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THESIS

FEMALE OFFICER RETENTION IN THE MARINE CORPS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF EARLY SUPERVISORS AND MENTORS

by

Stefanie V. Allen

December 2018

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13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)

This study examines mentorship experienced by female Marine Corps officers and its influences on career decisions, with a particular focus on retention. The Marine Corps recently stated its desire to increase the percentage of female Marines from 8% to 10%. This new goal might be attained through a more robust recruiting strategy; however, if the number of female Marines who attrite upon their initial contract remains constant, the organization will face difficulties meeting this goal, especially among the higher ranks. Based on the grounded research revealing the benefits of mentoring to organizations and individuals, this study looks at how mentorship affects female Marine Corps officers, how frequent mentorship occurs, and how it affects their career decisions. The researcher conducted 17 one-on-one interviews with female officers who previously and currently serve on active duty in the Marine Corps. The findings reveal that there is a lack of career mentorship and a lack of role models in regard to family management, and job satisfaction and work-family conflict are the biggest factors in determining female Marine Corps officer retention. The principal recommendation is to create a network for Marines to connect with a mentor who possesses similar interests and is willing to advise.

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FEMALE OFFICER RETENTION IN THE MARINE CORPS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF EARLY SUPERVISORS AND MENTORS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines mentorship experienced by female Marine Corps officers and its influences on career decisions, with a particular focus on retention. The Marine Corps recently stated its desire to increase the percentage of female Marines from 8% to 10%. This new goal might be attained through a more robust recruiting strategy; however, if the number of female Marines who attrite upon their initial contract remains constant, the organization will face difficulties meeting this goal, especially among the higher ranks. Based on the grounded research revealing the benefits of mentoring to organizations and individuals, this study looks at how mentorship affects female Marine Corps officers, how frequent mentorship occurs, and how it affects their career decisions. The researcher conducted 17 one-on-one interviews with female officers who previously and currently serve on active duty in the Marine Corps. The findings reveal that there is a lack of career mentorship and a lack of role models in regard to family management, and job satisfaction and work-family conflict are the biggest factors in determining female Marine Corps officer retention. The principal recommendation is to create a network for Marines to connect with a mentor who possesses similar interests and is willing to advise.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

FITREP	fitness report
IRB	Institutional Review Board
MOS	military occupational specialty
MEU	Marine Expeditionary Unit
NPS	Naval Postgraduate School
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
TBS	The Basic School
TIS	time in service

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recently, the Marine Corps stated its desire to increase the percentage of female Marines from 8% to 10% (Snow, 2018). While a more robust recruiting strategy can contribute towards this goal, if the number of female Marines who attrite upon their initial contract remains constant, the organization will face difficulties meeting this goal. A plethora of grounded research reveals the benefits of mentoring to organizations and individuals (Kram, 1988; Scandura, 1992; Ragins, 1989; Burke & McKeen, 1990). Furthermore, mentorship provides career and psychosocial functions that assist individuals achieve success in organizations (Kram, 1988). Research finds that mentoring can even help reduce turnover in organizations due to the empowerment and development it provides for individuals within the organization (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004). However, studies show that women have a harder time finding and/or attaining a mentor due to six barriers: lack of access to information networks, tokenism, stereotypes and attributions, socialization practices, norms regarding cross-gender relationships, reliance on ineffective power bases (Burke & McKeen, 1990; Noe, 1988; Ragins, 1989). The research between mentoring and military organizations is sparse, more notably it is nonexistent in regards to females in the military.

This exploratory study takes a qualitative approach to analyze three questions on how mentorship influences female Marine Corps officers' career decisions, impacts their ability to perform, and if they desire it from higher-ranking female officers. The researcher conducted 17 one-on-one interviews with female Marine Corps officers. The participants ranged from first lieutenants to majors who previously and currently serve on active duty in the Marine Corps. Upon completion of interviews spanning 1,087 minutes, the researcher analyzed the 532 pages of transcribed interviews to extract the findings.

The findings suggest that there is a lack of career mentorship and lack of role models in regards to family management in these female Marine Corps officers' experiences, which leads to their desire to resign from the service. The analysis reveals that mentorship does not directly influence career decisions on whether to remain or leave the Marine Corps. The researcher also found that mentorship does positively contribute to

female Marine Corps officers' confidence in their ability to perform their job and their overall perception of the Marine Corps. An optimistic perception of their job and the Marine Corps led to a desire to continue a career in the service. The analysis also suggests that female officers desire other higher-ranking female officers to be role models for family management; yet there is a lack of them in the Marine Corps. In regards to turnover, the findings suggest that the top reasons involve job satisfaction and work-family conflict. Female officers want to pursue future opportunities in the Marine Corps that are interesting to them and they are passionate about, but two conflicts arise: (1) the Marine Corps plans out the "golden" path and/or (2) their active duty relationship causes strain in pursuing those opportunities. The analysis suggests that female officers did not leave or would not consider leaving the service solely to raise a family, but rather, pursue a career that can work with a more sustainable work-life balance. The findings of this study hopes to help influence future policy initiatives in order to retain high performing, highly talented female Marine Corps officers.

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I.   PROLOGUE

One of my mentors, who also happened to be my company commander at the time, looked me intensely in the eyes and said to me, "Stef, remember that the Marine Corps is a people organization. It is made up of people." He frequently said this to remind me what the Marine Corps was truly about. Looking back, he was also teaching me about life—that things that make me who I am are the direct result of interactions with people around me. Those words resonated with me then and will for the rest of my career. Reflecting on those wise words with deep gratitude for the mentors along the way is what inspired me to do this research. I imagine a Marine Corps where all officers receive quality mentorship to reach their full potential and that there is a community that fosters officer development. I hope that the Marine Corps continues to retain the highest performers and that it creates a genuine culture of people helping other people achieve their potential. In the end, I hope that potential can fuel the warfighting organization to be even better than it is today.

During my (short) time as an officer, my peers and I have seen our share of good and bad leaders. I was fortunate enough to have immediate bosses and mentors who shielded me from poor leadership and guided me onto the right path. When talking to my peers about their experiences, I found it upsetting if they did not share similar experiences of strong mentors or supervisors; instead, their paths became full of negativity and disappointment. They became pessimists and disenchanted with the same Marine Corps that they once adored.

Prior to attending the Naval Postgraduate School, I reached a crossroads in my career. My initial five-year service obligation was nearing a close, and it was time decide whether to transition out. Conversations with my peers made it clear that the majority of female Marine Corps officers were having similar thoughts: "Stay in? Or take my talents elsewhere?" We all battled with the same decision at this critical juncture in our young adult lives. My high-performing peers who tended to be more negative when contemplating their futures in the Marine Corps, felt unchallenged, undervalued, and unrewarded. Toxic commanders and poor networking with more experienced officers seemed too common in

the Marine Corps. These women could be valued and challenged in the civilian sector—so why would they pass on that opportunity?

Does the Marine Corps take mentorship seriously? Does the Marine Corps know how to properly manage talent? Or, does the Marine Corps have a serious problem with leadership—are the right leaders being placed at the top of commands? All of these questions propelled me to address this problem. I knew that if someone did not, the Marine Corps would fail to realize that good people were opting out.

I embarked on this study in hopes of hearing women's honest experiences in the Marine Corps. I wanted to provide the data with a "voice" to shed light on issues the Marine Corps faces when trying to retain talented and high-performing women. I would be wrong if I did not mention how incredible these women are; some served with special forces units and some with ground combat units. Some deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), and others served on Marine Expeditionary Units (MEUs). These women graduated from such schools as Harvard, University of Southern California, United States Naval Academy, and Notre Dame. They had been stationed all over the world such as Okinawa, North Carolina, San Diego, and Bahrain. Many of them obtained a master's degree and some have earned two or more. It would be a shame for the Marine Corps to lose the collective knowledge and experience of the women interviewed. Their stories are profound, and it would be a grave mistake if we do not pay attention to them. In order for us to continuing being the best warfighting organization, we must be willing to listen to the truth—even if it is not what we want to hear— and learn from it.

II.   BACKGROUND

> My experience was unique in many different ways. I remember the positive things [and] I try not to remember it for the bad things…my husband would frequently say, "I think [she] would have stayed in if she would have had better mentors." Or, "I think [she] would have stayed in if she had been [with a] Lieutenant Protection Agency." Or, "I think [she] would have stay[ed] in if she deployed." He would say those things [about me] because he was also able to see from the outside-in when I was going through it. And I'd always be like, "No way. I was always going get out." But he's like, "No. Like, that's not how it was supposed to be." …he knows how much I love the Marine Corps, I think that when he says that, he means if I would have had people fighting for my career or people help guide my career that would have led to different events might have shaped or reshaped my decision to stay or go.

> —Former Marine Corps female officer

The military provides unique opportunities, experiences, and challenges compared to the civilian sector. There are many reasons a female might chose to join and remain part of this warfighting organization rather than leave to join the civilian sector. As suggested by the quote above from an interview with a former female Marine Corps officer, role models and mentors may be one impactful influence.

The objective of this exploratory, qualitative study is to gain a richer understanding on the significance of mentors in female Marine Corps officer's careers decisions. The study also aims to gain deeper insights into other factors influencing an active duty female officer's decision to remain in or depart the Marine Corps. The researcher's goal is to use the findings from this study to help shape future Marine Corps policies to retain its best officers and talent pool. This study analyzes responses of 17 female Marine Corps officers through semi-structured questions focusing on their experiences with early supervisors, mentors, and occupational choices in the Marine Corps. This study answers the following questions.

(1) Primary: How do early supervisors/mentors influence female officer's career decisions in the Marine Corps?

(2) Secondary: How does interaction with early supervisors/mentors affect female Marine Corps officer's perceptions of their ability to perform in the organization?

(3) Secondary: How do female Marine Corps officer's perceptions of the availability of high-ranking, female mentors influence their perception of future career options?

A.   FEMALES IN THE MARINE CORPS

The most recent Marine Corps Operating Concept published in 2016 addresses how our force must be prepared to fight in 2025 and beyond. Notably, it tackles the need to exploit the competence of every Marine stating that "organizations are only as good as the people that fill them" (Neller, 2016, p. 24). Over the years, the number of women attaining higher degrees and participating in the workforce has increased. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, from 2000–2016, in the United States, more females attained a bachelor's degree or higher than their male-counterparts (Snyder, Brey, & Dillow, 2018). Similarly, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018) reports that 46.9% of the U.S. workforce in 2017 was made up of women. However, women remain underrepresented in some career fields including the military. The Marine Corps requires the most talented and skilled individuals to meet the challenges of the future, which implies a need to recruit and retain more women.

Recognizing this need, the Marine Corps recently expressed a desire to increase the population of females in the service. Currently, the Marine Corps is comprised of a lower percentage of females than each of its sister services. According to the Defense Manpower Data Center [DMDC] (2018), females make up 7.6% of the officers corps and 8.6% of the enlisted corps. The Marines, with 8.6% female population, are behind the Army at 17% and the Navy and Air Force at around 20% (DMDC, 2018). In a recent interview, Marine Corps Commandant, General Robert B. Neller announced a new goal to raise the percentage of female Marines from 8% to 10% over the next year (Snow, 2018). This deceptively small 2 percentage point increase would result in an additional 1,434 female enlisted Marines and 166 female officer Marines (DMDC, 2018). To succeed in this goal,

the Marine Corps must focus on attracting and retaining the most qualified and talented female Marines.

