence of a sufficient number brings about qualitative improvement in conditions and accelerates the dynamic of change (Etzkowitz, Kemelgor, Neuschatz, Uzzi, & Alonzo, 1994, p. 51) When President Biden said “You cannot be what you cannot see” he was referring to the challenge women have in male-dominated organizations where the scientific sweet-spot of enough representation to realize organizational change has not yet been reached. Some evidence suggests that this social tipping point occurs when the minority group represents at least 15 percent of the dominant group (Kanter, 1993). Other studies have shown that a board room consisting of at least three women out of ten personnel, thirty percent, will change the group dynamic. If women in the Marine Corps want to even begin to see an acceleration in the change dynamic once critical mass is achieved, then we are only a little over half-

way there at eight percent. The lack of critical mass of women in the Marine Corps is one possible explanation for why women struggle to mass support and gain leverage in changing the structural, cultural, and personal barriers to their long-term retention.

When it comes to diversity and inclusion, focusing strategically and programatically on sheer numbers of representation, however, can be problematic as DoD policies recognize (DoD strategy on Diversity and Inclusion 2012) when leadership and culture tend to have a greater affect on change. How does an organization trying to diversify and include its personnel, especially women, get from where it is to where it wants to be? As Kvarving pointed out in her doctoral thesis, change in the absence of government or armed forces accountability is likely to be brought about by individual enthusiasts through expertise, education, and funding (Kvarving, 2019). Therefore, it is important for individual Marines to have a grip on the definitions, concepts, processes and expectations of such areas.

Diversity and Inclusion. Achieving a common understanding of the titles and terms included into such strategic plans makes implementation a challenge. The terms *diversity* and *inclusion* as well as *talent* and *talent management* frequently appear side by side, within the same paragraph, or are used to define or further describe one another within the literature where earlier and somewhat higher themes of *equality* and *equity* once existed or now co-exist. The 2011 Military Leadership Diversity Commission Final Report entitled *From Representation to Inclusion* noted this concern as equal opportunity was once associated with affirmative action (MLDC, 2011).

Diversity's definition is changing. In the DoD Diversity Strategic Plan published in 2012 and relevant through 2017, *diversity* is defined as the different characteristics and attributes of individuals (as defined in DoDD 1020.02). The document expands this definition to: all the different characteristics and attributes of the DoD's Total Force, which are consistent with our core values, integral to overall readiness and mission accomplishment, and reflective of the best of the Nation we serve. More than reaching an anticipated or acceptable percentage of minorities from greater society representative within an organization, achieving diversity requires an inclusive organizational culture. Deloitte University's definition of *inclusion* is "respect for and appreciation of differences in demographic characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, and/or non-demographic characteristics such as religion, education, experiences, communication style, or work habits" (Deloitte, 2017). Christie Smith, Managing Principal of the Deloitte University Leadership Center for Inclusion published in infogram on *The Radical Transformation of Diversity and*

Inclusion The Millennial Influence for Inclusion. Their 2015 survey found that the millennials are unique in viewing cognitive diversity as essential for an inclusive culture that supports engagement, empowerment, and authenticity. They also value inclusion not as an abstract ideal that checks a box and makes everyone feel good, but as a critical tool that enables business competitiveness and growth. As the millennials flood leadership ranks, their perspectives will demand a shift in traditional diversity and inclusion models. (Smith, 2015)”

Inclusive organizations. The social inclusion concept of sociology serves as a partial foundation for exploring the need for organizations to be inclusive. Many scholars have suggested that the humans need to seek inclusion and to avoid exclusion as a developmental trait essential for survival (Ainsworth, 1989). Others have approached inclusion and exclusion from a psychosocial and physiological perspective whereby they propose that the pain of social exclusion, separation, or rejection share many of the experiential attributes of forms of physical pain (Eisenberger & Lieberman, 2005; MacDonald & Leary, 2005). Furthermore, theorists Baumeister and Leary (1995) have posited a belongingness thesis, which suggests the need to belong is a fundamental human motivation. Like food and shelter, belongingness is held to be a foundational human need. It results in a general pattern whereby social inclusion is used to reward, and social exclusion to punish (Bernstein, Sacco, Young, Hugenberg, & Cook, 2010).

In an organizational setting, a 2017 study by Deloitte University researched the need for organizations to be inclusive in order to retain employees and members. Of approximately 1,300 full-time employees from a range of different sized organizations and industries across the United States, researchers surveyed respondents asking them what were the most important cultural aspects when choosing an organization to work for. They prioritized criteria that reflects the experience of an inclusive culture. The top three aspects cited were “An atmosphere where I feel comfortable being myself” (47%), “An environment that provides a sense of purpose, where I feel like I make an impact” (39%), and “A place where work flexibility (parental leave, ability to work remotely, flexible scheduling, etc.) is provided as a top priority” (36%). (Deloitte, 2017). While flexibility is an element that is starting to be addressed by the U.S. Marine Corps as noted in the Programs and Policies section of the Literature Review, individual aspects of *belonging* are yet another matter and will be further discussed later in this chapter.

Historically, according to the late Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak, USMC, Marines have a fierce loyalty to the Corps “that persists long after the uniform is in mothballs. . . Woven through that sense

of belonging, like a steel thread, is an elitist spirit. Marines are convinced that, being few in number, they are selective, better, and, above all, different (Krulak, 1984)."

Talent and Talent Management. The phrase "talent management" was coined in a 1997 McKinsey study and again in a 2001 book called *The War for Talent* (Michaels, Handfield-Jones, Axelrod, 2001). While at the start, talent management is a competition in the practices of recruiting, the other side of retention practices is arguably just as vital (O'Reilly & Pfeffer, 2000). Around 2006, the term became commonly used in the military and the meaning has stretched from that of retention policies for top employees to personnel policies broadly. Analysis has been conducted using a Leadership/Talent Management matrix that examines two both elements in concert with one another. Categories in the leadership cultural dimension are independence, development, purpose, values, and adaptability. In contrast, the talent management categories are training, job-matching, promotions, compensation, and evaluations (Kane, 2017).

As far as the Marine Corps is concerned, talent management refers mostly to manpower management with a severe focus on having the right people, with the right training, equipment, and education; at the right place, at the right time to ensure the Marine Corps is ready to fight and win battles at a moment's notice (Berger, 2018). It is up to the organization to screen for the talent they want and both recruit it or retain it. For those who are already in the organization, it must be assumed that he or she has at least one talent, if not several, that initially made them eligible for recruitment and now makes them worth retaining. As concerned as they are with organizational elements of leadership and culture, these individuals are very preoccupied with the talent managerial processes I listed above.

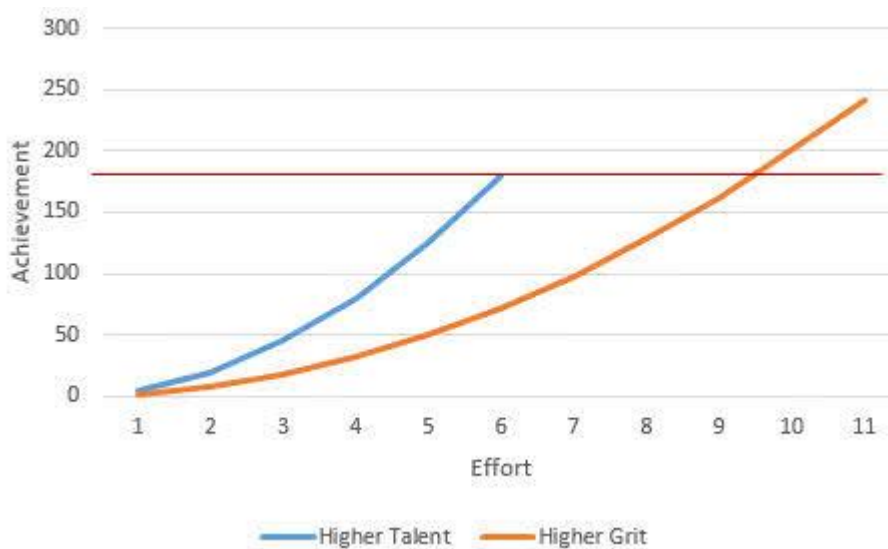
According to the research of pioneering psychologist, Angela Duckworth, institutions can be distracted by talent. She defines *talent* as the rate at which one's skills improve with effort (Duckworth, 2016). She interviewed dozens of high-achievers in business, art, athletics, journalism, academia, medicine, and law and their many achievements over time. No matter the domain, these people were resilient and hard working and had a very deep sense of what they wanted. They had both determination and direction over a long period of time, in other words a combination of passion and perseverance, which is a character trait she calls *grit*.

In Duckworth's formula for high achievement, effort matters twice as much as talent. Here is the central model on why effort matters so much:

talent x effort = skill
skill x effort = achievement

In theory, this means that someone of lower talent (“the striver”) can catch up in skill level by applying effort. Likewise, someone of lower talent (“the striver”) can reach the same skill level but achieve more over time by applying the skill with more effort. Third, someone of higher talent (“the natural”) can achieve less by putting in less effort.

Table 1. Natural vs. Striver



I mention this here for the sake of the self-identifying hard worker who is getting tired of leaders talking so much about talent. Whether these personnel are “the natural” or “the striver”, grit can grow, and individuals can be encouraged and inspired by leaders and mentors who recognize their talents and potential to have a *growth mindset* (Duckworth, 2016).

Marines, in fact, are taught and memorize Leadership Principle #1: “Know yourself, and seek self-improvement” (MCWP 6-11, 2002). This leadership principle is all about understanding who, what, and where you are and focusing forward. The Marine Corps manpower system is certainly an ‘up or out’ system, meaning that if a Marine does not promote, then he or she is likely not to retain unless a retention board consisting of senior Marine leaders determine that one possess skills or talents that the organization cannot afford to lose. The nature of the model, severely impacts those who are not promoted, especially at the highly competitive field grade ranks and all but ensures that they will not retain for too many months or years after a second pass on the annual promotion selection board. There are also so many timing, mission and budget factors at play. Likewise, personnel experience performance peak and lull sine curves due to real-life reasons (such as women Marines who

experience operational disruption due to pregnancy, post-partum and breastfeeding or Marines who suffer an injury). Due to all these factors, it is hard to determine whether those non-selects were any less talented or gritty than those who were selected. The Marine Corps performance evaluation system, promotion and command selection process, and billet assignment processes are not flawlessly synchronized to produce the perfect result and are under constant scrutiny calling for structural improvement. In the words of the 38th CMC, “the Service does not have the tools needed to recruit the skills it wants, retain specific talents, advance Marines more quickly based on need, and separate Marines who cannot perform or are not compatible with military service. These deficiencies are related to budget, policy, and law” (Berger, 2018). Duckworth’s grit concept provides an alternative; that an organization’s talent management goal should not really be hyperfocused on talent, rather more on retaining those who are passionate about the skills they have that interest them and who persevere towards achievement over the long haul.

Organizational Culture. Theoretical viewpoints on culture and organizational practice are diverse. However, they tend to share some of the same assumptions: they are related to history and traditions; they have some depth, are difficult to grasp and account for, and must be interpreted; they are collective and shared by members of groups; they are primarily ideational in character, having to do with meanings, understandings, beliefs, knowledge and other intangibles; they are holistic, intersubjective and emotional rather than strictly rational and analytical (Hofstede et al., 1990)

Culture theorist, Edgar H. Schein, defines culture as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions, invented, discovered, or developed by a given group, as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, is to be taught to new members of the group as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (Schein, 1991). In short, “Culture is the way we do things around here” (Deal & Kennedy, 2000).