The U.S. government spends precious resources to train Marine Corps officers to lead the most ready and lethal fighting force in the world. Over the six months at Marine Corps officer training and an average of four and a half months at military occupational specialty (MOS) school training, Marines gain tactical and technical proficiency and experience, resulting in an annual $99.3 million dollars cost (Department of Navy, 2016). When a Marine Corps officer decides to leave the service, he or she takes those unique skill sets with them. In fiscal year 2015, 18% of officers who left the service were in for five or fewer years (Marine Corps Demographics, 2017). In fiscal year 2016, the number rose to 25% (Marine Corps Demographics, 2017). More notably, on average, the percentage of females who separate are about two times higher than males (Quester, Kelley, Hiatt, & Shuford, 2008). On the civilian side, when female managers and professionals leave their organizations at a quicker rate than men, corporations spend millions to retrain and replace those women (Morrison, White, & Van Velsor, 1992). These findings, in combination with the Marines stated desire to increase that number suggests a need to explore and identify barriers that may restrict women from succeeding and staying in the organization.

B.   MENTORING IN ORGANIZATIONS

There is a growing body of evidence that mentoring is a highly valuable tool for retaining skilled individuals. Ragins and Kram (2008) reported that according to Saratoga Institute, 22% of individuals leave their organization within the first year due to a lack of socialization and feeling as though they do not fit in—something that mentorship can help overcome. Research finds that career mentoring positively relates to not only organizational socialization, but also career satisfaction, compensation, and success (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004). Additionally, individuals with mentors have a greater edge in the organization than their peers without mentors (Allen et al., 2004) and vocational mentoring is significantly related to manager's promotion rate and salary (Scandura,1992). Mentoring relationships are also a vital aspect to career progression and decisions within an organization. The bond formed between the mentor and protégé lends to a more

productive work environment and individual growth (Burke & McKeen, 1990). While research supports the importance of mentorship in organizations, studies also suggest that women face more barriers than men face in attaining a mentor, due to tokenism, stereotypes, and a lack of access to networks (Noe, 1988).

Additionally, women face unique obstacles during their Marine careers. For example, numerous high-profile scandals have highlighted negative actions and perceptions against women in the military. The Tailhook scandal in September 1991 was one of the first major sexual assault cases in the military to gain widespread attention. The incident occurred at a Las Vegas convention for Naval and Marine Corps aviators where 4,000 officers, including 35 Navy admirals and two Marine Corps generals, attended and consumed $33,500 worth of alcohol; 97 sexual assault cases were reported (Healy, 1993). Twenty-five years later in 2017, over 30,000 active duty Marines and veterans belonged to Marines United, an invitation only Facebook group that shared thousands of inappropriate photos of female Marines without their consent or knowledge (Philipps, 2017). Both of these situations occurred during a time when females were trying to break barriers to enter new roles in the military. Around the time of the Tailhook scandal females were seeking to fly combat aircraft (allowed two years later) (Healy, 1993). Around the time the Marines United scandal, females were beginning to enter combat MOS' that had opened up a year earlier. These cases of misconduct against female military service members caused a great deal of alienation towards women in an already low-density female population. A key aspect of mentoring is the function of protection for the mentee (Kram, 1988). A mentor can provide protection to a junior member in an organization during a controversial situation that may cause negative attention – especially where the individual is too junior to know how to navigate the situation properly (Kram, 1988).

C.   MARINE LEADER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The Marine Corps' current mentor program is the Marine Leader Development Program. Marine Corps Order 1500.61 (2017) outlines the objectives for Marine counseling. This program replaced the Marine Corps Mentorship Program (MCMP) (NAVMC Directive 1500.16 published in 2006), which called for a structured approach to

mentoring. The newer program focuses less on structure and more on content within a mentoring relationship. A study revealed that the MCMP failed to accomplish its intended task, noting that 61% of Marine respondents believed the program to be unbeneficial or a "waste of time" (Rauschelbach, 2013). Additionally, 80% of Marine participants in the study reported that they went to an unassigned mentor instead of their MCMP assigned mentor, who was usually their supervisor or a person in their chain of command (Rauschelbach, 2013). This study revealed that these Marines did not go to a direct supervisor or boss for mentoring because they did not feel comfortable in fully expressing their gripes and concerns.

Per the order, the newly published Marine Leader Development Program takes a different approach to mentorship that highlights key areas that are important to developing Marines in their professional and personal lives. The six functional areas of focus are fidelity, fighter, fitness, family, finance, and future. Commanding officers are to integrate counseling on the six functional areas into operations, training events, and unit activities. The order prescribes a generic schedule for counseling or mentorship to occur, at a minimum, during significant events during a Marine's career and life – but no specific timeline. The order describes counseling as "the mechanism Marine leaders use to provide feedback on performance…counseling primarily focuses on actions that have already occurred" (Department of Defense [DoD], 2017, p. 5). Whereas the DoD (2017) order defines mentoring as

> a voluntary relationship between two individuals and should not be directed or forced. One individual has experience and knowledge and is seeking to guide another whose development they have taken interest in. The other individual seeks to learn, gain, experience, and model his or her development after the person providing guidance. (5)

This order comes in tow with an online website with links to the six functional areas for in-depth worksheets and checklists to guide mentors through a counseling session (Marine Corps University, n.d.).

D. CONTRIBUTION OF THIS STUDY

This study fills a gap in research on female Marine Corps officers and their career decisions related to the interactions with early supervisors and mentors. Current studies enhance the understanding of the effect of career experiences on female Marines, however there is a lack of research exploring the role of female Marine's interactions with their early supervisors and mentors on their career experiences.

Considerable research suggests that there are many positive impacts of mentorship in organizations, such as the career and psychosocial support a mentor provides to their mentee (Kram, 1988; Fagenson, 1989). These studies reveal the strength of strong mentorship within civilian organizations and even address some shortfalls that women may experience such as lack of role models and stereotyping (Noe, 1988). However, most research on mentorship does not extend to the military organization. Existing studies do not account for the additional challenges that military members face in the course of their careers, such as deployments and quick turnover of supervisors and billets. A few of these studies looked at mentorship influences on midshipmen at the United States Naval Academy (e.g. Baker, 2001; Oakes, 2005; Wilkins, 2004) or mentoring programs as a whole on military members (Rauschelbach, 2013; Cook, 2015). However, these studies do not explore the role of mentoring in female Marines' careers.

Female Marines face unique hurdles as illustrated by a study on gendered stereotypes in the Marine Corps (Archer, 2012). This study conducted in-depth interviews to reveal four themes exclusive to females that inhibit their performance—most notably, the theme of "opportunities for female Marine mentorship" (Archer, 2012). These events together with limited studies, suggest that the knowledge on the role of mentors in female Marines' careers is deficient. This study aims to gain a deeper understanding of female Marines' perceptions of their experiences with mentors and the effects of said experiences on their careers. This study uses a qualitative approach to provide this understanding.

The focus of this research is on female Marines' experiences with early supervisors and mentors. Mentoring, or lack of mentoring, influences an individual's early career to ease the transition into a new organization and help posture the individual for career

success (Kram, 1988). Primarily, this is a point of interest because of the uniqueness of the Marine Corps and the adjustment that all officers go through upon earning the Eagle, Globe and Anchor. Additionally, junior entrants into an organization frequently report that having a role model to emulate provides a sense of self-competence, identity, and effectiveness in their career (Kram, 1988). Although the psychosocial function of role modeling benefits both males and females, the latter have a harder time deciding whether to mirror male managers due to believing male managers lack similar experiences to women; and vice versa (Kram, 1988). Finally, most mentoring research focuses on protégés early in their careers and organizational newcomers due to the large impact mentoring has on their future career successes (Scandura, 1992).

E.   THESIS ORGANIZATION

This thesis is organized as follows. Chapter II provides a literature review encompassing the major contributors to the research of turnover, mentorship and supportive supervision issues experienced by females. Chapter III provides details on the interviewees and interview process. Chapter IV provides the data analysis and findings of the interviews. Chapter V concludes with a discussion of the findings, recommendations for solutions, and potential areas for further research.

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III. LITERATURE REVIEW

This research topic highlights many key areas related to turnover, mentorship, gender-related issues, and work-family conflict. The causes of turnover has been a long studied phenomenon in organization behavior and psychology (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). This is especially true with voluntary turnover due to the loss of high-performing individuals who opt out of the organization for various reasons (Shanahan, 1983). McGinn and Milkman (2013) discovered that voluntary exits occurred more frequently with individuals who were early in their careers. Additionally, the literature on mentoring is abundant in proposing the positive contributions it provides to organizations and individuals (Kram, 1988; Burke & McKeen, 1990; Fagenson, 1989). Furthermore, lack of mentoring has shown to increase the probability of men and women leaving organizations (Preston, 2004). Similar to mentoring, research shows that supportive supervision provides beneficial contributions to employees and employers trying to balance family and work responsibilities, which in turn decreases turnover (Lapierre & Allen, 2006). Gender-related issues are also a common factor amongst all three: turnover, mentoring, and supportive supervision. It has been shown that men and women possess similar characteristics and attitudes towards their professional careers (Tinsely & Ely 2018; Ely, Stone & Ammerman, 2014). However, men and women place different values on things that are important to them in an organization such as the job description, salary, opportunities, and family responsibilities (Preston, 2004). Moreover, there are unique barriers that women face compared to their male counterparts that increases their chances of not succeeding in organizations (Morrison et al., 1992). The following chapter discusses the proliferated and unstudied research topics in regards to turnover, mentoring, work-family conflicts, and gender-related issues in order to gain a better understanding of how it relates to this study.

A. TURNOVER

Turnover is a key topic of interest in many organizations due to the significant losses incurred when employees leave organizations and take their learned skills and talents with them (Shanahan, 1983). Notably, voluntary departure by a high performing individual

presents a much larger loss to an organization compared to that of a low performing individual (Shanahan, 1983). While there is a plethora of research revealing the many influences on turnover, this section focuses on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and relational demography. These topics are particularly important because of the study's focus on retention of female officers in the Marine Corps. Some research is in dispute over which has higher impact on the turnover process: satisfaction or organizational commitment, as highlighted by Tett and Meyer (1993) and Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian (1974). However, it is apparent that job satisfaction and organizational commitment both contribute uniquely to turnover in civilian and military organizations (Shanahan, 1983; Tett & Meyer, 1993; Mowday et al., 1982; Hellman, 1997; Hom & Kinicki, 2001). Additionally, the literature review covers relational demography in regards to turnover. Research suggests there are evident and obscure obstacles women face in organizations especially with low-density female populations (Morrison et al., 1992; McGinn & Milkman, 2013).

1. Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is a two-part equation: (1) how the individual satisfies the basic requirement of the job, and (2) if the individual is satisfied by the job (Zytowski, 1973). Researchers have paid close attention to the second portion of that equation. The individual's satisfaction in the job has been widely examined in order to see the effects of satisfaction on turnover. Porter et al. (1974) found that satisfaction in the job, salary, and coworkers has shown to be a moderately significant factor in predicting turnover. One explanation for this is the certain level of expectation met for individuals who stay versus those that leave an organization (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974). Additionally, the reward system plays a factor in job satisfaction based on pay, advancements, and opportunities that do or do not satisfy the employee (Porter et al., 1974). A high satisfaction to one's job and their supervisor negatively influences withdrawal intentions as shown by Tett and Meyers (1993) through a meta-analysis study capturing 155 related studies and 178 samples. Tett and Meyers (1993) found that work attitudes were shaped by job and supervisor satisfaction when predicting turnover. Another aspect of job satisfaction is work-life conflict in order to balance a family and work. A sample of managers in

organizations that allow flexible work schedules reported to have more job satisfaction and a lower rate of attrition due to less strain on the work-life balance (Masuda et al., 2012). Research shows that the factors affecting job satisfaction for civilian and military occupations are similar in many regards but also have some differences (Zangaro & Johntgen, 2009; Allgood, O'Rourke, VanDerslice, & Hardy, 2000).

The military continues to research the topic of job satisfaction and its impacts to turnover throughout the various branches, ranks, and specific occupations. For example, satisfaction in one's work plays a significant role in mid-to-late career Marine Corps aviators (Sullivan, 1998). Excessive collateral duties, low quality training, and feeling unchallenged and unrewarded hindered the level of work satisfaction for Marine Corps aviators, leading to higher attrition rates (Sullivan, 1998). Navy nurses surveyed over a three-year period showed that increased job stress led to decreased job satisfaction and therefore, related to their intentions to leave (Pagliara, 2003). Research shows that work overload and placement in a job that is outside of one's scope leads to dissatisfaction in Navy Nurse Practitioners (Chung-Park, 1998).

However, research has shown that organizational commitment has a stronger relationship with turnover than job satisfaction (Porter et al., 1974; Tett & Meyers, 1993). Job satisfaction has been considered the primary predictor of turnover for the longest time, but more recent models have called the prominence of job satisfaction into question, suggesting it plays a lesser role, at least for some employees, than previous models suggest (DiRenzo & Greenhaus, 2011; Swider, Boswell, & Zimmerman, 2011).

2.   Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is "the extent to which the individual identifies with and is involved in an organization" (Shanahan, 1983, pg. 6). There are three key components of organizational commitment: affective, continuance, and normative commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Affective commitment is composed of three groups: personal characteristics, organizational structure, and work experiences (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Of these three groups, research suggests that work experience is the largest contributor to commitment (Meyer & Allen 1991). However, the relationship between

work experiences and affective commitment is unclear because it is not theory driven (Mowday et al., 1982; Meyer & Allen, 1991). Continuance commitment is the identification of costs tied with leaving an organization such as other investments or employment opportunities (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Normative commitment is the feeling of debt or responsibility to remain in an organization because of pressures, familial socialization or organizational socialization (Wiener, 1982). These three groups contribute to organizational commitment and all three are widely studied in relation to turnover (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Issues related to employee roles in a company negatively influences their organizational commitment (Ali & Baloch, n.d.). The attitudes of people who desire to leave an organization are lower than people who desire to stay in regards to their commitment to an organization (Porter et al., 1974). This study revealed that the overall attitudes of employees towards an organization has a higher effect on their decision to stay when compared to their job (Porter et al., 1974). However, the reasons for why individuals had higher attitudes regarding their commitment or satisfaction was unidentified by the study (Porter et al., 1974). Mowday et al. (1982) found that studying the longitudinal effects of organizational commitment in relation to turnover was crucial and under studied. Due to the belief that attitudes and behaviors towards commitment to an organization develop over time, it is important to look at commitment over long periods and not just a snap shot of time (Mowday et al., 1982).

3. Relational Demography

In relational demography theory, demographic similarities harmonize social relationships between individuals (Sacco & Schmitt, 2005; Tsui, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992). Relational demography often plays out in organizations of professional or leisure groups (Sacco & Schmitt, 2005). A few social psychology theories show the underlying reasons as to why relational demography relates to organizational demography (Sacco & Schmitt, 2005). The social categorization theory's key premise is that in order to maintain high self-confidence and esteem, people label others based on their prominent characteristics such as sex and race (Tajfel, 1981; Turner 1987). Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif (1961)

found that the categorization results in individuals having positive interactions with other people in the same group. Additionally, Bryne (1971) and Berscheid and Walster (1978) revealed that similarity-attraction paradigm causes liking and attraction of similar people and groups which then results in various positive outcomes.

Empirical studies backed up these similarity theories. Research suggests that same-sex or same-race supervisors reduced the turnover rate for individuals (McGinn & Milkman, 2013; Sacco & Schmitt, 2005). In a five-year study encompassing 511 lawyers, McGinn and Milkman (2013) discovered through their quantitative portion of research that female attorneys remaining at the firm believed that female associates played a key role in them staying in the organization, whereas men did not voice anything about gender (McGinn & Milkman, 2013). The women sought out other similar individuals to preview and compare their probability of success based on those like-individuals and made career decisions on that assessment (McGinn & Milkman, 2013). In another study involving employees at a quick-service restaurant, Sacco and Schmitt (2005) observed 255,630 samples where two-thirds of their sampling population were between the ages of 16 and 23 years old. Through a dynamic multilevel model, this study found that women who worked in a restaurant with a higher composition of females reduced the chances of female turnover by 21%, conversely the effect for men was lower with a 15% decrease in their turnover risk (Sacco & Schmitt, 2005). These studies revealed the individuals desire to be in a group they identify with (Tsui et al., 1992).

Conversely, Fromkin (1973) proposed a uniqueness theory that individuals want to be different and stand out from other people. Fromkin discussed that people like to differentiate themselves by having different names, clothes, and performance in order to achieve higher status and self-confidence (Tsui et al., 1992; Fromkin, 1992). However, Tsui et al. (1992) discovered that there is a stronger desire to be similar than different. It is also important to note that there is some desire to be unique in a certain context such as the explanation for why women would want to join male-dominated professions and groups (Tsui et al., 1992). From the research in this area on similarities and differences, it is apparent that individuals gravitate towards some form or level of similarity with others.

Whether it is race, sex, or like-minded thinking, there are many similarities drawn within groups and organizations (Tsui et al., 1992).

4. Embeddedness

Over the past decade, job embeddedness has been a focus of research between social, psychological, and economic topics (Tian, Cordery, & Gamble, 2016). Job embeddedness comprises three entities: (1) fit between one's career and the other key aspects of life, (2) ties of an individual to their co-workers and organization, and (3) sacrifice made if the individual left his or her occupation (Mitchell et al., 2001). Hence, the better the fit, ties, and sacrifice with an individual's job, the more likely an individual embeds into their organization (Direnzo et al., 2017). It acts similar to a tangled web, making it more difficult for an individual to leave their organization if experiencing all three aspects (Mitchell et al., 2001). Direnzo et al. (2017) found that embeddedness has a negative relationship to turnover intentions in a study of Marine Corps Reservists. Research revealed that among these reservists, strong intra-unit and inter-unit relationships, heightened sense of meaning, and low role conflict decreased the chance of turnover (Direnzo et al., 2017). Furthermore, Tian et al. (2016) discovered that the top three human resource practices strengthening job embeddedness were rigorous selection process into the organization, training that invested in skill development, and developmental practices such as consistent feedback on performance progress.

5. Supportive Supervision

Supportive supervision is defined as, "facilitative, fostering relationships that help improve individuals' skills and performance" (Marquez & Kean, 2002, p. 12). Supportive supervision is also commonly tied with work-life balance through the concepts of family-supportive policies and family-supportive supervision (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). Family-supportive supervision is defined as a supervisor who is sensitive, flexible, and empathetic to helping a subordinate achieve a good balance between work and family life (Parker & Allen, 2002). It also unites people and resources together to achieve organizational goals through the trust and responsiveness formed in those supportive relationships (Marquez & Burke, 2002).

Research has shown that supportive supervision influences turnover. Organizations promoting and enforcing family-supportive supervision are shown to decrease turnover intentions of their employees (Allen, 2001; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000). A study conducted by Choi and Johantgen (2012) found that supportive supervision contributed significantly to job satisfaction and turnover. Employees were approximately 4 times more likely to experience job satisfaction, thus decreasing the chances of them intending to leave the company by 47% (Choi & Johantgen, 2012). Additionally, Maertz, Griffeth, Campbell, and Allen (2007) found that perceived organizational support and supervision support significantly lowered turnover intention and positively influenced retention in a sample of 225 social workers.

B.   MENTORING

Simply stated in the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a mentor is, "a trusted counselor or guide." Kram (1988) takes a closer look into the relationship between a mentor and protégé by describing a traditional mentor as someone who "helps the younger individual learn to navigate in the adult world and the world of work. A mentor supports, guides, and counsels the young adult as he or she accomplishes this important task" (Kram, 1988, p. 2). A mentor relationship can occur either formally or informally, such as an organizationally ran program or a casual relationship formed based on similarities, respectively (Kram, 1981; Burke & McKeen, 1990). There are also four phases of a mentoring relationship: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition (Kram, 1983). Kram (1988) also defines the different stages of mentoring for individuals who are early-career, mid-career, and late-career; noting that the same mentoring functions occur but vary in breadth of topics based on the career timing of the protégé. An individual early in their career is concerned with fitting into an organization and learning the ropes; whereas mid-career individual is concerned with advancing and being challenged (Kram, 1988). Additionally, Burke (1984) identifies a concept of "early career socialization" where junior members with mentors have a higher probability to adjust to an organization and fit in, therefore reducing turnover. Finally, Kram (1988) outlines that there are two key functions of a mentor: career support and psychosocial support.

1.   Career Functions

Career functions are "aspects of the relationship that enhance career advancement" (Kram, 1988, p. 23). Specifically, they are sponsorship, exposure-and-visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments (Kram 1988). These career functions occur in a mentoring relationship due to the senior mentor's position in the organization, their experience, and organizational influence (Kram, 1988). Mentors increase likelihood of career success and job satisfaction (Kram, 1988). For example, manager promotion rates increase when individuals receive professional mentoring as shown by Scandura (1992). Additionally, individuals in an organization who reported to have a mentor believed to have more career opportunity and mobility, appreciation, and job satisfaction than their counterparts who did not (Fagenson, 1989).

Mentors also provide protégés beneficial opportunities and help through challenging experiences (Kram, 1988). In a study conducted by Morrison et al. (1992), they found that all 76 top-level female executives achieved their high level in part to the assistance of mentors above them in their organizations. Conversely, a study conducted earlier revealed that only about half of men reported having help from mentors above them (Morrison et al., 1987). The female executive participants who did not reach the higher levels of management reported that mentorship from above was one of the three missing items (Morrison et al., 1992).

2.   Psychosocial Functions

Kram (1988) defines psychosocial functions as the "aspects of the relationship that enhance competence, identity, and effectiveness in a professional role" (p. 23). The four functions are role modeling, acceptance-and-confirmation, counseling and friendship (Kram, 1988). While career functions occur more through the mentor's positional authority, psychosocial functions occur because of a relationship that fosters through mutual trust and interpersonal bond (Kram, 1988). Mentors provide individuals the feeling of acceptance and confirmation in an organization (Kram, 1988). Junior individuals use role models in order to visualize themselves and their aspirations in the future (Kram, 1988).

Psychosocial support has a positive impact on manager's salary levels as illustrated by Scandura (1992). A study done by Burke (1984) involving 80 samples of professional men and women in their early-career stages revealed that the top functions served by a mentor were confidence-boost, positive role model, teacher/coach, supporter, and talent development.

3. Peers

When mentoring is not readily available or there is a gap between mentoring relationships, individuals rely on peers for career and psychosocial support (Kram, 1988). This study revealed that peer relationships provide information sharing, career strategizing, and job-related feedback for individuals. Kram (1988) discovered peers provide confirmation, emotional support, personal feedback, and friendship for individuals in organizations. More importantly, Kram's (1988) study found that at every stage in female managers' careers, they refer to other female peers for counseling and role modeling when it was missing from a mentoring relationship with a senior male colleague. Kram and Isabella (1985) determined three different kinds of peer relationships (information, collegial, and special peers). Peer relationships provide mutual exchanges to gain expertise and especially empathy, which is sometimes lost in a traditional mentor (Kram & Isabella, 1985). McGinn and Milkman (2013) also discovered that higher amounts of same-gender and same-race peer increased turnover due to the competition.

There are many benefits to peer mentors that may suggest even an advantage to traditional mentoring, such as they offer mutuality, are more readily available, and endure much longer than normal mentor relationships (Kram, 1988). However, there are some disadvantages to peer mentorships that would support the need for traditional mentors. The first key disadvantage is the potential for competitive dynamics that can result in destructive interactions especially in a competitive organization (Kram, 1988). Additionally, peer relationships are formed based on similarities, which can lead to follow-on problems such as the inability to see alternatives or group-think (Kram, 1988). For example, a group of peers with pessimistic views can foster negativity and potentially stymie growth to an individual who takes on those same negative views (Kram, 1988).

Peers provide many positive benefits to an individual; however, it must not replace the role of a traditional mentor so that the full potential and growth can be achieved.

4. Relation with Turnover

Mentoring contributes to individuals having a higher level of organizational commitment (Payne & Huffman, 2005). Research has shown that among Army officers, mentoring support by immediate supervisors influenced the effect on turnover as illustrated by Payne and Huffman (2005). Specifically, career mentoring positively influencing individuals' organizational commitment as shown by Chew and Wong (2008). Additionally, mentored individuals reported higher levels of commitment to their careers and a greater intention to remain in their organization compared to their non-mentored peers (Allen et al., 2004). The amount of career mentoring that individuals receive increases their sense of professional identity and self-competence to encourage them to continue to be a part of organizations (Kram, 1988). However, the quality of mentoring that individuals receive to develop them toward success is most important (Kram, 1988).

C. GENDER-RELATED ISSUES

Research reveals that men and women possess similarities in the workplace that contribute to overall success. Men and women have similar attitudes about work and success in an organization but women are more likely to face hurdles that create a stereotype that women are not as committed as men (Tinsely & Ely 2018; Ely et al., 2014). Additionally, men and women also placed their career importance at the same value (Ely et al., 2014). However, even with similar values, organizations may assign different training opportunities for men and women based on the perceptions of the "roles" of a father and a mother (Tinsley & Ely, 2018; Preston, 2004).

1. Relation to Turnover

Research reveals some gender differences in regards to turnover between men and women—especially when children change family dynamics. More importantly, the research shows that gender differences are not a result of men and women valuing their careers differently, but that organizations consciously or subconsciously develop men and

women differently. Tinsley & Ely (2018) found that organizations expect men to "man-up" upon the addition to their family. Fathers may ask for a less intense travel schedule but managers expect them to recoup the time so that they remain on the same career trajectory (Tinsley & Ely 2018). Women experience the opposite; mothers are encouraged—even expected by managers—to do less at work and are rerouted into less strenuous work (Tinsley & Ely, 2018). Additionally, "opt out" was a recently coined term in regard to women, which supports the popular belief that women seek less demanding work after giving birth to a child (Tinsley & Ely, 2018). However, Kanter and Roessner (1999) conducted a study for Deloitte's CEO Mike Cook to determine why only 10% of top managers were women under the belief that they left to become mothers. Their research revealed that over 70% of women who left their firm were employed less than a year later at another firm and less than 10% of women actually left the firm to be a full-time care taker for their young children (Tinsley & Ely, 2018). Furthermore, the impression that motherhood is the top barrier to women succeeding in organizations is still prevalent today. A poll taken by Harvard Business Review revealed that 73% of men and 85% of women believe prioritizing of family over work is the biggest barrier for women (Tinsley & Ely, 2018). Contrary to popular belief, the research showed that 11% of women care for children on a full-time basis (Tinsley & Ely, 2018).

Yet with these beliefs discredited by the information, the percentage of men and women at the top management levels are not equal. Multiple studies suggest that women are not embedded into their organizations because of lack of access to networks and information thus causing a disadvantage for negotiations to further their careers (Tinsely & Ely, 2018). Additionally, research shows that men receive more frequent and higher-quality feedback than women, which causes women to lack understanding in their strengths and weaknesses (Tinsley & Ely, 2018). Due to this difference in feedback, women are unable to gain confidence in their skills to believe that they can promote in their organizations so they perceive themselves to take a backseat in their careers compared to their male counterparts (Tinsley & Ely, 2018).

Research also suggests that gender similarity and racial similarity individuals are more willing and comfortable in asking for support from supervisors who share same

characteristics (Foley, Linnehan, Greenhaus, & Weer, 2006). More interestingly, men and women supervisors give more support to same-sex subordinates compared to different gender subordinates as illustrated by Foley et al. (2006). This study's findings are similar to the gender-related issues found in relational demography and mentorship.

2.   Relation to Mentoring

Women are less likely to gain mentors in organizations (Burke & McKeen, 1990; Ragins, 1989; Noe, 1988; Ragins & Scandura, 1994). There are two fundamental reasons explaining why women do not establish a mentor: (1) they do not seek out mentors, (2) mentors do not select female mentees (Ragins, 1989). Women may not seek out mentors because they do not realize the importance of a mentor. As demonstrated in a study of career tactics of 80 women branch bank officers, the participants believed that learning from male managers was unimportant (Larwood & Kaplan, 1980). Another reason for an unestablished mentoring relationship is that females may be uncomfortable in seeking it out. Collins (1983) conducted a study on 388 female professionals and discovered that 61% "happened upon" a mentoring relationship, 20% were handpicked by a mentor, but only 19% sought out a mentor on their own. Furthermore, people positioned to be a mentor may not reach out to junior females in an organization. Male mentors may be hesitant to pick female protégés for a handful of reasons: negative attitudes towards women (Bowman, Wortney, & Greyser, 1965), sex-role socialization (Reich, 1986), or biased tendency to choose same-sex mentee (Bowers, 1984). Additionally, women in leadership positions tend to avoid being a role model or mentor because their plate is already full and they do not know how to deal with the responsibility of assuming that role for junior members (Morrison et al., 1992).

Research highlights that women face greater barriers to gaining a mentor in the civilian sector. There are six barriers for women to attain a mentor: lack of access, tokenism, stereotypes and attributes, socialization practices, norms regarding cross-gender relationships, and reliance on ineffective power bases (Noe, 1988). More importantly, women who have mentors reported to have higher self-confidence, beneficial career advice, counseling on organizational life, and constructive feedback on weaknesses

compared to their male counterparts (Reich, 1985, 1986). Even if mentorship is available, the quality of the relationship must be meaningful. Collected during the exit interviews of lawyers, men and women both had equal proportions of mentors and advisors to their careers, but 71% of men were satisfied with their mentor relationship while a dismal 29% of women had a positive perception of their mentor relationships as illustrated by McGinn and Milkman (2013).

Literature reveals that there are particular stressors unique to women in organizations: discrimination, stereotyping, marriage/work interface, and social isolation (Nelson & Quick 1985). Furthermore, a mentor can alleviate those stressors that professional women experience by increasing a female mentee's self-confidence, understanding the potential future stressors, and how to cope with them (Nelson & Quick 1985).

D.   WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

There is robust research in the area studying the dynamics between the roles and responsibilities between work and family. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) describes work-family conflict researched in 1964 by Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal as the clashing of role pressures between family and work dynamics. Essentially, an individual's work role is strained by their competing family role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). A study conducted on over 25,000 Harvard Business School graduates revealed that 100% of their sample, regardless of their gender, believed their family and personal relationships as "extremely" important (Ely et al., 2014). Coupled with the desire for both men and women to achieve career success and achievement (Ely et al., 2014), work-family conflict becomes inevitable.

Research found the amount of hours spent at work per week (Burke, Weir, & Duwors, 1980) frequency of overtime, and odd shift hours (Pleck, Staines, & Lang, 1980) to be contributors to work-family conflict. Inflexible work schedules also adds to the work-family tension (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). For parents with young children and larger families, work-family conflict increases due to the amount of time spent caring for young children or many children (Beutell & Greenhaus, 1980; Cartwright, 1978). Furthermore,

Direnzo, Greenhaus, and Weer (2011) discovered that employees in high-level positions experience more work interference with family compared to employees in lower levels because of the greater job demands and longer work hours. Additionally, higher-level employees experience more family interference with work due to increased job demands and family responsibilities (Direnzo et al., 2011). Research reveals that work-family conflict differs amongst individuals based on their career timing. A study assessed 230 employees from multiple organizations and industries on work-family balance and conflict in relation to supportive supervision as illustrated by Lapierre and Allen (2006). The study found that supportive supervision in the workplace provides employees with family support because it plays a role in averting conflicts between work and family life (Lapierre & Allen, 2006).

E.   SUMMARY

The research on turnover, mentorship, gender-related issues, and work-family conflict provides a better understanding of the existing literature. These topics were thoroughly examined individually and comparatively. However, there have been no collective studies—capturing all of these topics in one.

The studies on turnover reveal top driving factors for attrition among men and women in both civilian and military organizations. The research also suggests the similarities and differences between both men and women in their professional careers. However, research lacks in regards to relational demography and gender differences for women in the military and their effects on turnover. The studies show that there are differences in organizational treatment for men and women once a family is introduced (Tinsley & Ely, 2018), however it is uncertain how that compares to the military, especially for female Marines with more physically demanding jobs compared to civilian professions. This study hopes to discover the perceptions that women have towards turnover and career decisions based on experiences in their careers with early supervisors and mentors.

The mentoring research covers many areas related to the functions of mentoring, how it affects turnover, and gender differences. However, there is limited mentoring literature in relation to military organizations. Although the studies have shown the barriers

for women to seek out and gain mentors in the civilian sector, this is untouched in the Marine Corps context. This study aims to fill the gap on the various topics of mentorship in regards to women's career decisions.

Gender-related issues reveal that there is a commonality between turnover, relational demography, and mentorship. This study aims to reveal those commonalities in female Marine Corps officers, consequently determining if results parallel with past and current literature.

Research shows that work-family conflict occurs in varying levels across all organizations. The literature has not observed how mentorship may influence work-family conflict. Additionally, the literature is sparse on how work-family conflict impacts female Marine Corps officers.