Brené Brown, PH.D., LMSW, is a research professor at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work. In her book, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* published in 2010 she discusses how she has witnessed major shifts in America’s zeitgeist:

The world has never been an easy place, but the past decade has been traumatic for so many people that it’s made changes in our culture. From 9/11, multiple wars, and the recession, to catastrophic natural disasters and the increase in random violence and school shootings,

we've survived and are surviving events that have torn at our sense of safety with such force that we've experienced them as trauma even if we weren't directly involved (Brown, 2012, p. 12).

Then, add in the COVID-19 pandemic and the number of unemployed and underemployed. She claims that "scarcity is our culture's version of post-traumatic stress...when we've been through too much and rather than coming together to heal...we're angry and scared and at each other's throats" (Brown, 2012, p.27). In her work, she sees the evidence of scarcity's formula of shame, comparison, and disengagement in family, school, work, and community cultures. Brown writes that many people still believe that shame is a good tool for keeping people in line. Shame is highly correlated with addiction, violence, depression, eating disorders, and bullying. Disengagement is the opposite of connection. In order to find out if one's organization is suffering from these cultural symptoms she recommends asking these questions:

1. Shame: Is fear of ridicule and belittling used to manage people and/or to keep people in line? Is self-worth tied to achievement, productivity, or compliance? Are blaming and finger-pointing norms? Are put-downs and name-calling rampant? What about favoritism? Is perfectionism an issue?
2. Comparison: Healthy competition can be beneficial, but is there constant overt or covert comparing and ranking? Has creativity been suffocated? Are people held to one narrow standard rather than acknowledged for their unique gifts and contributions? Is there an ideal way of being or one form of talent that is used as measurement of everyone else's worth?
3. Disengagement: Are people afraid to take risks or try new things? Is it easier to stay quiet than to share stories, experiences, and ideas? Does it feel as if no one is really paying attention or listening? Is everyone struggling to be seen and heard? (Brown, 2012, p.28)

If the answer is "yes" to any one or a portion of these, then changing it requires awareness, commitment, and work on a daily basis. We are called to "dare greatly" whenever the social climate of scarcity rears its head.

I offer Brown's *shame resilience* concept as an explanation for why some women stay and succeed in the Marine Corps, yet also why shame and the loss of resilience may perhaps cause more to leave. In her experiences as a shame and vulnerability researcher, Brené Brown has discovered the antidote to scarcity, which she calls "wholeheartedness". At the core of wholeheartedness is vulnerability and worthiness: that when facing *uncertainty*, *exposure* and *emotional risks*, one can say "I know I am enough". First, people who practice whole-heartedness are able to break the shame cycle. Brown's definition of shame is "the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love, belonging, and connection" (Brown, 2018, p.126). Second, *vulnerability* is the emotion we experience when we encounter uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure. It is

neither winning nor losing, yet the courage to show up when we cannot control the outcome. Vulnerability is not weakness. In fact, courageous acts can only occur in the presence of vulnerability. Courage is one of the U.S. Marine Corps' Core Values alongside Honor and Commitment (MCWP 6-11, 2002). Finally, *trust* and vulnerability grow together. Brown's visual of trust is the stacking and layering of small moments and reciprocal vulnerability over time; they grow together, so to betray one is to destroy both (Brown, 2012, p. 34).

Brown explains her theory that disengagement is the issue underlying the majority of problems in families, schools, communities, and organizations. She identifies a value gap in the space between an organization's practiced values (what its people are actually doing, thinking, and feeling) and its aspirational values (what we say we do, think and feel). This she names "the disengagement divide". "It's where we lose our employees, our clients, our students, our teachers, our congregations and even our own children (Brown, 2012, p. 177)."

Brené Brown defines a leader as "anyone who takes responsibility for finding the potential in people and processes and has the courage to develop that potential" (Brown, 2012). She inspires leaders to be vulnerable, whole-hearted and show empathy. Brown writes "empathy is connection; it is a ladder out of the shame hole...Empathy is a strange and powerful thing. There is no script. There is no right way or wrong way to do it. It is simply listening, holding space, with-holding judgement, emotionally connecting, and communicating that incredibly healing message of 'You're not alone'." Her response to leaders who think "Who has the time?": Leaders must either invest a reasonable amount of time attending to fears and feelings, or squander an unreasonable amount of time trying to manage ineffective and unproductive behavior (Brown, 2018, p. 67).

For example, the Marine Corps as an organization has plenty of accounts from previous wars and conflicts where its values of honor, courage, and commitment as well as innovation and creativity made all the difference in coming out of a battle bloody yet victorious. In the uncertain and risky operating environment of today, it leans heavily on its traditions and culture to inspire Marines to uphold espoused values. Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 6-11, *Leading Marines*, addresses how to lead Marines away from the shaming and stifling behavior of perfectionism toward innovation and creativity:

"The essence of loyalty is the courage to propose the unpopular, coupled with a determination to obey, no matter how distasteful the ultimate decision. And the essence of leadership is the ability to inspire such behavior... to promote innovation and creativity... first, leaders should make it their duty to bring subordinates' ideas and criticisms to the surface

where all may analyze and evaluate them. Ask for ideas and you will get them. Second, leaders must clear a path to their doorstep. Subordinates should use the chain of command, but ideas must rise to the top. Leaders must allow subordinates the opportunity to show initiative. Third, because innovation is imprecise and because subordinates, especially junior ones, will make mistakes, protect them. "Zero defects" are not a standard of measurement. They do not encourage initiative; they stifle it. Lastly, emphasize that you expect honest expression of the subordinate's best thinking. Do not tolerate patronizing behavior. "If we wish to think clearly, we must cease imitating; if we wish to cease imitating, we must make use of our imagination. We must train ourselves for the unexpected in place of training others for the cut and dried. Audacity, and not caution, must be our watchword." 2 (MCWP 6-11, 2002)

In organizations full of living breathing human beings, there is always room for improvement. Brown's research and experience show that slogans are easy, yet behaviors to support the slogans are not. She writes that in organizations where emotion and vulnerability are seen as liabilities, the organizational culture or individual leaders prefer to armor up with perfectionism, emotional stoicism, false compartmentalizing of our lives and our work, and ease and comfort over tough, awkward conversations. They value all-knowing more than learning and curiosity.

How well Marine Corps leaders can epitomize these expectations within the budget, manpower, and time scarcity of today's world will make the difference between winning and losing the great power competition. Whether talented and diverse Marines identify with the organizational cultural values and dare greatly through vulnerability in a world of competing interests will be of great importance to the continued successes of their families, the Marine Corps, the DoD, and the Nation as organizations.

3.2 Organizational Identity and Self-Identity

In sociology, identity is often defined in terms of certain key characteristics indicating how an institution, a social group or an individual understands itself (Albert & Whetten, 1985). This view implies there is a core representing how an organization, organizational unit, group or individual defines itself. Identity represents the form by which organizational members define themselves as a social group in relation to their external environment, and how they understand themselves to be different from their competitors (Haslam, 2004). There is emphasis on distinction, which downplays the commonalities among all organizations or groups. It therefore, elevates what is viewed as unique, significant and coherent. When this happens, the organization is viewed favorably and affiliation with the organization is viewed positively. "As the object of belonging and commitment organizational identity provides cognitive and emotional foundation on which organizational

members build attachment and with which they create meaningful relationships with their organization” (Hatch and Schultz, 2000; 16)

Within organization studies the concept of identity is used also in referring to social identity and self-identity. *Social identity* means that a person or a group uses a social category (group) to define themselves. Individuals define themselves as professionals, for example, or as a member of a nation. Organizational identity and self-identity find a direct linkage when people refer to their own organizational membership by saying: ‘I am a Marine,’ for example. One associates oneself and the other members of the organization as «us» who stand out against «them» the other members of the other organization(s). The organization, therefore, forms a strong input to the definition of the social category the individual uses for definition (Alvesson, 2012).

Self-identity refers to how the individual views themselves as an individual and what is distinct and important in terms of a sense of self. Self-identity seeks to answer the questions ‘who am I and what is important for me?’ Self-identity typically includes elements of social identities, as well as other elements, and gives the social categories a richer individual meaning. Organizational members, in turn, develop and express their self-concepts within the organization and the organization becomes developed and expressed through its members’ self-concepts. Therefore, organizational identity, can both answer the questions ‘who are we?’ as organizational members as well as ‘who am I?’ as an individual (Gioia and Thomas, 1996). As an organizational member identifies with the organization, he or she begins to affiliate with a social category and thereby enters into depersonalization. Depersonalization is the use of social categories for self-description, de-emphasizing individual uniqueness, which is a key aspect of social identity theory (Haslam, 2004; Hogg and Terry, 2000). Often depersonalization only partially describes the situation of an individual sense of self at work. Further, organizational belongingness becomes a factor in one’s development of self-identity which can sometimes involve positive identification and/or other, more complex choices, such as disidentification, ambivalence, and constructing the organization as a source for identification in multiple and shifting ways (Ashcraft and Alvesson, 2011; Pratt, 2000). A person can define other parts of the organization in less favorable terms while their own unit has positive qualities, such that responses to questions of self-identity at work can be muddled because a person can define their unit using positive qualities while defining other parts of the organization less favorably. These responses are closely related to organizational cultures manifested as practices, beliefs, values and meanings characterizing the organizations, and they tend to come ‘with a strong personal touch’ (Alvesson, 2011). The linkage between organizational identity and self-identity in a social identity

context can further explain why Marines, who identify strongly with the organization as a matter of shared personal and organizational cultural values may find it difficult to privilege or strike a balance between other identities and also find success in the other organizations they socially identify with, such as identifying as a mother or wife within a family structure.

This identity crisis is perhaps partially addressed in the concept of **tokens**. In the mid-1970s, social theorist Rosabeth Moss Kanter conducted a widely cited case study of an American corporation whereby she identified three major factors that condition work behavior. One of the factors, *relative number*, is the most famous and simply implies that numerical distribution has a major influence on the social experiences of the group. She named these members of a sub-group who make up equal to or less than 15 percent of the whole, *tokens*. Women as *tokens* in male-dominated organizations, for example, experience three elements of tokenism: *visibility*, *contrast*, and *assimilation* and have to decide how they will cope. *Visibility* is the condition when Women become a novel perceptual element where their every move is noticed. They can become “symbols of how women-can-do, stand-ins for all women” (Kanter, 1993, p.207). Additionally, “the token does not have to work hard to have her presence noticed, (yet)...she does have to work hard to have her achievements noticed” (Kanter, 1993, p.216). This is because the men she works with point out the *contrast* between themselves as dominants and women as the visible minority by highlighting their own positive experiences and successes. Tokens begin to feel alienated and isolated and they learn that they interrupt in-group activities. Given this situation, they have two choices: either to accept isolation or to become themselves dominants. This process undervalues the women minority as leaders. Women are then caught up in a dilemma to either *assimilate* and succumb to “role-encapsulation” (Kanter, 1977, p. 980) where they take on the dominant leadership characteristics or to remain passive and undervalued. Ironically, in the assimilation process, women lose their characteristics, which eventually results in lowered status in the group.

Instead of assimilating into the group by becoming dominant or accepting being undervalued, there is a third option posed by other identity theorists – *resistance*. “A woman executive can identify with feminist language that is far from commonplace in corporate life and challenges the very foundations of the corporation in which she holds office. She can also be loyal to her corporation, earnestly engaged by many of its practices and issues, and committed to a career in a traditional, male-dominated organization or profession” (Meyerson & Scully, 1995). The cost of being a so-called *tempered radical* is living in the margin, with ambivalence, and being frustrated from time to time due to the internal power struggle between one’s own personal and professional identities while

trying to stay true to one's own values. I offer this theory as an explanation for some women officers who remain in the Marine Corps. Even though they may face identity crises from time to time due to the culture and structure of the organization, they still believe in themselves and believe in the organization and desire success for both. They, therefore, commit themselves, often experiencing the hardship and sacrifice of pursuing improvement of themselves as agents, while working to reduce or remove organizational barriers for the greater communal good.