The primary research goal of this study is to identify the influence that mentors and early supervisors have on Marine Corps female officers' career decisions. Upon reviewing the pertinent literature, this study fills a gap in the current research. The next section illustrates the methods used to conduct the study; the follow-on sections provide the findings, analysis, and conclusion.

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IV. METHODS

This study investigates how interactions between female Marine Corps officers and early supervisors and mentors influence their future career decisions and perceptions of their ability to perform. This research utilizes semi-structured interviews with high-performing female Marine Corps officers, to allow an in-depth exploration of their experiences with early supervisors and mentors. The researcher formulated the interview questions (see Appendix) based on studies that reveal the importance of mentoring in organizations to assist individuals with future career success and fulfilment (Preston, 2004; Kram, 1988). The researcher designed the questions based off existing literature in order to capture what mentoring relationships women have, how mentoring affects turnover, and barriers that women face in establishing mentors (Morrison et al., 1992; Kram, 1988; Preston, 2004; Noe, 1988). The questions revolved around the experiences between women and their supervisors and mentors in the Marine Corps. Due to the nature of the study involving human subjects, the researcher routed paperwork to three entities: Naval Postgraduate School Institutional Review Board (IRB), Marine Corps IRB, and the office of the Marine Corps Staff. Upon the approval of all three offices, the researcher recruited participants and conducted interviews. The participants were encouraged to share their stories through semi-structured, open-ended questions. The researcher transcribed and analyzed the responses to identify themes and make recommendations to shape policy.

A.   DATA COLLECTION

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 17 participants. Open-ended questions encouraged participants to share their personal experiences and perceptions (Spradley, 2016). The researcher designed the interview to elaborate participants' interactions with early supervisors and mentors and their perceptions of the effects of these interactions on their career aspirations and outcomes. The first series of questions provided information about the participant's background, such as how they became interested in the Marine Corps and their career aspirations. The next series of questions revolved around the experiences and influences of the first three supervisors and

any mentors in the participant's career. Probing questions provided additional information to allow a deeper understanding of the participants' responses.

The researcher conducted interviews over a four-week period beginning on September 24, 2018 and ending on October 23, 2018. The interviews lasted from 41 to 95 minutes, for a total of 1,087 minutes, taking place either in person or through telephone conference. Participants who were geographically located close to the Naval Postgraduate School interviewed in person with the researcher. The in-person interviews were located in a quiet location on or nearby the Naval Postgraduate School campus. Participants who were not geographically located near the Naval Postgraduate School interviewed through telephone conference with the researcher. During the telephone conference, the researcher was located in a quiet, private space on or nearby the Naval Postgraduate School. Of the 17 interviews conducted, 14 were conducted via telephone, and three were conducted in person.

The researcher recorded all interviews and had them transcribed, resulting in 532 pages of text. During and following the interviews, the researcher created memos documenting her initial thoughts and observations, yielding 34 pages of handwritten and typed text. The researcher analyzed the notes and the interview transcripts.

1.   Participant Selection

There are several key milestones during a service member's career. The first milestone is finishing the initial commitment at either four or five years. The next milestone is around the ten-year mark, halfway to retirement. An officer who chooses to stay past the ten-year mark is highly likely to choose the military as a long-term career (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2010). This study divides officers into two groups, a group with under ten years of service and a group with more than ten years. The researcher further divided the "under ten years" into subgroups delineated by key career decisions. The researcher did not divide the "over ten years" group because officers who stay in the service past ten years are likely to choose the military as a long-term career. The researcher placed participants into four categories: (1) under ten years of service and planning to serve until retirement, (2) under ten years of service and undecided about serving until retirement

or resigning, (3) under ten years of service and resigned, and (4) over ten years of service and planning to serve until retirement. There were six participants placed in the first category, five participants placed in the second category, and three participants placed in each of the third and fourth categories. This grouping allowed the researcher to analyze responses based on the career decisions of the participants and compare and contrast the experiences and perceptions of the four groups.

The researcher interviewed 17 participants for the study. Participants included a mix of active duty and prior active duty female officers. The researcher recruited participants through personal contacts and a snowball search—meaning at the conclusion of each interview, the researcher requested participants suggest colleagues that might be interested in participating. This approach allowed the researcher to recruit participants who other females perceived as high performing female officers. The females interviewed were carefully selected to ensure a wide spread of MOS and time in service (TIS). Additionally, this approach allowed the researcher to purposefully recruit female officers who fit into four thematically selected categories to allow comparative analysis between groups.

2.   The Participant Demographics

The participants in the exploratory study were across the wide spectrum of MOSs as shown in Figure 1: MOS Breakdown. The spread of different occupations also allowed the study to observe any similarities or differences experienced within a MOS if possible. Of note, while the graph shows only one participant with a combat MOS designator, a few other participants served in billets with low-density females, combat MOS units, or as part of a Special Forces unit. The participants' rank ranged from first lieutenant (O-2) to major (O-4) as depicted in Figure 2: Rank Breakdown. The importance of having a variety in TIS was to ensure that the researcher could observe any themes between women serving under ten years or above ten years, as shown in Figure 3: TIS Breakdown. During the interview process, the researcher noted the high percentage of females who were in dual military relationships and wanted to capture it visually as portrayed in Figure 4: Family/Dependents Breakdown. This may provide insight on an underlying reason why a larger portion of females would want to leave the service. Additionally, because the service does not take

into consideration women who are in relationships but not married (Figure 4) it also does not capture the females who are in a relationship with an active duty service member, so Figure 5: Relationships Breakdown, shows a more accurate view of the relationships of the women who participated in the study. The female participants collectively served in units across the world at the major subordinate commands and deployed in support of operations and exercises spanning from OEF to serving on MEU's. This strengthens the importance of the amount of knowledge that these women possess and can contribute to the Marine Corps.
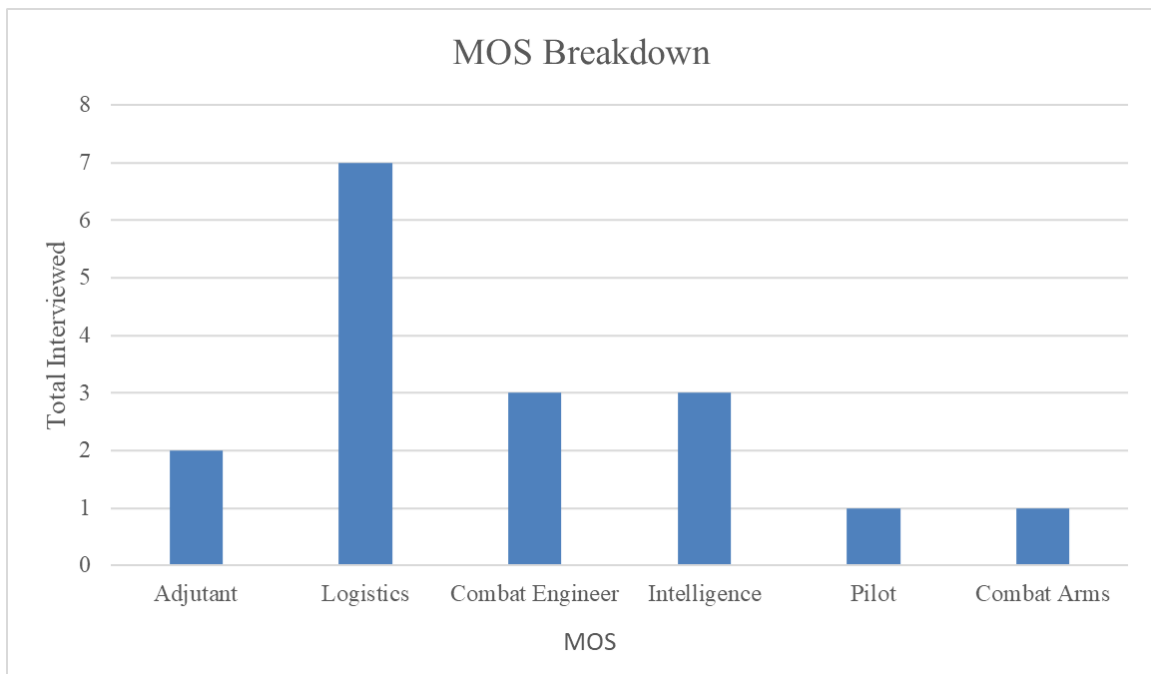

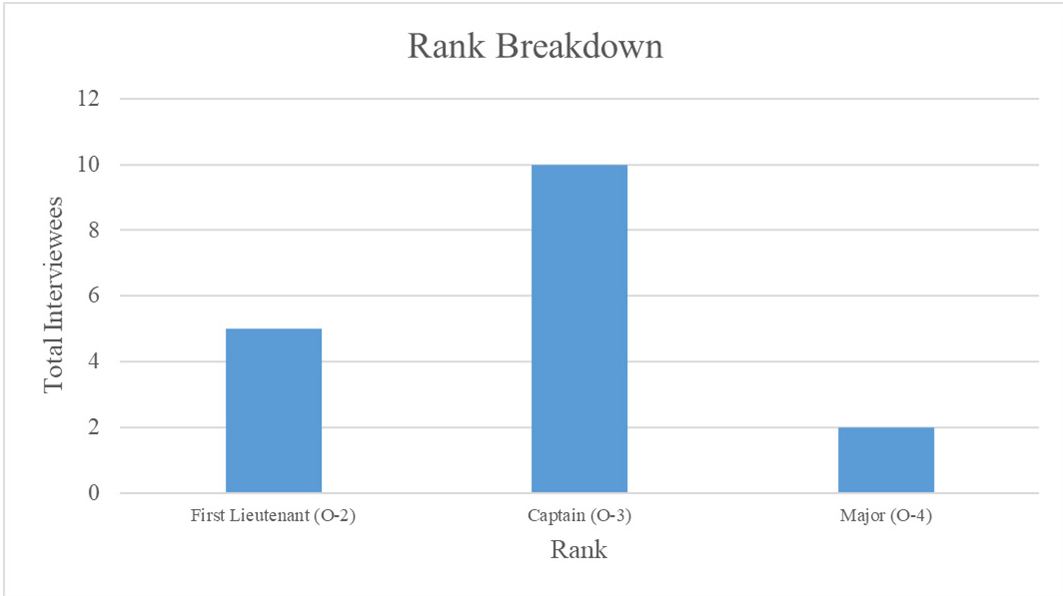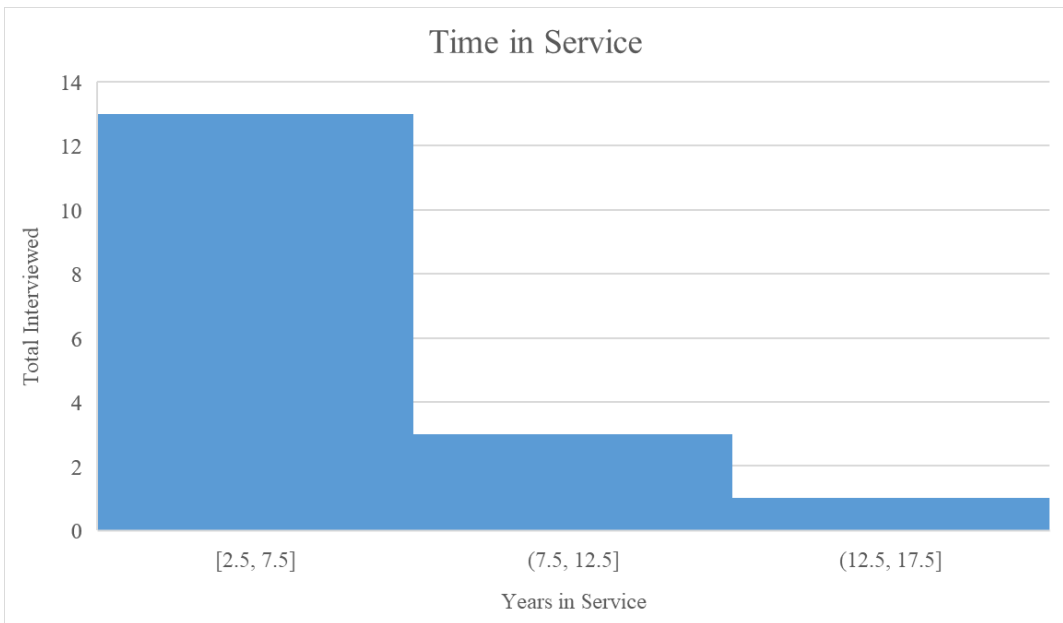Figure 1.   MOS Breakdown