In summary of the organizational theories and concepts and identity theories and concepts described, I offer that the women who negotiated the labyrinth and attained to the general officer ranks in the Marine Corps were tokens, a very small visible percentage of the larger male-dominants navigating a male-dominated structure and culture. In summary of the identity theories and concepts, these same women had to make a choice about how they would behave as leaders. At various times, they had to choose to either assimilate, stand out, or temper their radicalism in order to remain in the organization and to change the organization's structure and culture from within. They were talented and gritty, as well as properly managed by the Marine Corps manpower management system. It is extremely challenging, therefore, for women to wrestle with their identities while reacting to pressures posed by the Marine Corps structure – manifested in its strategies, policies, and procedures – and its culture – held up by its core values. The question is where do we lose the rest? Is there any one specific or set of character traits or values possessed by those women who have navigated and are still negotiating the metaphoric barriers to their optimal performance who nonetheless decide to continue past the 20-year mark? Might these attributes be developed in those women who are worn down by the struggle to overcome barriers and therefore believe that the sacrifice of sticking around has become too great and the reward of achieving general officer level leadership positions too little?

The next section will describe how I sought to understand the structural, cultural and personal barriers to continued service and the strategies active duty female field grade officers use to navigate them through the lenses of diversity and inclusion; talent and talent management; critical mass and tokens; culture, vulnerability and the values gap.

4 Methodology

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper insight into the retention decisions of female field grade officers to continue serving in the active component of the U.S. Marine Corps beyond 20 years when

they otherwise could have retired. There are three types of research approaches: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I have chosen the qualitative approach because it most closely aligns with the transformative worldview of the researcher and of the research topic chosen. In this chapter I will explain how and why I selected a research method, how and why I conducted a literature review, and how and why I selected research participants and what I did to ensure their ethical treatment.

4.1 Qualitative Method

I have chosen a qualitative approach where I have carried out a literature review of previous research on successful women in high levels of leadership within hierarchical, male-dominated career fields, and the military in particular, and I interviewed six female field grade officers. In being introduced to the scientific method as part of the masters curricula and becoming aware of three main types of research – quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods – I weighed my skills and strengths against my selected theme of research and problem statement. An initial search for background information on the theme of women in hierarchical, male-dominated organizations yielded a vast amount of complex information and varying ideas and opinions. It was necessary to narrow the scope by understanding women in hierarchical, male-dominated, *military* organizations, specifically my organization, the United States Marine Corps. Even so, I found the idea of personnel retention complex and that the decision for women to retain was highly personal and dependent on many variables, a combination of factors in time and space. I decided that the best way to understand these women was for my research to embody some basic characteristics of qualitative research. For example, I would observe them in their natural setting with myself, the researcher, as the key instrument. In this qualitative design, a researcher uses a protocol, gathers information from multiple sources of data, makes sense of it, and organizes it into themes that cut across all of the data sources (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To me, this was going to be a far more effective method for my problem set than relying on a questionnaire and a limited data scope from which to conclude anything concrete using a quantitative design. First, I was going to need to make myself aware of what types of challenges and privileges these women encountered, in order to ask them in greater depth how they experienced, felt, thought, and acted.

4.1.1 Qualitative Literature Review

To gain a better understanding of the empirical context and previous research, I chose to conduct a literature review. Several constraints challenged my ability to access references or reference types in the manner I would have preferred or originally anticipated. In deciding to take on writing a masters thesis in Norway, I had not considered my physical distance from the Marine Corps University and Gray Research Center located on board Marine Corps Base, Quantico. At first, I was satisfied with the ability to access the library at the Norwegian Defense University College in center city, Oslo, and we the students, had access to the online library and all of its links to external search engines and journals. However, several waves of COVID-19 prevented in-person visitation of libraries. Additionally, after the Norwegian Defense Department moved to make their network more secure, students lost access to the online library via their school issued laptops. These two main challenges resulted in mostly home-office work with internet connection as the most accessible resource.

Nevertheless, I already possessed several books by highly successful civilian women about leadership and how to achieve success in hierarchical, male-dominated career fields. Additionally, an internet search of online libraries and journals resulted in over 50 reports, articles, more books, and other masters and doctoral theses on this theme. As I have highlighted in previous chapters, one of my earliest finds in the literature review was Colonel Waldrop's thesis on the women Marine General Officers through 2016. That study explained key elements and ideas which guided my curiosity and influenced my search for further related sources. An early in-person meeting with my advisor helped to shape my research questions and was followed up by encouragement to review her doctoral thesis within the same theme of my proposed work and recommended readings attached to email correspondence. Likewise, an early video call with Colonel Waldrop and a phone call with Colonel Emily Swain, both retired Marine officers, helped narrow down some of the areas and topics I intended to research in the conduct of the literature review. They also got curious and have forwarded interesting written works, titles, and links to YouTube videos and TED-Talks, to my email account. In the end, I had what I felt was a solid basis for understanding the issues, barriers, and challenges that career women face and suggestions of strategies to overcome them as well as how organizations handle retention.

4.1.2 Qualitative Interview

To a greater extent than in other professions, defense personnel are shaped into a system, culture and society such that they and their narratives must be understood in connection with the context in which they are in (Jacobsen, 2015). Through in-depth interviews with female senior officers, one can identify commonalities within what has influenced their career choices (Jacobsen, 2015). In order to

understand the factors affecting the retention of female field grade officers beyond 20 years time in service, it would be important to uncover how they experience and interpret their careers in the social context. One can uncover experiences and interpretations through the study of the informants' own actions and by using their own words (Jacobsen, 2015). An interview will create an understanding of and take into account the context to a greater extent than in a survey (Jacobsen, 2015).

4.1.3 Participant and Site Selection

The informants were selected on the basis of their identification as women, who have achieved the rank of major, lieutenant colonel, or colonel, who have served 20 or more years in the U.S. Marine Corps and are still serving in the active component. No specific delineation was made regarding marital or parental statuses, yet I was welcoming and interested in the nuances in responses between all respondents depending somewhat on their variances in these categories. That is to say, I was interested in how the factors of single versus married life and the presence or lack of the need to care for additional legal dependents impacts one's decision to retain in the organization; however, I did not necessarily want to dictate that I would select "a colonel, married with two children". Instead, I would let participation of all social types of informants truly avail itself in a purely voluntary fashion without placing such extreme demands on meeting a particular social scenario. In this way, I hoped that the results, regardless of the social mix would remain flexible and become part of the overall finds and information gained by the end of the study. Likewise, I sought to select Marines in varying military occupational specialties (MOS). By nature of how we people tend to build networks within their familiar work settings, I have a large network of Marine Corps Manpower Officer (MOS 0102), especially women 0102s. I was more interested in understanding women working in other MOSs to see if their perspectives differ or to draw similarities, or ultimately to see how MOS may impact retention decisions.

The above criteria limit the population of a small group of female officers in the Marine Corps (n<410). The sample consists of six women who represent evenly the field grade officer ranks; two majors, two lieutenant colonels, and two colonels. The women are on average 45 years old and have an average of 25 years of service in the Marine Corps. To anonymize my informants, they were given numbers according to the order in which they were interviewed.

The interview would reveal the female officers' narratives, where they would likely recount their career while the researcher listens and asks for detail where needed. It is appropriate to have a face-

to-face interview to create a relationship to achieve trust and transparency in the interview (Jacobsen, 2015). In this case, given the geographic separation, multiple timezones, variances in video chat platforms and security, and responsibilities and schedules between myself and these likely senior-ranking respondents, I offered each one the option to either use one of these platforms or telephone to ensure they were most comfortable. In lieu of being able to meet physically, in person, the ability to talk face-to-face over one of these video chat platforms would have been a next-best option. However, the test I conducted revealed some significant delays in internet connectivity between my location and the location of the test subject when testing my interview guide. The interruptions served to be rather distracting. Therefore, I established a rather military habit of ensuring the respondent and I had both a primary and secondary means of communication. If the first was to be video chat and failed, then the secondary was to be telephone. If the telephone was primary and failed, then a second telephone number was established. They could have my number available and dial me, for example, from any other phone or application. All except one decided that they were most comfortable simply talking over the telephone. That interview was conducted via video chat.

Prior to the interview, the interviewees were presented with the objective of the study through the information letter (Appendix A) and the consent form (Appendix B). The meetings were preceded by social talk, mostly the informants' curiosities about my rare opportunities as a Marine officer in Norway and me asking about where in the world they were sitting. I had not previously been acquainted with any of the informants prior to my initial contact with them. The first few were recommended to me by Marine Corps colleagues, and the remainder contacted me to volunteer as a result of me discussing my research work with other colleagues. Therefore, it was greatly important that I put the informants into a relationship of respect and trust in order to obtain a significant depth of data for the sake of this research. When the initial small talk was over, I again explained the purpose of my research and again verified the nature of their participation as detailed in their comprehension of the consent form provided to them (Appendix B). Assured of their verbal consent, I began the questioning. As a stringent measure of confidentiality for these informants, the interviews were not recorded. The interviews lasted about one and a half to two hours. The interviews were semi-structured. The opening question was time in service, followed immediately by what factors affected their retention decision past 20 years time in service and when that decision was made; two open-ended questions that would prompt them to recall their own career history and deliberate choices. Then more detailed, yet still open-ended, questions were asked in an attempt to

highlight the impact of certain themes, programs and policies, theories and concepts on their experiences.

To keep the interviews organized and in an expectation of obtaining comparable and contrastable responses to particular themes, I used an interview guide (Appendix C). Having a guide allowed me to have a set of questions to ask if officers did not discuss these topics within their response to the first two general questions. The final questions to the interview guide were again broad and helped to close the interview. I asked them what advice they would give to other women officers aspiring to be retained and promoted and if there was anything else they would like to add. I thanked them for their time and for sharing, wished them well in their futures and hung up the call.

4.2 Confidentiality

It was extremely important to me that the data of the respondents would be collected in a manner ensuring not only their privacy but that the results would be compiled in a manner to maintain confidentiality as well. I believed that the depth of sharing could not be reached in the extent comparable to Colonel Waldrop's case studies and cross-case analysis of the women Marine General Officers because the officers I intended to interview are still actively serving and find themselves in stiff competition for selection and promotion. Because bias is a live and well in human nature, if is also in the organization. Regardless of gender, case studies of these officers including every detail of and even traceable facts that cause them to be re-identified could be harmful to them and their careers. I considered it my duty to present mostly opinions and to keep facts regarding experiences as commonly identifiable as possible. For example, all Marine Officers experience time in the rank of second or first lieutenant. Therefore, I can discuss a woman Marine Officer's time in the fleet as a lieutenant. However, including the year or specific duty station provides enough data for the officer to be identified, and these were the mistakes I have attempted to avoid, while still shining a light on how it was to be a woman lieutenant in the fleet a decade or two ago and how this might have shaped where they are today.

To maintain confidentiality, I made sure that the respondents understood how I planned to collect and use the data by ensuring their understanding of Appendix B by referring to it at the start and finish of the interview. Second, I kept my typed notes as non-descript as possible. When a respondent provided a proper name, I wrote "[person], [place], or [unit]" to avoid documenting that information, lest it work its way into the reported data. Third, the women were sent their quotes

and career accounts for review, to ensure they were interpreted correctly and reminded that they could withdraw at any time.