Figure 2.   Rank Breakdown

Figure 3.   TIS Breakdown
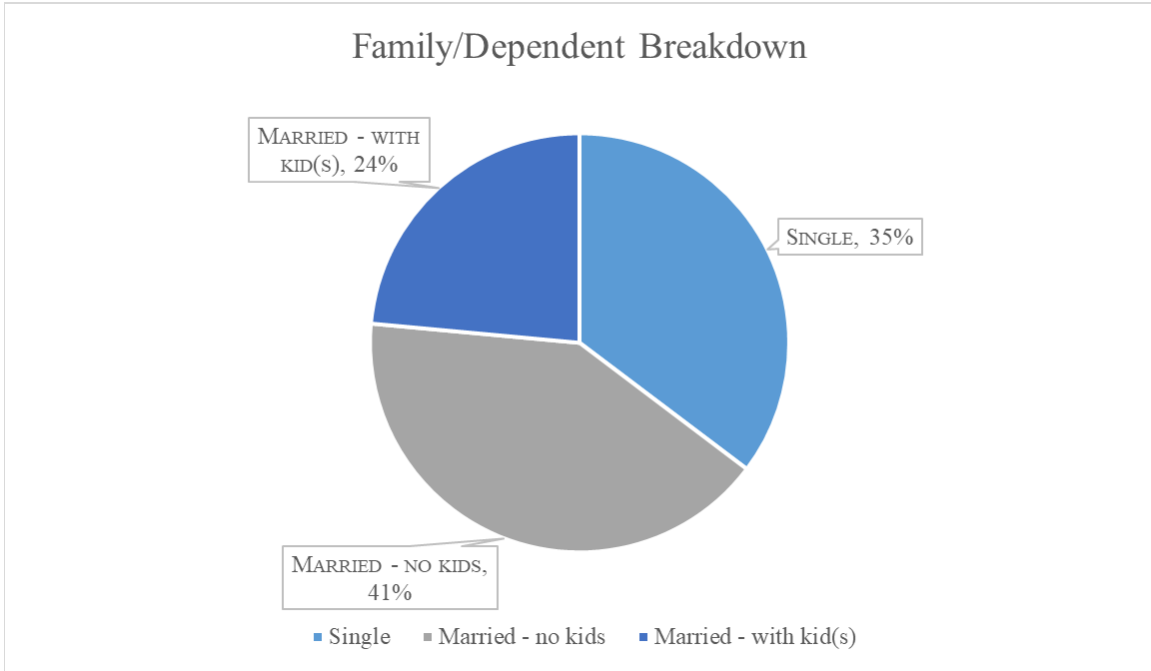
Figure 4.   Family/Dependent Breakdown
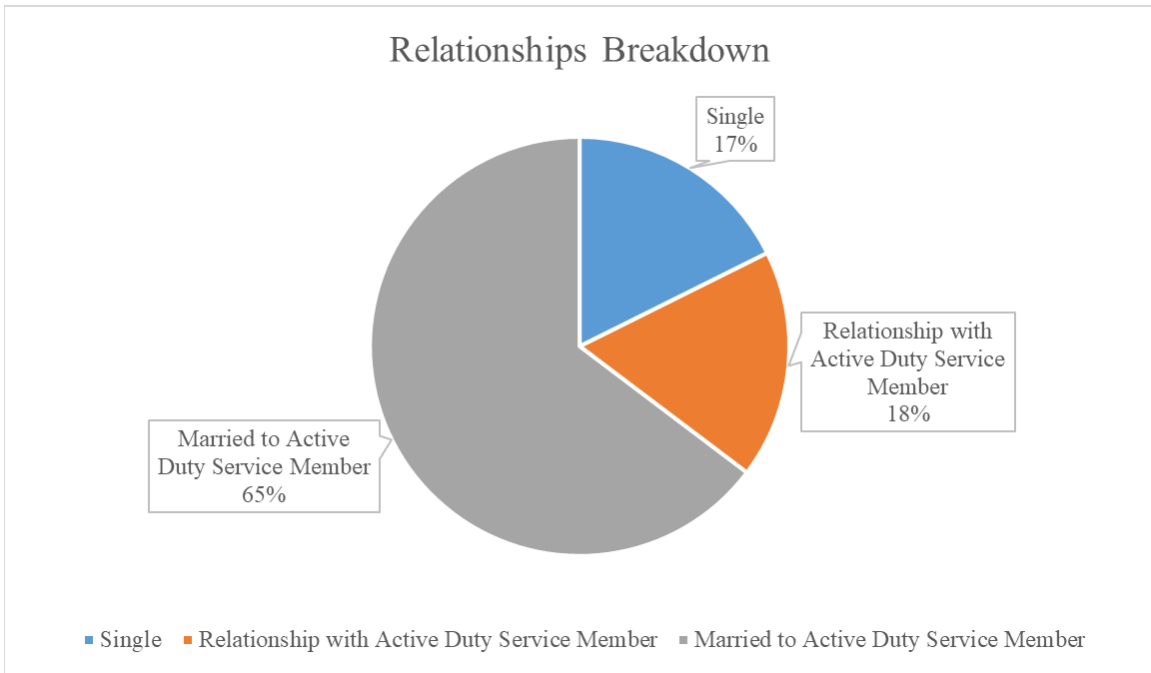
Figure 5.   Relationships Breakdown

B.   DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher analyzed the interview data and memos using thematic analysis and pattern matching across groups to create themes and further categories (Yin, 2015; Lofgren, 2013). The researcher read all transcripts and memos to gain overall familiarity with the data and a broad understanding of the content. Then, the researcher read the interviews of each of the participant groups separately. The researcher identified and coded segments of text related to recurring themes. The researcher then compared themes between participants within the groups, combining themes to arrive at 39 final themes. The researcher continued reviewing the themes in order to add and combine categories, comparing the transcripts, themes, and categories across all four groups and noting similarities and differences, until the categories accounted for all the themes in the data. This resulted in nine second-level categories (initial allure, brand new officer, career decisions, establishing a mentor, mentorship, negative experiences, negative feelings, positive feelings, female obstacles). These categories were further expanded upon, resulting in key concepts.

1.   Description and Analysis of Themes

The researcher began open coding by reading through the transcripts and marking segments of text related to mentoring or early supervisors. From the initial review, the researcher marked over 1,000 segments of text from several lines to several paragraphs long. Through successive readings, the researcher grouped the segments of text into 39 categories that were common in the responses of the 17 participants. The categories include topics such as bad leadership, the feeling of gratitude, and identifying a mentor, as shown in Table 1: Categories. These categories were then organized and condensed into nine second-level categories as shown in Table 2: Themes with Second Level Categories. These categories capture a broad picture of the career of a female officer; starting from when she enters the organization, including her experiences during her time as an officer, and also future opportunities and options. There are two separate categories labeled "negative experiences" and "negative feelings" but only one for "positive feelings." The researcher did not include a category for "positive experiences" because the data revolving

interactions with peers, mentors, and inspiring leaders captured those experiences. Next, the researcher pulled direct quotes from the interviews and organized them into four groups: (1) under ten years of service and planning to serve until retirement, (2) under ten years of service and undecided about serving until retirement or resigning, (3) under ten years of service and resigned, and (4) over ten years of service and planning to serve until retirement. The researcher compared the nine second-level categories between the groups to identify patterns. This resulted in 618 quotes pulled from the transcripts and placed under the nine second-level categories creating 69 pages worth of categorized quotes.

Table 1.   Categories

Categories		
Initial perception of USMC	Females with driven personalities	Female-related
Adjusting as a 2ndLt	Aspirations	Being in a combat role/low density female
Identifying a mentor	Male vs. female mentor	Sexual harassment
Degree of separation	Lack of a mentor	"Golden path"
Relational demography	Bad leadership/command	Future opportunities
Perception of higher ranking Marines	Pilot leadership	Insight from leadership
Enlisted vs. Officers	Marine Corps "green weenie"	Family Relationship
Bad early supervisors	No guidance	Bad female leader
No reward	Burnt out	Counseling
Disheartened	Distrust	Peer support
Undervalued	Lonely	Gratitude
Not belonging	Mentor relationship	Career advice
Being treated like a human being	Protection	Luck

Table 2.   Themes with Second-Level Categories

Themes with second-level categories		
Initial Allure • Initial perception of USMC • Females with driven personalities	**Positive Feelings** • Luck • Gratitude	**Brand New Officer** • Adjusting as a 2ndLt • Aspirations
Mentorship • Relationship • Treated like a human being • Protection • Career advice • Peer support • Counseling	**Negative Feelings** • Burnt out • Disheartened • Distrust • Undervalued • Lonely • Not belonging	**Female Issues** • Female-related • Being in a combat role/low density • Sexual harassment

Establishing a Mentor
• Identifying a mentor
• Male vs. female mentor
• Degree of separation
• Lack of a mentor
• Relational demography
	Negative Experiences
	• Bad leadership/command
	• Stereotypes
	    • Type of people who stay in
	    • Pilot Leaders
	    • Enlisted vs. Officers
	    • Marine Corps "green weenie"
	• Bad early supervisors
	• No guidance
	• No reward
		Career Decisions
		• "Golden Path"
		• Future Opportunities
		• Insight from leadership
		• Bad Leadership/Command
		• Family Relationships
		    • Dual military
		    • Kids

During this analysis portion of the study, the researcher observed no outstanding differences among the aforementioned four groups of participants. Major differences appeared in the responses of women who departed the service and who were on the fence versus the responses of women who plan to remain in the service. There were many similarities between the two groups, thus leading the researcher to analyze the responses of all participants as a single group. The researcher then returned to the transcripts, and examined the text in the initial categories and second-level categories to identify overarching themes.