4.2.1 Ethical Dilemmas

As an member of the United States Marine Corps, I am influenced by the organization's culture and attitudes, in addition to as a woman, I holds opinions on women's position in the Corps. Since the start of this thesis, I have been moderately active in the Marine Women Initiative Team (WIT), a network for AC Marine Corps women officers seeking organizational change through improvements to policy and practices. Many of the areas explored in the literature review and through the interview process are being explored by DACOWITS and the WIT, among other formal and informal organizations and networks that monitor women's position in the services. These facts may call into question my independence as a researcher, perceptions of the interviewees, and the necessary critical distance to the thesis a researcher should have.

On the other hand, my subjectivity, if consciously monitored and managed, does not have to be absolutely avoided. University professor and author in the field of qualitative research, Alan Peshkin (1988) argued that "by monitoring myself, I can create an illuminating, empowering personal statement that attunes me to where self and subject are intertwined." It is quite possible that my positionality as one among them influenced the informants' openness, in that they were more willing to trust and be vulnerable, to share what they really experienced, felt, thought, and did in the course of their careers to date. They were aware that the information was being collected for the sake of adding to the body of knowledge on a topic which we both knew we were very familiar, having started at the bottom and worked our way up through the institution.

To mitigate my subjectivity from having ultimate control over the research, I maintained memos. To incorporate reflexive thinking into a qualitative study, one can write notes about personal experiences during the study including observations about that data process, hunches, concerns about the respondents' reaction to the research process (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). I went back to my interview notes several times to make sure that the analysis was consistent with the narrative. To compensate for my positionality, I have been aware of this condition since selection of the problem statement and have remained distanced along the way. While conducting the literature review, creating the interview guide, selecting participants, and in the course of my interviews, I avoided allowing my mind to jump to analysis or conclude precipitously. Rather, I remained open to the new knowledge and possibilities as a true recipient and trustee of the data presented.

4.3 Criticisms and limitations

There is no perfect method for portraying reality. Research methods each possess strengths and weaknesses. One criticism for qualitative studies involving a small sample can be criticized for the conclusions being based on the individual's opinion and not transferable to the entire population. A counter argument is that an agreement in the individual statements of the respondents increases the likelihood that these are true experiences (Jacobsen, 2015). Likewise, the proportion of women field grade officers in the Marine Corps is so small relative to the totality of field grade officers in the Marine Corps that it can be argued that the sample represents the population, so that the findings are transferable and the inferences valid.

Another criticism is that interviews provide indirect information filtered through the views of the interviewees. A counter is that these interviewees already possess a high degree of credibility in that they have proven themselves capable and competent officers to have been retained, promoted and selected to command and other educational opportunities in the Marine Corps. In other words, their stories are worth the listen and the unique perspectives are valuable.

Third, it could be detracting that these officers cannot be observed entirely in their natural setting as I may have been able to do had I had the time and means to travel to visit them in locations across the globe where they are stationed and to follow them in their daily activities for a week or more, for example, or had I spent time to interview people who have served under their leadership or command. Instead, the direct and primary interview is useful in not only asking respondents about their current experiences, yet also allows them to provide historical information and allows the researcher control over the line of questioning to truly determine what factors to retention are helps or hindrances as they share glimpses of their careers in correlation with their identities, roles, and the culture at the time.

Finally, the reliability of qualitative studies is difficult to assess because the researcher's role and interaction with the respondent affects the situation. Therefore, I have clearly described the selection of participants, the nature and challenges of telecommunications in lieu of meeting at a site, the conduct of interviews, maintenance of confidentiality, and chosen the method of analysis. My own role in producing and administering the questions in the interview guide are based on the literature review of the previous research in Chapter 2 and theories explained in Chapter 3. The

reliability of the transcription will not be verifiable as the data was not voice recorded and only written as typed notes, which became deleted after the thesis was turned in. In the interviews, the women were indeed very descriptive in their accounts of their career pursuits, goals, desires, aspirations as well as struggles, frustrations, emotions, comforts, and joys. The fact that they told about life events and especially personal stories causes me to believe that I succeeded in achieving the informants' trust and sincerity, largely because of the chosen method.

In the next chapter, I offer major retention factors and themes that were evident among the interviews of these six successful women as a result of this methodology. Each begins with a comparison and contrast of the data followed by a short analysis.

5 Results

This chapter will relay to the audience the results of the individual interviews I conducted with six Marine Corps women field grade officers to learn the factors that affected and continue to affect their retention beyond 20 years time in service. First, I will briefly lay out the findings: general demographics of the group; key factors affecting their retention decisions and timing; their knowledge and experiences with recent policy changes; and their experiences with the various theories and concepts outlined in Chapter 3. Then, I will analyze these findings in greater detail, expressing deeper meaning by drawing connections between the structural, cultural, and individual levels of the Marine Corps as an organization. Lastly, I will discuss the implications of the most salient factors and suggest how they might be mitigated or enhanced.

5.1 Results

This group of six highly accomplished USMC women field grade AC officers had an average age of 45 years and an average TIS of 25 years. Two majors (O-4), two lieutenant colonels (O-5) and two colonels (O6) are represented. At the time of the interview, four of the six respondents were married and five had at least one child; one had at least one grandchild. Two have served in command billets, and all have accomplished career and intermediate levels of PME representing both resident and non-resident PME programs including: Naval Post-graduate School (NPS); Foreign PME; School of Advanced Warfighting (SAW); Marine Corps Command and Staff College (CSC) and Top-Level School. The MOSs of these women are representative of the ground support or aviation support occupational fields. The waterfall method of respondent selection did not result in the

recommendation of any aviators or combat arms MOSs, although several of the women reported combat tours served in Iraq or Afghanistan, having been stationed in FMF overseas billets or serving in combat arms units.

To begin the interviews, I asked two open-ended questions: When did you decide to stay in the Marine Corps after becoming retirement eligible and what factors affected your decision to retain? Of all the respondents, three of the women could not say that they actually had made a conscious decision whether or not to retain beyond the 20 year mark. Two said they were pretty certain that they would retire at 20 until circumstances made them change their minds, and the sixth said she made a calculated decision to retain. Respondent #1 (R1) said that she had not originally intended to retain beyond 20 years. In her early years as an officer, she endured some personal struggles, and while she had met performance standards, she did not have particularly competitive performance evaluations and was twice passed for selection to major. A Marine Corps retention board determined that she could remain a captain and retire at 20 years; and, when selected for promotion to major on the third consideration, she noted that “everything started working out.” Respondent #2 (R2) simply stated “as long as you give to the Marine Corps, the USMC will give back to you two-fold or three-fold.” She intends to keep giving and receiving. Respondent #3 (R3) said “I don’t think that I ever considered retirement at 20 because I was already on a path...it all happened so quickly that it didn’t occur to me.” Respondent #4 (R4) was offered and took advantage of educational opportunities that required pay-back tours and added obligatory service. When she was close to retirement eligibility, she was pregnant and had a very bad work experience with her boss. “I told my husband, not a day or a year over 20,” she said. Then she transferred to another duty station where she worked for a wonderful boss who changed her whole outlook. Respondent #5 (R5) said she has served alongside her active duty spouse, who has also had a successful career. Like R4, R5 said that she had attended several schools and served pay-back tours and quickly approached retirement eligibility at 20 years and decided with her husband that they would stay in as long as they could to build a solid retirement. Respondent #6 (R6) explained that she has had an atypical active duty career in that she has served a significant number of year in the RC and seeks an AC retirement. She decided not to retire when she was eligible for an RC retirement because she would not be able to go on and have the earning potential for her age in the civilian sector that she would as an AC Marine.

To better understand how structural policies and programs affect their retention, I asked how changes in DoD or Marine Corps programs or policies in the past five years affected them personally

or professionally. I provided them a list of topic areas, which are outlined in Chapter 2 and Appendix C. I allowed them to comment or skip on to the next. Some illicit greater response than others.

Retirement System. None of the women in this study were greatly affected by the Marine Corps' implementation of the BRS, since they were either grandfathered into the traditional system or opted to remain under the traditional system as described in Chapter 2. Their attitudes towards this system, however, were that they felt achieving retirement eligibility at 20 years gives them greater bargaining power and control over their careers. R1 explained that being over 20 years of time in service gives her some negotiating power with assignments officers: "If the Marine Corps wants to send me somewhere I don't want to go, I can drop papers. If my husband cannot go to the next duty station, then I can choose not to go." Further, she explained, "at this point, I feel like I have taken control of my career. I don't talk to my monitor or occupational field sponsor. I care about where I'm going, because I want to do the best job that I can there." Likewise, R2 said, "I like what I do now. I'm my own boss." R5 said, "I can speak up now, because I've been in for 20 years." R6 indicated that retirement income provides her financial security: "[it is] very important that I get a monthly check after I retire. I am a single mom with an adult kid, so being able to take care of myself is important." Furthermore, some of the women officers were aware of when they will arrive at a new mile-marker, mandatory retirement. R3 said, "I hit my mandatory retirement at [date redacted]. This is the first time of my Marine Corps career that I gotta figure out what I wanna be when I grow up... unless I am promoted." Similarly, R4 said, "I max out in [date redacted]. I don't want to retire in [location redacted]. I'm a very take it day-by-day. I don't know where I want to retire. I just go with the flow. I don't have any end-of-plan right now."

Uniform & Grooming Standards. None of the respondents claimed that either changes in uniform or grooming standards were significant factors that impacted their retention; however, two spent some time to impart their thoughts and opinions. R2 said, "Keep the bun!" with emphasis. "Long hair in a pony tail does not look professional. Take California Highway Patrol, for example." She went on to explain that pulling hair can be used to attack women in a hand-to-hand fight and that a lot of civil organizations look to the military for norms in making their own standards. In her opinion, there is no need to change the formal female hair standards in the Marine Corps because the current standard keeps women Marines safe under operations and otherwise looking professional. In contrast, R4 expressed concern over her own hair loss as a result of conforming to standard. "What are we trying to do, prove, save here? There are plenty of women who don't want to make the change. Eighty percent that say that is because they think the culture doesn't expect us to change," she said.

Regarding the Marine Corps's decision to switch to a new dress blues coat and cap, she said "the new blues are horrifically uncomfortable. I hate the covers, I can't stand them. Don't give me a lame excuse that a company is going out of business... It's America! – we can get anything made we want. It's lip service from the USMC. 'Look, we're all the same.' They are just trying to [mess with] us, just like everything else. Really, we're gonna end up paying more money [out of pocket] for uniforms." Some of these smaller policies and issues can have a cumulative negative effect on the level of trust these women place in the organization, according to R4, and ultimately their desire to retain.

Equipment & Gear. Changes in military equipment and gear that accommodate for the feminine form were not factors for this sample group.

Physical Fitness. The most significant change to Marine Corps policy that affects this population of Marine Corps officers is the elimination of flexed arm hang (FAH) and the introduction of pullups for women and the option for pushups for all Marines. They discussed their fears, struggles, and triumphs and ongoing concerns with respect to their ability to continue to perform to standard as physically fit Marines:

- Nobody's shooting at me. I get to PT on the Marine Corps' dime. (R1)
- As long as you can continue to PT and meet height and weight standards, they are likely not to question you. Then they look at performance. It [physical fitness] is half of what the Marine Corps is. (R2)
- Longevity is hours to physically train, yet hours to rehabilitate as well. I PT every day. I spend anywhere from 15-20 minutes stretching. Eating well, it's a life-style. I don't eat garbage, drink, or smoke because it takes the edge away. I don't want to be complacent. (R2)
- FAH, I hated. At that age [in the 40s], you are more aware of training safely so you don't get injured. I trained pretty hard, and I was getting there. I injured my shoulder. I'll take the 30 point hit, I can max the pushups all day long. There are some women who have natural upperbody strength. Women and men aren't going to be able to do the same thing. It's a biological fact. That annoyed me because I always had a high first-class PFT, and now I don't. (R3)
- Pullups! They are not doing it for any benefit to us. They never are. We [women] still have different scoring. (R4)
- For me, the biggest change was PT. Here I am, single parenting and maxing pull-ups. Give us higher standards, and we continue to meet them. (R5)

Body Composition & Physical Appearance. Two of the respondents' shared their sentiments on the topic of body composition and physical appearance standards. R2 offered a glimpse into what might

be a cultural bias held by many, but went on to say that she can see both sides. Also, sentiments on physical fitness changes seem to correlate directly with the topics of body composition and physical appearance standards:

- You can be the best performer, but if you're fat, forget it. If you don't care about your appearance, how are you gonna care about your work? That's human nature. Someone who looks sloppy. That's a walking billboard. Their life is sloppy, their work is sloppy. It's a human nature bias that we have. (R2)
- There are some frames that don't fit the mold, so it's hard for them, but they make it because they put in the work. Those who don't are processed out. (R2)
- BCP would have been a deciding factor for me [to retire]. I have always been fit, but I thought pullups would be too hard. I'm heavier now and can do more pullups. I'm probably in better shape now, with the standards higher, but I weigh more than I ever have without being over the max. (R5)

Female Specialized Healthcare. Some of the respondents were unclear what was meant by the name of this topic. I clarified that it covered health matters specifically related to the female gender (see descriptions in Chapter 2). One respondent shared that these matters were of great concern to her in relation to her retention decision. She indicated that if the inability to maintain privacy and lack of access to gynecological care persisted, she would seriously consider retiring sooner rather than later. She said:

“One of the things that really makes me want to get out is lack of privacy in healthcare, lack of access to a gynecologist that we don't have at the tactical level, and I have been at the tactical level my whole career. You have to go through a Corpsman, who contacts the provider. At the Battalion or Group, you have one provider, who you don't want to do your well-woman exam because they sit next to you in the conference room at the CO's meetings. Every year I have this argument to get a referral. When you ask for the same-sex stand by then you're asked what your problem is, or if the corpsman did something wrong. Going to the doctor this year was very frustrating. Getting an update on my birth control medicine was a challenge.”

While not specifically gender-related, another respondent feels like the health care system has served her well. She believes that this is a factor towards her retention. “I plan to keep on serving as long as my body holds up. I've put it through the ringer. A number of [joint] surgeries, and they keep putting me back together. I already have one [joint] replacement. Ninety percent of these surgeries were done [by civilian physicians],” she said. A third respondent mentioned that her unit's primary care manager is a woman, and she believes that due to the openness of the unit and that particular individual's approachability, many people have come forward for help, to include mental health care, who were hesitant to do so in other commands. She was frustrated that other Marines both men and women, did not seem to be able to get the help they needed earlier in their careers yet glad to see that they are getting it now, and she considers herself a facilitator in speeding them to care.

Pregnancy & Post-partum. In summary, the majority of responses under this topic were that none of these women had been affected by the most recent changes in policy, although some wish they had. These women had their children under the six-week convalescence period policy and used additional personal leave following childbirth. They fully support the service's move to allow women up to 12 months of maternity leave to establish breast-feeding and bonding. R1 recalled checking into a new unit as a pregnant junior enlisted Marine. "My commander looked at me with disgust and said 'are you trying to get out?'" Six months after giving birth, she had to take a physical fitness test, and she remembers how hard it was to get back into shape and perform to standard. As well, she chose to breastfeed her baby and recalled sitting in an equipment room amid the grime and pumping while smelling the fumes of lubricants as well as immature comments made by male Marines who encountered her expressed milk in the communal refrigerator. R4 and R5 recalled how they felt the nearly 2-month absence from work for the duration of their maternity leave resulted in them being forgotten and marginalized by their peers and superiors, even in decisions made about one's own billet assignment, which she learned about first upon her return to work. Specifically, R5 stated, "I missed the boat on the parental leave. I had 6 weeks with first kid, and it made me think twice about having another. I think 12 is great for today's mom. First kid, 6 weeks. I was a hot mess. The Marine Corps says they want you to have work/life balance, cause it looks good on paper, but I don't think they really meant it."

Parental & Family Leave. Respondents who recalled the challenges of their pregnancies and post-partum experiences were likely to comment on recent improvements to policies extending the length of parental and family leave following the birth or adoption of a child. R1 continued saying she is glad that there are greater considerations being made for today's Marines with families.

Childcare & Work-Life. This topic was interpreted by all as it was intended, to better understand how policies at their local base or unit level allowed them to juggle work, family, and home-life and how important this factor is in their retention. R1 shared that her husband, who worked previously now stays at home. "He literally does everything," she said, "He cooks, cleans, does the laundry, grocery shopping. He's Amazing! Those guys who had stay-at-home spouses knew what they were doing!" R4 said, "in the DC area, I would get to work by 6 a.m., and having space in the Child Development Center (CDC) was vital. No facility off-base was open that early. I would not want the facilities to extend their hours at the end of the day because I feel it would hurt families. My kids deserve to be picked up at 6 p.m., get a hot meal, get homework done. I would hate to see parents that get

stretched to another hour, especially because the parents that get stretched are women. I say that because I have worked in a unit where I don't work with any men who had a wife who worked outside the home." R5 also noted CDC considerations, specifically that childcare hours are limited to 50 hours per week per child, and that placement and its relative distance to one or both parent's place of work are a challenge. Parents must have to plan in the commute and time they need for their own physical training. She shared an example of lack of consideration due to inexperience from co-workers when re-scheduling a meeting: "We're moving the meeting to 1930, does anyone have a problem with that?" She said, "the men said 'no', but I was thinking 'YES!, I gotta get a sitter for my kids.' How many men do we see get congratulated for leaving early to be with their kids? 'Awe, that's so sweet', but when a woman says she's leaving, 'where's your childcare provider plan?'" She says she would prefer to be home in time for homework to help her kids and use her issued mobile phone to keep up with emails from work. Additionally, R5 said, "People love working for my husband because at 1700 he walks out of the building. He sets the example that people can actually leave work at a normal hour." Finally, R5 expressed some social challenges with balancing work and home priorities:

"It's really hard to compete when you have peers and spouses who stay at work late and make time to read the Marine Corps Times article. I don't have time for that. I'm reading Dr. Seuss to my kids. I don't blame the stay-at-home spouses for that. I can't blame them for enabling their men to stay and work late. There's still someone supporting us. It's not all or nothing for us military women. We all have different situations. A lot of my friends have older kids. My kids can't be left alone. If my kids were in high school, it would be different. Some of my peers can't understand why I can't join them for certain activities."

Financial. None of the women mentioned any changes in policy or programs in this area. Rather, they all seemed to be moderately to greatly content with their financial security and reimbursement for their time and sacrifices. R2 and R3 mentioned sufficient pay and secure finances as factors for retention. R1 said, "the money's not terrible. It's not a difficult job. I'm not asked to do anything out of the ordinary. Command was busy, but it was not complicated. I had a great command team and staff." R6 said she did research and calculated the difference and that she had enjoyed being able to see the world without necessarily using her own personal funds:

"In the military, the DoD gives me equal pay. Because I was in the reserves, I worked a civilian job and experienced unequal pay, so for me, equal pay was very important... I moved around every couple of years, and I liked that, so I wanted to keep having those opportunities. I wanted to see the world, see different places, experience different cultures, and the Marine Corps allowed me to do that. The only continents I haven't been to are Antarctica and Africa. I get to volunteer for exercises and deployments. That to me is very rewarding."

Sexual Assault & Harassment. Three of the respondents touched on the topic of the service’s sexual assault and harassment policies and programs from a professional and idealistic viewpoint and their influence as leaders and commanders. One respondent said:

“one time in a deployed environment, the guys were awful. Both officer and enlisted. It’s actually one of the reasons I became an officer. I’m not gonna let them run me off. I resolved myself to do better and to be better. Be a good coach and mentor for the young Marines, males and females. This is when we destroy young ladies lives. This is when we wear them down. Many come to the Marine Corps because they had a crappy childhood, they come to the Marine Corps to escape. I always tried to look out for that kind of thing.”

Another offered, that Marines she has met, joined to get out of a bad homelife. In her experience, “this it is not at all an uncommon reality, particularly for females who joined after they were sexually harassed or assaulted.” She felt that the Marine Corps helps them. The ability to be part of the help and concern seems to be a motivation for these women to remain in the Corps. Lastly, one expressed from a procedural viewpoint:

“There are so many problems at every level. We are getting better at handling it, but there is bias in the system. At least we do something about it. This goes on at colleges and universities, and they do nothing. A lot of these cases that have no probable cause or evidence, we can’t take to non-judicial punishment because the Marine can refuse that, and then can’t take it to courtsmartial. All you need is the victim’s statement to substantiate, under ‘Commission of a Serious Offense’, then 6105 formal counseling, and then administrative separation. Then we can get them out and they can’t victimize another Marine. The civilians won’t touch a lot of these cases.”

MOS, Selection, Promotion & Assignment. The uniqueness of the many MOS communities and occupational fields in the Marine Corps lends itself to variances in career progressions, selection to programs and command, as well as geographical and billet assignments. I asked these women how these collective factors have affected their retention. Quite often, these Marine officers referred to the measure of performance known as the FITREP, the performance evaluation and brought up board processes and recent changes in their parameters, such as the removal of photos.

- You deliver what we need in an ethical, moral, and legal way; You get retained. You get retained through good FITREPs. (R2).
- MOS is a factor for retention. I think you’re boxed in if you’re in these combat arms MOSs. Combat support can go anywhere to any unit. (R2)
- I picked my MOS because there aren’t a lot of us. There is flexibility in our work. Lots of possible jobs. As officers we contribute competence. You don’t have to be a genius; you just have to give it a bit of gas. You have to care. (R2)
- I never got the feeling that we made a decision based on anyone’s gender or race. Yeah, they looked at the photo, but then they dove right into the record. Congress makes a decision for the military based on what is going on in civil society not necessarily a military

problem. If there is unconscious bias in the military based on gender and race, I was obviously not affected. (R3)

- Most of the people in my MOS have been successful because they stayed in the MOS, not because they departed from it. (R5)

One respondent sensed bias in the assignments process within her MOS. She recounts:

“This is where my fight is. In my MOS field, I was [billet] and only female in [billet] at [my duty station], was married, but geo bachelor. All my guys were married, and they would all get together and go to lunch, play ball, go golfing. I would gladly have gone along, but I was a woman. I was not included. Maybe because they weren’t secure in their marriages, maybe not. A few years went by, and one is the occupational field sponsor. There was a job that came up, and it could be me or one of those guys. There’s no checks and balances on that kind of thing. Then you get the used-car-salesman phonecall ‘this is where I’m sending you, and it’s a really good deal.’ You know its not, but what are you gonna do?”

Another barrier in assignments emerged again when she knew she needed to get back to the Fleet Marine Force (FMF), and was instead assigned a joint billet. She said, “they are teaching Marines that joint job FITREPs are inflated. They say ‘joint’s the thing, joint’s the thing.’ The USMC is really losing by not coveting joint more than they should. Too much emphasis on FMF over joint. Ironically, joint is required for GO.” She said she decided to look at the glass half-full and enjoy being close to family in that job.