Ultimately, there were three key themes identified in this study: sources of mentoring, mentoring functions, and mentoring related to career decisions, as shown in Table 3: Initial Flow Chart. These themes capture female participants' experiences in regards to how mentorship plays a role in their careers. If a female does not have a strong mentor in her career, the analysis suggests that this lack of mentor negatively influences her career. From the overarching themes found in Table 3: Initial Flow Chart, the researcher examined the chart again but with a closer look at how mentoring played a role in the

second-level categories. From that analysis, the researcher reorganized and downsized the second-level categories from nine to six in order to capture the 39 overarching themes and subthemes fully related to mentoring shown in Table 4: Updated Second-Level Categories. Finally, the researcher added the updated second-level categories in the initial flow chart to create the final flow chart displayed and discussed in Chapter IV.

Table 3.   Initial Flow Chart

Categories

- Adjusting as a 2ndLt
- Aspirations

- Identifying a mentor
- Male vs. female mentor
- Degree of separation
- Lack of a mentor
- Relational demography

- Relationship
- Treated like a human being
- Protection
- Career advice
- Peer support
- Counseling

- Burnt out
- Disheartened
- Distrust
- Undervalued
- Lonely
- Not belonging

- Bad leadership/command
- Stereotypes
  - People who stay in
  - Pilot Leaders
  - Enlisted vs. Officers
  - USMC "green weenie"
- Bad early supervisors
- No guidance
- No reward

- Female-related
- Combat MOS/low density females
- Sexual harassment

- Luck
- Gratitude

- Initial perception of USMC
- Females with driven personalities

- "Golden Path"
- Future Opportunities
- Insight from leadership
- Bad Leadership/Command
- Family Relationships
  - Dual military
  - Kids

Second-Level Categories

- Brand New Officer
- Establishing a Mentor
- Mentorship
- Negative Feelings
- Negative Experiences
- Female Issues
- Positive Feelings
- Initial Allure
- Career Decisions

Overarching Themes

- Sources of Mentoring
- Mentoring Functions
- Mentoring related to Career Outcomes

Table 4.   Updated Second-Level Categories

2.   Data Limitations

It is important to mention that were limitations to the data used in this study. Although the intent of the study was to provide a sample from across the entire Marine Corps, the study was relatively small compared to the entire population, thus patterns identified may not capture all female Marine Corps officers' views. Additionally, the researcher was unable to capture all MOSs for the study. There was a spread across women in supporting MOSs and women serving in and with combat MOS units; so the responses shed light into the many differences and similarities across various billets in the Marine Corps. Therefore, a focused study on a specific MOS' could strengthen some of the inferences made. Furthermore, there was no rank variation above ten-year mark. The researcher sought out various ranks to interview, but was only able to interview the rank of O-4 for the "over ten years" group. Due to the qualitative nature of the study, the information provided by the participants was all descriptive information. Thus, the findings

for this research are not statistical, but rather more informative about the recurring topics and ideas observed in the responses of the women. Lastly, it was beyond the scope of this research to interview male officers to provide a comparison group. These limitations were not crucial to the overall impact of the study; however, for future research, those missing pieces could fill in additional information that went unacknowledged. Overall, the participants in this study provided meaningful insight and truthful perspective into their experiences on the unique barriers of establishing mentoring relationships and other issues in the Marine Corps that can help improve current policies in place.

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V. FINDINGS: MENTORING FUNCTIONS, SOURCES, AND MENTORING RELATED TO CAREER DECISIONS

This chapter presents the findings from the exploratory study conducted through one-on-one interviews with 17 female Marine Corps officers who previously served or currently serve on active duty. The analysis suggests that mentors do not directly influence a female officer's decision to remain in or leave the Marine Corps. However, the analysis does highlight that mentors influence a female officer's perceptions of her performance, future opportunity, and the organization. The findings of this study suggest that female officers deal with challenging experiences encompassing bad leadership, female-specific issues, and/or adjusting as a brand new officer. Additionally, the study finds that there was a lack of mentoring in both career and psychosocial support, especially in the form of role modeling for female officers. Furthermore, the study reveals that women have no preference in the gender of a mentor for career functions, but there is a desire for a female mentor or role model for family management. The findings also show that female officers received support most from peers, especially when mentoring from higher-ranking officers was unavailable. Lastly, the study finds that the function of a role model is a strong factor in the career decisions of female officers for initially joining the Marine Corps and whether or not to depart the service.

The analysis shows that mentoring influences females' experience in their careers. Consistent with extant literature, the analysis shows that mentors provide two distinct functions for an individual: career functions and psychosocial functions (Kram, 1988). Furthermore, the analysis suggests that role modeling and support in challenging situations for female officers is crucial. The analysis identified three overarching themes – sources of mentoring, mentoring functions, and mentoring related to career outcomes – as shown in Table 5: Final Flow Chart, and described subsequently.

Table 5.   Final Flow Chart
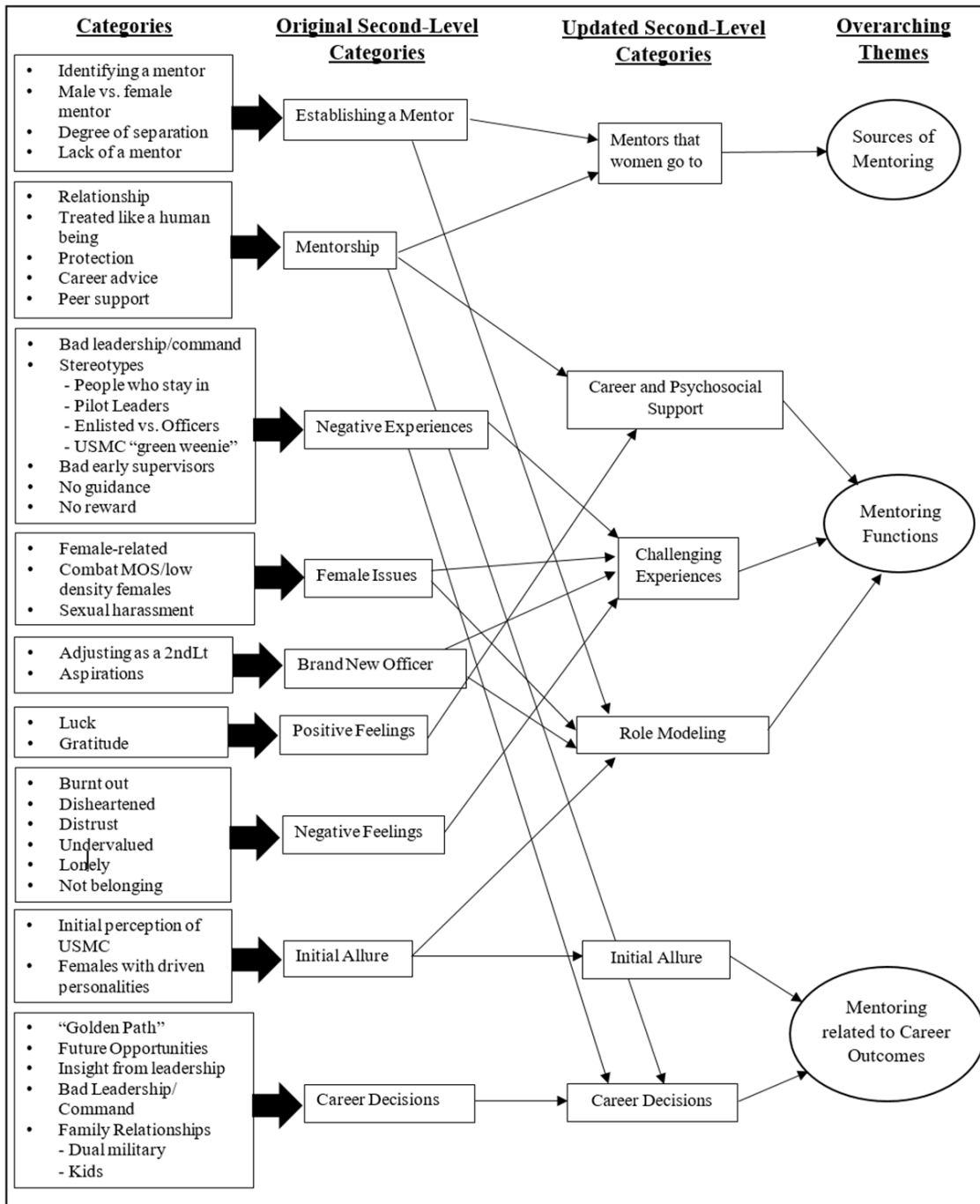
A.   MENTORING FUNCTIONS

Mentoring functions encompass how mentors help mentees in different types of situations and the various types of support provided. The analysis revealed three common situations that the participants dealt with: toxic leadership, female-specific issues, and being a newly commissioned officer. Through those challenging experiences, individuals who had mentors showed more capability in handling those problems. Mentoring provides two main supporting entities: career and psychosocial support. The analysis showed the importance of both functions in a mentee's experience as a female officer. Most notably, the research discovered that female role models are important for family management and work-life balance.

1.   Dealing with Challenging Experiences

Bad leadership. The analysis suggests that all female officers are undeniably likely to serve under a toxic commander at some point in their careers as shown in Table 6: Mentoring Functions: Challenging Experiences. Every participant spoke of at least one bad supervisor or command climate during her Marine Corps career. For example, one female noted, "My commanding officer was worthless. I basically ran the company for him. I don't know what he did all day except maybe ground fights…If nothing else, I learned from him what not to do." Another female spoke of how serving under a bad commander influenced her negatively, "I just saw a lot of political stuff…the battalion commander…saying it's for the benefit of the institution. But, clearly, it's for his next evaluation...that has definitely made me less interested in the Marine Corps." All of their responses highlighted the follow-on effects of experiencing a toxic leader. One woman said, "I don't feel valued. And the work that my Marines do doesn't feel valued." Another explained how poor leadership had caused a sense of disenchantment when she stated, "I don't have that fire anymore…as sad as that might sound. There's a lot of people throwing water on that fire." These negative experiences and the subsequent negative feelings revealed that bad leadership was a common thread among female officers, whether in their initial contract or having served for over ten years. Interestingly, participants frequently used the word "luck" in their responses when talking about good leadership as though it was a rare occurrence. As one

woman explained, "I got really lucky because if I had…another [major]…it would totally change my experience. And so, I feel very lucky that I had him." The responses suggest that encounters with uninspiring, unfavorable leaders is unavoidable in the Marine Corps.

Female-specific issues. The female officer participants shed insight on issues they faced because of their gender. Stories revealed that female-specific issues occurred among various MOSs and ranks. The responses from women serving in billets in male dominated MOSs were especially noteworthy, revealing they experienced unwanted sexual behavior that they tried to handle at their level to reduce the spotlight on being the sole woman or one of very few women in their unit. As one female recalled,

> I didn't want anything to detract from [doing my job]…I didn't want to appear like I couldn't handle myself and that I didn't have thick skin and that I couldn't take comments without going and running and telling someone about it because I knew that's what they would say because I would hear conversations like that happening around me. Like, 'Oh, you can't say that because then someone will go and complain about it.'

Women also spoke about difficulties related to being pregnant. One participant said,

> He was very insensitive to my pregnancy as a whole and female Marines as a whole. In the field, he would try to get me to go on convoys, which, I had no reason as the S-4 to go on a convoy with the [Motor Transport] companies….And I would talk to him and be like, 'Sir, like, I don't want to take the risk of a vehicle flipping over and me losing my baby in the first trimester.' And he'd be like, 'Well, you can ride in a POV, can't you?'