Education Opportunities. All respondents expressed gratitude for the PME opportunities afforded to them by the Marine Corps, and they attribute their retention, in part, to having completed either non-resident or resident programs. R1 recollected one policy that when revised or changed removed barriers to her advancement. Prior to 2011, a Marine Officer’s assignment to Naval Post-Graduate School or the Foreign Area Officer Program was in her words, “the death knell for your career.” These assignments, while often career-broadening and educational, can take Marines away from their primary duties and units serving in their MOS. The less time performing in a billet matched with one’s primary MOS, the less time superiors have to observe an officer’s leadership and character traits and to recommend them for other competitive billets or command. To solve this dilemma, the CMC established the Commandant’s Career Level Education Board (CCLEB) and the Commandant’s Professional Intermediate-Level Education Board (CPIB), “to select the best and fully qualified eligible officers for professional military education, graduate-level education, and select special duty assignments” each fiscal year (MARADMIN 409-11). A change in structure and cultural thinking led from the top changed minds and career decisions toward seeking out these highly competitive, career-enhancing, educational opportunities in spite of time spent away from one’s MOS.

Diversity, Inclusion, Talent, Talent Management, Mentoring. The respondents were asked about whether any changes to policies on diversity, inclusion, talent, talent management or mentoring had affected their retention, and they could think of none in the past five years that had any direct impact from their perspective; however, at a cultural level, they had much more to say, which I will cover in the Analysis.

5.2 Analysis

These women AC USMC field grade officers provided so many practical responses to the structural factors leading to their retention. Further, I will look at the information these women provided through the lens of organizational theories and concepts and organizational identity to examine the cultural and individual retention factors. These areas as addressed in Chapter 3, include masculinity vs. femininity and critical mass; talent and talent management; diversity and inclusion; organizational culture and leadership; identity and organizational identity.

Maculinity, Femininity and Critical Mass. I sought to examine the concept of critical mass and its subsets of visibility, comparison, and assimilation holding it up against the experiences, thoughts, feelings and deeds of these women officers. R4 said, sometimes she does not even notice her own visibility, yet she ends up pointing out the comparing behavior:

“Some friends have said they walked into a room and realize right away they are the only one. Not me. None of my bosses, because they have stay-at-home wives, seem to understand a schedule or what women go through. They throw meetings on the schedule without asking because it’s not a conflict for them. Kids activities, dinner. There are times I have to leave to take them to an appointment. Absence of concern. Everyone says this kind of comment just to say it: (offices face the parking) someone walks to their car at 1630... ‘must be nice!’ I feel like it’s my duty to enlighten them. I get up at 0330, work out, get my kids to school, get to work around 0800, and work through lunch. I often work until 1900 or 2000 to get stuff done. I bring work home. My kids still need help with their homework. It’s a scramble and a struggle every day. I have always been driven to be the best I can be at what I do.”

While R4’s was a pretty clear example of the misplaced value that time spent in the office equates to performance, I was surprised that others had to pull the moments up from distant memory. I must have assumed that because they are still minorities among the dominants every day at work that they were attuned to the fact that they stand out. However, at this point in their careers, they had ceased spending mental and emotional energy on being compared to men, and furthermore, had ceased comparing themselves to men. In this way, although earlier in their careers they had to make a choice to confront or ignore immature comments or behaviour from the dominant group, now, they chose to just be themselves. Three of the respondents wrote these early critics off as “idiots,”

(yes, all three used that word) and went on their merry way. I do believe their current attitude has a lot to do with tenure and having achieved the 20-years TIS as a mark of distinction among Marines in general, but I find this lesson a valuable one, especially for the younger generation. The lesson is, a token woman Marine will make choices in how she handles situations at an earlier stage in her career that will either result in being ostracized, accepted or marginalized. The individual manages this through conscious effort. The difference between choosing fitting in with the group or belonging to the organization and or herself, is ultimately up to her.

Talent, Talent Management (TM). I asked the respondents When you hear senior officers talk about talent or talent management, what they think senior officers mean when they talk about talent and TM. R1 proposed that, “TM is trying to put the best person for the job in that position.” R2 posited that, “performance is the talent that measures our worth to the organization and the measurement tool is the FITREP.” Then, I asked them how they perceive themselves being affected by talent management. Many explained the key to talent management is *flexibility* in the manpower management process. R3 said, “... talent management, everybody has a talent, we just gotta make it work,” and “we have to capitalize on people’s talents. We have to set them up for the next step whether they are on track to be the next commander or best staff sergeant ever for the mission, but also because you genuinely care about people.” R4 expressed that in her experience, the command selection process is too rigid.:

“We lose talented, great personnel because we are so stuck in our old ways. How we define success in each of our MOSs? The path: You gotta go to resident school, O5 command, O6 command. I have not necessarily done that. She explained that the first year she was eligible for command, she and her husband had kids and he landed a civilian job. She said, “the USMC touts *family first* but it’s lip service, they really mean *Marine Corps first*. I took my name out of the hat, and on the second look, I took my name out of the hat. I was not surprised... Life’s about personality, so you never know if another woman or man is thinking ‘I can’t move my family.’ They could be an outstanding human being but they don’t conform to our timeline, so we lose them. You would get better people, have happier people, if you worked with them and were *flexible*. But...we are so rigid, *it’s worked for us since 1775 arghhh, have a beer!* I think that is such a *huge* flaw for our service. What if someone injured themselves and decided it wasn’t a good time to represent as a commander, so they requested not to be considered? They would be a better commander if they were ready to go and they had their support system with them.”

To test the *comparison* element of Brown’s shame resiliency theory, I asked if there was an ideal way of being or one form of talent that is used as a measure of everyone else’s worth (Brown, 2012). I received some interesting thoughts. R1 responded to this question without hesitation in one word – *combat*.” She shared an example of a FITREP she had received from a reporting senior whereby he

stated, “this is a really good FITREP, but you’re going up against some real war heroes...,” so she should expect some lower marks in comparison. This type of evaluation, while honest, still furthered marginalization.

Grit. As I looked out for indicators and definitions of talent, I kept my eyes and ears open for anything that looked or sounded like consistent effort over time. The respondents did not disappoint. R1 recalled a time when she committed to completing CSC distance education program known as ‘the box of books’. She started before deployment, paused, and resumed upon return. It required attending two knights a week for weeks on end. People asked her why did not quit since she was passed for promotion and likely would not be selected again. She said, “if I’m going to [commit to] do something, I’m going to do it to the best of my ability.” The day before she graduated, she was selected for promotion to the next rank. R2 said, “I don’t like the word talent. I use merit. Talent is subjective. Merit is objective. A merit is a fact. It is results-based. Sticking with it until it’s done. R4 said “I improve my fighting hole,” which to any Marine means you might be done digging out a pit large enough for you and your battle buddy to seek shelter in, but you are going to start looking for natural camouflage and cover to keep you from being seen by the enemy and protected from flak. She painted a great visual of *growth mindset*, tha one can always improve (Duckworth, 2016). She went on:

“All this extra work and effort is all my doing. I roll in, and it’s the same 1980s binders in a moldy cabinet. We didn’t even have a share point for my command. Nobody does anything to make it better. I feel like I have to be the one. There is always a way to make things easier. I hate bureaucracy, how long it takes us to do things.”

Diversity is not static. I asked the respondents to characterize the Marine Corps culture and whether it was diverse, inclusive, masculine, or otherwise. R1 agreed that the Marine Corps is still very masculine, “although increasingly diversifying.” She sees a lot more minority race male officers coming up through the ranks now. She noted that “it takes 30 years to make a GO” and thinks that there is greater diversity among the junior officer ranks, yet more and more as officers age and promote. Interestingly, she said “it’s diversifying,” as an active verb. In this way, it seems she views diversity more like a process with phases, than a static goal to be reached. She added a disclaimer, however, that due to her MOS, rank, and recent billets, she does not really see too many junior officers and does not ever get to see the combat arms fields to fully understand what diversity looks like there.

Inclusion means being seen and heard. These respondents indicated that there are levels of decision-making power within the organization that influence policy and change in policy and that it

is highly linked to occupational fields. This became apparent in statements regarding the disconnect between leaders that come from the combat arms communities and those from the support communities. When I asked her to describe the Marine Corps organizational culture, R6 recalled a time she served in an infantry battalion as the only female officer. She said in a unit like that, “all of these things wrap up into one package. You have resistance to the support MOS telling you what you can’t do, then you’re a woman and a minority. As a staff officer and you’re not the OpsO, it’s hard to get people on board to do stuff for you. ‘You’re not the OpsO, you can’t tell me what to do.’” She said at least she had the support of the CO, the XO, and the OpsO who trusted her to run the show, supported her, let her do her job and be successful. In concert with Kvarving’s findings discussed in Chapter 3, in lieu of a critical mass representing all gender perspectives, it is up to a few dedicated individuals to spend time and energy on advocating for change. One of the respondents indicated how powerless one can feel towards making any difference at the organizational policy level. She gave an example of an orders review process.:

“There was an order I spent a lot of time reviewing when it was sent out for review. It went up with recommendations, came back, more recommendations added. Why are you wasting our time? It’s like we don’t matter. We live eat and breath these procedures. There’s a fatal flaw in USMC orders that they cannot write in active voice. It needs to be written in active voice: who is doing what? I spend an inordinate amount of time and it’s a waste.”

I asked her, “does it make you want to disengage?” She replied, “Yes.”

We have empathetic, engaged and authentic leaders, even among men, especially when they have skin in the game. When we discussed leadership within the context of Marine Corps organizational culture, R1 discussed a time when she was given the opportunity to command during the COVID-19 pandemic and how she believed her empathetic, engaged, and authentic leadership style produced results in zero cases of COVID-19 on the base. “My subordinates gave me creative, well-thought-out options. Together we could all figure out what was best on base and everyone who works on it. Most of our people were local nationals. Getting buy-in from everyone helped *a lot*.” She sensed that even though she sometimes had to make decisions that went against what everyone said, they knew she had considered every angle, that nobody – neither military nor civilian, national nor foreign national personnel – felt ignored, left out, or that their concerns were not addressed. R2 said, “I am a results-driven individual. I am typically a good person. There is probably a lot to me that people don’t like. The ones who don’t are probably those who don’t produce, because I hold them accountable.” Accountability is essential in engaged leadership (Brown, 2012, 37,178, 244). When respect and accountability are part of our practiced values, yet we fail to spend energy walking into the

uncomfortable conversations and hold people accountable, we create a values gap between our organization's aspirational values and practiced values (Brown, 2012, 177). R3 said, "I had leaders I really respected because they were genuine. You could tell whether they cared about you. You didn't have to sit down with them and be mentored. They were people I wanted to be like because I respected them."

Empathetic leadership comes more naturally to some than others. R3 stated she had not used the words *engaged* nor *empathetic* until she was a commander. "What does it take to lead? I am going to treat Marines the way I would like to be treated. That's how I am as a person anyway." This statement falls in line with certain communal traits (Eagly & Carli, 2007) that research shows come more naturally in women. She went on to say, "anyone of these kids could be my son or daughter. A lot of my peers who have kids that age in the Marine Corps. Now that engaged and empathetic leadership comes through. R5 said that a boss who has a wife who works outside the home or a daughter who works has "skin in the game," and so they are interested in the gender perspectives and they want to know the issues.

Vulnerability is possible where there is trust, and we need practice. R1 said, "every time you open your mouth, you're vulnerable. I'm the only female [my boss] has on staff, so every time I say something, I'm vulnerable. I don't know if anybody else feels that way, but I do." She gave a particular example of how sometimes her billet causes her to be in a position to have to task commanders of a higher rank. On several occasions, she has fielded emails in response to a task that seem to push back against the tasking. She has only had to rumble with vulnerability (Brown, 2012) and confront each individual one time, and now they are all on board. She clarified that she thinks the initial opposition had more to do with her rank than her gender. R3 responded, "this [being vulnerable] is human nature. This is the way people are. Bullying and hazing are not to be tolerated and are to be reported...because we have people who are idiots. Can we be compromised and made to be vulnerable? Yes. Depending on the situation with someone you trust."

To respondents discussed vulnerability as *feedback* (Brown, 2012, 202-206) . R2 says she remembers last names. She says, "the better you are, the bigger target you have on your back. The critics are the ones with the [crummy] names. If they can't say it to my face. I don't lose sleep over it." R3 said, "A subordinate may come back to me and tell me that a decision I made was probably not the best. If you can come back to me and tell me you're right, I'm wrong. It's that kind of person that can make an organization better. My way or the highway people are destructive in organizations." She also said, "a coward on a FITNESS report, won't counsel someone on a FITNESS report. It took me a while

to learn how to have those uncomfortable conversations without crushing their souls. As an institution, we don't do a very good job."

Self-Identity vs. Organizational Identity. I simply asked the respondents how they identify and if it was connected to the organizational identity of *Marine*. All claimed the obvious identities as mother and wife, yet one respondent was very specific that they identified as daughter in that her mother was a working woman. Another identified more with her ethnicity than other self-identities or with the organization. All claimed the organizational identity as Marine, however, it was interesting to see most claimed it did not define them. One went so far as to say that when she retires, she will not identify as a retired Marine, but rather a woman who retired from the Marine Corps, and while she is proud of her service and pledges to continue to uphold the values of the Marine Corps, because once a Marine, always a Marine, she will not be folding her t-shirts in six-inch squares. I find this subdued organizational identity in contrast with one finding Colonel Waldrop uncovered in her dissertation; that one of the keys to the success of the women Marine General Officers was that they privileged their Marine identities above all others. The variance here does not have to mean a lack of loyalty to the institution, rather it could be the cause of nothing more than generational differences between the Baby boomers and Generation X (Deloitte, 2017).

5.2 Discussion

Ladies, Who Wants to be a General Officer?

I asked the respondents if they had considered their eligibility to becoming a GO. One officer briefly stated, "no, I don't think about that stuff. I wouldn't ever want to be a GO. No way. They [GOs] are on the platter for everything. It's like being a planner. You want results? Put me on the ground. I'll make things happen behind the scenes. I don't want to be a figurehead, that's just not me." Another officer offered advice:

"General? Do it for the right reasons. Do it because you wanna be a Marine and serve Marines, not for personal aggrandizement or the money. It's not genuine. Be competent, do your job, and don't worry about being a female. If you make it an issue, it's going to be an issue, and it's not going to have the result you're looking for. If you've got a chip on your shoulder, it's going to be an uphill battle.

In lieu of any strong desire to attain to the ranks of GO, another respondent said "I want what's best for the Corps, and I also want what's best for me. As long as the two things mesh, then, 'Yes! Let's do it!'" She did express concern over the lifestyle of GOs, which she observed while assigned as a staff secretary earlier in her career. Having worked with several of them, she recognized that the lifestyle

of GOs very directly affects their families, their pocket books, and how they travel and spend their off-duty hours. She provided an example of a GO who spent nearly 10,000 dollars on new or upgraded uniforms and uniform items when selected to the new rank of GO. She noted that attending dinner events in the evenings and on weekends along with her spouse is not something she thinks they would enjoy and that she would rather travel on her own terms instead of on business. Her statements shed light on the idea that success is relative. She said she would keep serving in the Marine Corps as long as it is enjoyable, regardless of rank.

Further, she does not think she has what it takes to be a GO. She made an interesting statement about the historical organizational structure and the type of individual background that is typical of those leaders nominated to GO in the Marine Corps. She stated, "I am not at all eligible to become a GO. I don't have the record, I don't have the pedigree, the university alma mater. It's not a glass ceiling, it's just not attainable for me with my degree from an online civilian university. Most of these GOs have been to School of Advanced Warfighting (SAW). Not me." She humbly stated, "I don't know if I'm smart enough. I'm one of those people who likes to surround themselves with people who are smarter than me. It's not hard to make a decision when you've got good choices placed in front of you." Ironically, these sentiments of "not enough" are what is required of wholehearted people who lead through vulnerability and possess the courage to dare greatly (Brown, 2012). Additionally, the concept of a leader surrounding oneself with diversely-talented individuals and considering all options before making a decision displays not only emotional intelligence but also inclusion and is the type of leadership in high demand of executive employees in today's competitive environment (Deloitte, 2017).

In all practicality, although the group possesses a mix of pre-requisites of O5 and O6 command, educational opportunities, special assignments, and joint qualifications, the real limits are the board precepts. Two of the officers mentioned that their MOS only precepts for one GO per board and sometimes not even that. All in all, the competition for any Marine officer in these low-density MOSs for selection to GO is stiff.

Guardian angels, Look-outs, and Luck. The lack of critical mass of women in the Marine Corps has resulted in slower change and a greater degree of difficulty for all women Marines as they seek not only to fit in, but to belong particularly at the beginning of their service in the FMF. R3 said, "I never thought that I was the beneficiary of mentoring. I never had that growing up in the Corps. What I did have was what I called 'guardian angels;' people looking out for me. Luck and timing? Maybe it

wasn't so much luck and timing. I had people that somehow knew me on the board." R2 said, "The best mentors are the ones who don't even call themselves a mentor. They are just there."

Mentors. Many of the women said they did not encounter a mentor until much later in their careers. I asked the respondents what was one thing that they would tell future women Marines who aspire to make the Marine Corps a career and attain general-level rank. Overwhelmingly, their answer was to find a mentor. R1 said, "get a mentor...EARLY. I've got two or three." She feels it is important to have someone who can objectively tell you what you need to do and what you need to work on. If they are all saying the same thing, then they are probably right. She said because she was neither approached by nor requested a mentor until she was a major, she feels she may have missed out on some positive earlier guidance in her life and career. R3 said, "TM is taking care of people because they are professionals and know their job. Mentoring is more personal." R4 described a male Marines' response to learning that the senior leadership desired to organize mentoring for females, who expressed that the Marine Corps had not organized something like that for him. She said it is important to invite men into this conversation as well as people who are not exposed to the same concerns. "Special? Yes. We are Marines, but we are women too. It's inexperience. You're a Marine, we're all Marines, but we are also men and women and we each have human needs that are different."

Wholeheartedness. I think these women take a wholehearted approach towards life, including their service in the Marine Corps, because they believe they are worthy of love and belonging. For over 20 years, these women Marines have negotiated the labyrinth (Eagly & Carli, 2007) to the top ranks of leadership within the Marine Corps organization. They have gone over, around, and through the barriers; and they have avoided slipping through what I call the trap door in the labyrinth's floor, and what Brown (2012) calls the 'disengagement divide,' where organizations lose their employees. When they describe their work and their service, they use words like *purpose; contribution; grateful; thankful; gratitude; gracious; joy; enjoy; enjoyment*. They can honestly say "I'm am enough, and I am brave." In this world where time, money, and resources, among other things, are scarce, they make time to connect. They connected with me. They will spread awareness, be committed, and work hard on a daily basis because they value courage.

6 Conclusion

Through the conduct of this thesis, I sought to answer the question: What factors affect female officers' retention beyond 20-year retirement eligibility? I sought to understand the structural,

cultural and personal barriers to continued service and the strategies active duty female field grade officers use to navigate them through the lenses of diversity and inclusion; talent and talent management; critical mass and tokens; culture, vulnerability and the values gap; and identity. I interviewed six active component female field grade officers in the active component of the United States Marine Corps. I would like to have had more time to interview even more Marines, but time is always a limit. These women are a wealth of knowledge and wisdom that when combined are extremely powerful. I would love to have more of that goodness going forward with even deeper analysis and reflection and to have shared it with the reader.

For now, without a critical mass of women in the field grade ranks and general officer ranks to drive spontaneous organizational change, it will take those individual enthusiasts (Kvarving, 2018), who are talented with passion and perseverance toward a goal (Duckworth, 2016), and daring greatly (Brown, 2012) to succeed in changing the structure and culture of the U.S. Marine Corps toward being a more inclusive, diverse, innovative, agile, and lethal force capable of ensuring our National security and a more peaceful world.

6.1 Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the literature review and the extent of comments provided by the respondents during the interview having to do with the need for flexibility in their work-days, I recommend a study on how to best achieve flexible working hours for AC Marines, especially while in garrison working environments. This study would include the feasibility of counting work hours for Marines in a similar fashion for civilian Marines in an effort to achieve better oversight, fairness, and compensation. It would also include an analysis of the administrative time-keeping systems used by foreign services, in particular the Norwegian Army. It is my anecdotal assessment is that it is fairly efficient and they achieve a better work-life balance than we enjoy in the United States with a moderate to high level of productivity both at work and at home. Second, I recommend a repeat of this study with a sample population of women field grade officers or senior enlisted (E-6 to E-8) who are between 15 and 19 years TIS, as I believe them to be at greatest impact for more of the parent and family leave policies while still having a fair amount of passion and perseverance towards a longer career in the Marine Corps. To that end, I support the ventures of Marines and civilians at Manpower Plans and Policies Branch are looking into structural solutions to the extended time Marine mothers spend away from their units and ways to fill the personnel gaps and enhance training opportunities for RC Marines. Such “on- and off-ramping” solutions for even longer term periods potentially up to one year are

being considered by the CMC. Now is the time for advocates to come forward with their perspectives and innovative ideas on how to support the mission while simultaneously supporting Marines and their families so that the organization's long-standing and time-honored aspirational values of Honor, Courage, and Commitment can continue to be its practiced values in spite of the challenges faced by our Nation and internal to our current American culture. Lastly, I would also be interested to learn how the USMC has incorporated WPS agenda into its overall strategy and operations since the NAP is currently written with a foreign perspective as opposed to a domestic point of view.

6.2 Significance of the Study

Historically, women Marines have seen their share of organizational structure and culture changes that have influenced how they shape their identities as I the researcher learned through reading the literature review of Colonel Waldrop's dissertation. With the aim of enhancing the body of literature on women Marines serving in high-level leadership positions, this thesis gave six professional women field grade officers in the ranks of Major, Lieutenant Colonel, and Colonel serving over 20 years time in service in the active component Marine Corps an opportunity to have a voice and share their gender perspectives through individual qualitative interviews. I spent sixty to ninety minutes asking them about these 14 areas of policy change and listening to what bothered them the most about how we do things in the Marine Corps – our organizational identity and culture – and the significant affects all these have on their retention decisions. I held these results up against organizational theories of masculinity and femininity, critical mass, talent, talent management, identity theory, vulnerability and the values gap. All this was to gain a greater depth of understanding into the cultural and personal factors that affect retention. Through the effort, I found many things I was expecting to find due to my positionality as an organizational insider; that these women have a passion for the Marine Corps and perseverance, yet the areas of physical fitness, health, working hours, inclusion, and occupational specialty limitations were the greatest challenges to their promotion to the GO ranks. These things I expected; yet, what surprised me was that they really felt they were lacking mentoring, because for me, that is thankfully, not the case. It serves, however, as a reminder that it is one of the very most important things we can do as Marines with one another and as decent human beings – to connect, to engage. It was good news that these empathetic, engaged, women leaders, given their willingness to contribute and mentor the junior population, are planning to continue to max retirement, regardless of rank, for the sake of Marines like me and their Corps. Yes, I believe the study succeeded in answering the problem statement and so much more by nature of the method selected.

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better.

The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again,

because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause;

who at best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly...”

– Theodore Roosevelt, April 23, 1910

“[O]ur job is to fight wars, but we also have a lot of missions that aren't fighting wars. We have humanitarian missions. We have security cooperation missions, which are usually training for fighting wars, but there's other elements to it too. ... We have an attitude that Marines are killers and warfighters, it's common. ... When I have said that we are missing the point when we want to say that we are warfighters and that's all that we are. Because we should all be trying to work ourselves out of a job, every single day. The purpose of the military is fight wars. The purpose of fighting wars is to not fight wars. It is to make the world a more secure place” (Participant #320, Major, Interview, MCB Camp Butler, 17 October 2017, MCOCR Report to PSO).

“In this age, I don't care how tactically or operationally brilliant you are, if you cannot create harmony—even vicious harmony—on the battlefield based on trust across service lines, across coalition and national lines, and across civilian/military lines, you really need to go home, because your leadership in today's age is obsolete. We have got to have officers who can create harmony across all those lines.” (MLDC, 2011) – General James Mattis, then Commander, U.S. Forces Command at the 2010 Joint Warfighting Conference

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Appendix A: Invitational Email

Ma'am,

Thank you for your interest! I looking forward to our call on [Day, Date, Month] at [Time, Time zone] via [phone, Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp, FaceTime, MS Teams]. I will dial you.

Background: I am a second-year student at the Norwegian Defense University College in Oslo, Norway as part of the USMC's Foreign Professional Military Education Program and Professional Exchange Program. I am writing a thesis in partial fulfillment of earning a Masters of Military Studies degree.

In short, this thesis covers the topic of retention, exploring recent changes in policy that may or may not have significant impacts on mid-grade Marines' retention choices. This thesis gives a few professional women who are active component field grade Marine Corps officers an opportunity to have a voice and voluntarily share their perspectives towards encouraging other similar officers to retain.

Further, nearly 18 percent of all DoD servicemembers are women, yet only eight percent of Marines are women. Since women were first allowed by law to attain to the rank of General Officer in the mid-1970s only about 12 women out of hundreds of Marine Corps General Officers attained the ranks of BGen, MajGen, and LtGen. While other services have promoted several women to the rank of General, the Marine Corps has yet to promote a woman to 4-star General. The Commandant of the Marine Corps has Talent Management as one of his top three priorities for the Corps, particularly the talents of women and other minorities. Given these facts, it seems that the playing field is wide open for more women to aspire to the highest ranks. I searched the literature to understand the barriers that still inhibit women from continuing and excelling in male-dominated organizations. Historically, women Marines have seen their share of organizational structure and culture changes that have influenced how they shape their identities. How women Marines identify seems to be a key driver in their retention decisions and the ways they strategically negotiate the barriers. Given this background, I will conduct qualitative interviews of active component women Marines to learn how they experience recent changes in USMC policy and how they identify both with respect to the organization and personally and how these may be affecting their retention in the years following 20-year retirement eligibility, potentially toward aspirations to attain to the GO ranks.

Consent: To meet with Norwegian PII regulations, responses are completely voluntary. I do not intend to voice record our discussion, I will type notes on my password-protected PC, and respondents will remain anonymous. I have attached to this email a consent form that provides greater detail on privacy and confidentiality, which I would appreciate you reading and we will go over it before we begin the interview.

Interview: The interviews will be semi-structured. You will be asked open-ended questions and encouraged to recount your experiences with factors that affect your retention past retirement eligibility beyond 20 years' time in service. If you like, I can send you a few questions for you to consider in preparation for our interview. It is not necessary that you come with complete answers. Rather, having the questions in advance hopefully facilitates a warm start and potentially deeper reflections on your past and present experiences.

Very respectfully,

Major Mary E. LeValley, USMC

Appendix B: Verbal Informed Consent

Interview Informed Consent:

Ladies, Who Wants to Be a General Officer?: What factors affect female officers' retention beyond 20-year retirement eligibility?

In accordance with the Privacy Act of 1974, this notice informs you of the purpose, use, and confidentiality of this study. Authority to request this information is granted under 10 U.S.C. § 501 and 502 (1956).

Overview

The purpose of this research is to contribute to the body of knowledge on successful women in male-dominated, hierarchical, military organizations, specifically to inform the organization and its members on barriers to retention of women field grade officers in the Marine Corps and success strategies that both the institution and its personnel might implement to increase the representation of women Marines at the highest levels of leadership, the General Officer ranks. Participation will involve an approximately one-hour, thirty-minute interview. There are no anticipated risks to participating in this research. Interviews will be analyzed for thematic trends, but quotes will be anonymous. You will not receive any personal benefit or compensation from participating in this project. The benefits will be the satisfaction from having taken advantage of an opportunity to lend a voice to the greater scholarly discussion aforementioned.

The research is voluntary. You have no obligation to participate in this project, and refusal to do so will result in no penalty. If you do decide to participate, you may change your mind at any point during the interview and end your participation without penalty. After participating, I will allow you to review comments for accuracy prior to publication.

Additional Details

What is involved: Participation will involve an interview. It is anticipated to take 60 to 90 minutes. Individual interviews will not be recorded. You can stop or pause the interview at any time or choose not to respond to certain questions without explaining why.

Protection of your information: You will be identified by a numerical identifier so that a reader can track thought processes, for example: "Respondent #1 said...". Respondents will be numbered in the order they were interviewed. Documentation of your name will be replaced with this code on notes, transcripts, and other research materials. Data from this research project, such as notes and transcripts with your name removed will be disposed of when the project is complete.

Risks: There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project.

Questions: If you have questions regarding this research, you may ask them now. Alternatively, you may contact the principal investigator at a later time. For questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Marine Corps Human Research Protection Program.

A copy of this document is yours to retain. Do you have any questions or concerns? Are you willing to participate? Do you agree to the method of replacing your name with a numerical identifier?

Points of contact information:

Principal Investigator:

NAME

TITLE

EMAIL@usmcu.edu

TEL

USMC Human Research Protection Program Official:

Leah Watson

USMC HRPP Office

leah.watson@usmc.mil

703-432-2566 (o)

Interviewer Verbal Consent Record

Interview with _____

Date_____

Do you agree to participate? ____ Yes ____ No

Do you agree to the method of replacing your name with a numerical identifier? ____ Yes ____ No

Notes

Appendix C: Interview Guide & Codes

[Pick up call. Good morning, afternoon, evening this is Major Mary LeValley. [A little small talk.] Thank you for setting aside some time today to chat with me. Let me tell you a little bit about my master's thesis. It is a qualitative study of USMC active component female field grade officers. The interviews will be semi-structured. Participants will be asked open-ended questions and encouraged to recount their experiences with factors that affected their retention past retirement eligibility beyond 20 years' time in service. You received a copy of the verbal consent form. Allow me to go through it [read through form and following acceptance of the terms...]. Let's begin with the first question...]

A. BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

- When did you decide to stay in the Marine Corps after becoming retirement eligible (A1)?
- What factors affected your decision to retain in the Marine Corps after you were eligible to retire (A2)?
 - What factors do you think affect other women to retain (A3)?
 - Are you aware of the metaphor of “the labyrinth” – that women in male-dominated organizations negotiate barriers on their journey toward high-level leadership positions (A4)?
- In the past 5 years, how have changes in DoD or Marine Corps Programs and/or Policies affected you personally or professionally?

Programs & Policies [interviewer ticks off those that illicit any interest/response]:

- Retirement System (B1);
- Uniform & Grooming Standards (B2);
- Equipment & Gear (B3);
- Physical Fitness (B4);
- Body Composition & Physical Appearance (B5);
- Female Specialized Healthcare (B6);
- Pregnancy & Post-partum (B7)
- Parental & Family Leave (B8);
- Childcare & Work-Life (B9);
- Financial (B10)
- Sexual Assault & Harassment (B11);
- MOS, Selection, Promotion & Assignment (B12);
- Education Opportunities (B13)
- Diversity, Inclusion, Talent, Talent Management, Mentoring (B14)

- How long do you plan to keep serving on active duty (C1)?
- Have you considered your eligibility to becoming a GO (C2 = joint, O5/O6 command, required PME)?
 - What is possible?
 - What are the limitations?

B. QUESTIONS RELATED TO THEORIES ON ORGANIZATIONS AND IDENTITY CRITICAL MASS

- How do you think being one of few women in a Marine Corps dominated by men (D = masculine/male-dominated vs. feminine/female-dominated) has affected you in your daily work and your retention (D1)?

- How does it feel (D2 = Visibility, Comparison)?
- What do you do about it (D3 = Assimilation vs. Devaluation vs. Tempered Radicalism)?

TALENT AND TALENT MANAGEMENT

- When you hear senior officers talk about *talent* or *talent management*, what do you think they mean (E1 = proposed definition of T or TM) and how do you perceive yourself being affected by talent management (E2)?

- Are you a talented Marine?
- What makes people talented?
- Is there anything more important than talent when choosing to retain, place, or promote a Marine?
- Is there an ideal way of being or one form of talent that is used as measurement of everyone else's worth (E3)?

LEADERSHIP (F)

- Describe a challenging time in your career when you experienced an empathetic (F2), engaged (F2), and/or authentic (F2) leader/leadership?

- How has leadership good/bad affected your retention (F3)?

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE (G)

- How would you describe the USMC organizational culture (G1)?

- Inclusive (G2 = Fitting in vs. Belonging)? Open to diversity (G3)?
- Masculine/feminine (G4)?

- Is it possible to be vulnerable (G5)? Do you fear being ridiculed or belittled? Is there blaming and finger-pointing? put-downs and name-calling? favoritism? perfectionism?

- Has creativity been suffocated? Are people held to one narrow standard rather than acknowledged for their unique gifts and contributions? (G6 = comparison)

- Are people afraid to take risks or try new things? Is it easier to stay quiet than to share stories, experiences, and ideas? Does it feel as if no one is really paying attention or listening? Is everyone struggling to be seen and heard? (G7 = disengagement)

IDENTITY

- How would you describe your own identity (H1 = daughter, wife, mom, Marine, ethnicity)?

- Is it connected to the organization's identity? (H2 = Marine; woman Marine; senior woman Marine)

C. POTENTIAL PROBES If they are not addressed in the story, the researcher may probe with the following questions:

- Were there certain policies that when revised or changed removed some barriers to your advancement or improved your experience in the Marine Corps? (B)
- Were there certain policies that when revised or changed reinforced or created barriers to your advancement or worsened your experience in the Marine Corps? (B)

-
- What remaining barriers might prevent someone like you from retaining and promoting to Brigadier General? Major General? Lieutenant General? General? (C)
 - If there was one thing that you would tell future women Marines who aspire to make the Marine Corps a career and attain general-level rank, what would it be? (I1 = advice)
 - Is there anything about your Marine Corps career that you would like to add that has not already been addressed?

[Thank interviewees for their time and willingness to share. Remind them of the verbal consent and that they may withdraw at any time. Assure them I will compile the data and send to them via email for their review for validation prior to publishing. Have a great day, weekend. Hang up.]

Unplanned Codes

J1 = whole-hearted finds; words include: purpose; contribution; merit; grit; grateful; thankful; gratitude; gracious; joy; enjoy; enjoyment; I am enough

K1 = bargaining power; words include: drop papers, walk away, leave (the service)