However, when one female wanted to go talk about an issue, she explained, "there were, like, men in the unit, I guess, that I looked up to in terms of mentors, but no one I felt like I could go and talk to about [female] things." Not all participants experienced female-related issues. However, these situations reveal that these problems may still exist for some female officers today.

Brand new officer. All officers must learn the ropes of the warfighting organization as a second lieutenant. Many participants spoke about the difficulties assimilating to Marine Corps culture once they entered the fleet as a brand new officer. One respondent spoke about her first unit when she remarked, "I was a [second] lieutenant who didn't know what was going on, trying to figure out how to manage an ops section for

regiment." Another, spoke about the uncertainties in leading as a young officer, "As an impressionable young lieutenant, it's hard to be the one that [says], 'hey, no, I'm going home, it's 1630. I'm done with my work, and there's nothing more I can do here. My guys are getting out of here.'" One officer recalled difficulty when she did not have a mentor to help guide her, "I feel like somebody probably could have pulled me aside and been like, 'hey, you don't need to do everything. It's okay to pass off something…It doesn't have to be 100% complete product…That's just the nature of the Marine Corps. You just need pass it on and move on to this next opportunity you have.'" Another officer shared how challenging it was for her to even establish a mentor as a young lieutenant when she noted, "I feel like there's definitely a possibility that I did not look for or utilize a potential mentor when I was younger I think. And now I feel like I am mature enough to seek mentorship." The responses reveal that there is a large adjustment as brand new officers and the help of a mentor is essential in the development of a junior individual. Furthermore, the analysis suggests that some participants were unaware of the importance of seeking out mentorship at an early stage in their careers.

From experiencing bad leadership, female-specific issues, and being a brand new officer, the analysis suggests women will face at least one of these unavoidable issues over the span of their careers. Additionally, these experiences cause women to feel frustrated, burnt out, and undervalued. One female officer states, "I just got burnt out honestly…I just felt like I had nothing left to give. I can't do it anymore. I can't feel like this anymore." Responses suggest that a reliable mentor would be useful in combating these challenging experiences.

Table 6.   Mentoring Functions: Challenging Experiences

Challenging Experiences	Quote
Bad Leadership	• "That set of…horrible leadership for six months really was a first case of me never wanting to be in the Marine Corps. That was the first time I questioned [myself] and my desire to be in the Corps. I was just like, man, I have maybe I messed up. Maybe I did mess up." • "My first supervisor…was bad. He was a captain, and he was terrible; the definition of the worst leader that I hope nobody ever has to deal with again." • "It's very few and far between where I'm just like, 'That's it! That's the guy. That's the girl. That's exactly what I want to be like.' And those are the moments – those few moments are when I've been reinvigorated, where I'm just like, 'Goddamn it, yeah! That's the kind of leader I want to be in the Corps.' But more often, it's the leadership that's poor or the miss opportunities that I go I don't want that to happen to somebody else because I know how it made me feel."
Female-Related Issues	• "There were some women who right after they gave birth, they were sent temporary additional duty – away from their child – and they have to figure out how to pump and mail breast milk in the mail to get to their child and get dry ice from wherever they were to make sure it didn't spoil. And then traveling through airports, and it was it's hard…or they get deployed six months after…they give birth…And I was lucky that…I wasn't in that position. I was not going anywhere. In the three years that I've had my daughter, I've been away from her for a total of, I think, three nights. And a lot of people haven't been that fortunate." • "So, [he says], 'Rich Jews exist? That's like saying smart women exist.' And it was like everybody heard it. And I was the only woman out there at that time." • "My first boss was a logistician and colonel, and today I can appreciate him because I think he's a good guy. When I met him, he was a different person, and I don't think he was comfortable around females. And he had these quirks…when I did my in-brief with him…one of the first things he said was, 'We're not going to have a problem with you sleeping with anybody here, are we?'…what I should have said was, 'is this something you ask all your lieutenants?'…And he was like, 'Well you know, the last female officer we had here, she slept with one of the staff sergeants.' And in my eyes, that's not gender exclusive."
Being a Brand New Officer	• "And it's just like how do I handle this as a second lieutenant that doesn't really know what she's doing [?]" • "As a second lieutenant, I really didn't know how to look for those qualities or, like, ask those questions." • "I don't know if you're a piece of shit. I don't know if you're a superstar, you know…I'm a blank state, I'm a blank canvas. You could shape and mold me -- so why don't you take advantage?" • "I was 22 years old…I think about it; legitimately just a 22 year old girl checking in, like, no idea what's about to happen."

Note: The researcher removed the respondents' filler words and spelled out acronyms.

2.   Career and Psychosocial Support

The analysis shows that career and psychological support are important functions served by the mentors of female Marines, consistent with previous literature proving them to be important in the civilian sector. The analysis suggests that these two functions are

also sought out by female officers in their mentors – primarily the desire for psychosocial support as shown in Table 7: Mentoring Functions: Career and Psychosocial Support.

Career Support. Participants spoke about the beneficial effects they experienced from the career support given to them by mentors. Some spoke of career support in dealing with decisions involving career paths, learning the ropes of the organization, and even dealing with negative situations. For example, one female officer said, "I was looking into the…Funded Legal Education Program [and one of my mentors] said, 'In life…you will see that opportunities will continue to present themselves to you, and they're never going to stop.'… [when] I think about opportunities…I think about what he said." Another female spoke about the coaching she received from another mentor, "I'd be working at 8:30 [or] 9:30 at night. And he would [say], 'Go home. It's still going to be here to tomorrow.' He [practiced] a healthy work life balance, but he also worked really, really hard…[he] took me under his wing…[and] provide[d] a lot of really helpful feedback." Moreover, another participant spoke about a negative situation that a mentor supported her in,

> [A major from my unit] saw me with a group…And he was like, 'Wait here for a second.' We were in a stairwell, and he waited for [everyone] to leave…it was just the two of us in the stairwell, and he was like, "I don't care about this political bullshit. You don't belong in [Combat Arms]…The Marine Corps' going to push you through because they need a female, but females shouldn't be in [Combat Arms]. And you should do the responsible thing and pull yourself out of it.'…I thought about that for two hours and then I went to talk to [my mentor]. And she obviously was not pleased, and she made it very well known….[she] told him that he had to apologize to me…even through all that, she was really supportive and stuff and she was like, 'there's all going to be people like that. But, here's all [the] other people that still do support you and stuff.'

The analysis reveals that mentors in the Marine Corps provide beneficial career support for junior individuals as they progress in their professions.

Psychosocial Support. The responses revealed that psychosocial support is a strong element in influencing positive perceptions. For example, one participant spoke about how she perceived her capabilities were influenced by her mentor when she said, "He definitely made me more confident…in my abilities…I could trust his judgment…he definitely made me feel like I had a chance at being a proficient logistics officer." Another

participant explained, "He looked at me like a person as opposed to a number." This sentiment was echoed by another participant who noted, "But it makes you feel like a person and it makes you feel like he actually cares genuinely about you." This idea of acceptance was a common theme when respondents gave answers about their mentors, suggesting that in order for a mentorship to be impactful, it must be genuine.

Table 7.   Mentoring Functions: Career and Psychosocial Support

Career and Psychosocial Support	Quote
Career Support	• "Those two mentors that I went to…consistently when I had gender-specific issues like a catcall issue. Or I had a Marine Corps Times article printed out and Marines drew a dick on it over my face, and I took it to him and we handled it. There were things that happened that I wouldn't have been able to handle on my own or respond on my own, and he helped me through those situations." • "[A major from my unit] saw me with a group…And he was like, 'Wait here for a second.' We were in a stairwell, and he waited for [everyone] to leave…it was just the two of us in the stairwell, and he was like, "I don't care about this political bullshit. You don't belong in [Combat Arms]…The Marine Corps' going to push you through because they need a female, but females shouldn't be in [Combat Arms]. And you should do the responsible thing and pull yourself out of it.'…I thought about that for two hours and then I went to talk to [my mentor]. And she obviously was not pleased, and she made it very well known….[she] told him that he had to apologize to me…even through all that, she was really supportive and stuff and she was like, 'there's all going to be people like that. But, here's all [the] other people that still do support you and stuff.'" • I started picking up the phone and going okay what are the pros and cons of being 'A', what are the consequences [of 'B'], and [how] does this impact my career…[I called] my previous boss, who calms me down…I needed my mentors, my senior officers to tell me…the truth in a good way. • "[One of my mentors would] give me a story of how he's been here before, and then he just told me to, 'Suck it up and quit complaining and go [be the] officer you're supposed to be.' In a very loving…and inspiring way." • "I would definitely say…my first company commander, was definitely one of the biggest influencers just on his mannerisms, his professionalism, and the way that he showed us how to take care of the Marines."
Psychosocial Support	• "He definitely made me more confident…in my abilities…I could trust his judgment…he definitely made me feel like I had a chance at being a proficient logistics officer." • "Having people recognize you for talents that you have and care about developing them and making sure that you're doing something that's fulfilling -- I wasn't expecting that." • "The first day I was there, I met one of the lieutenant colonels. And he sat down with me, he asked me about my life, what I wanted to do, about my parents. He sent my husband an email, he sent my parents an email. Every year he sends me a birthday email and an anniversary email, and it was a just a small example of that really good leadership and investment in people that made me go, holy shit, I'm back in the game." • "Just being able to sit them down and go, 'hey, what's going on?' Talk to me like a human...You know, vice 'lieutenant so and so what is the status of this'…Instead it's more of, 'hey, lieutenant, how's it going, how's your husband, how are the dogs, how is everything going?'"

Note: The researcher removed the respondents' filler words and spelled out acronym.

Role Modeling. Role modeling is a key function in psychosocial support that was found in the responses of the participants. The analysis suggest that role modeling plays a large part in female Marine Corps officers' perceptions of future opportunities and family management as a female officer as depicted in Table 8: Mentoring Functions: Role Modeling.

Role Modeling for Future Opportunities. Role modeling affects these female Marine Corps officers' perceptions of future opportunities both positively and negatively. For example, some women revealed the disappointment of their future billets when they looked up at role models in their career fields or others noted the inability to gain positive role models as their mentors. As one participant described, "But I haven't really met a company commander yet at [my unit] at least that makes me want to be a company commander at [my unit]." Another female stated, "I didn't at any time envy what [my boss] was doing. I never felt like, 'oh, I wish I could be him.' I don't think I've ever been in the position where I saw someone and said, 'that's the job I want.'…the future looks bleak." One female who left the service stated, "I didn't want to be a battalion commander because that was just such an obvious progression…[So I] need[ed] to reevaluate [my] life trajectory a little bit because it seems like that's something [I] should like want." On the other hand, some females have seen success with role models for future opportunities. A female General's Aide stated, "Both generals have been phenomenal with sitting down with me, talking about the options, talking about how it could impact my career good or bad." She continued to explain, "it helps when you have a general who encourages you to stay in and says, 'Hey, you should look into this. This is something you would be good at or try [and] look at this.' So, that definitely helps for sure." Another officer who is optimistic about the future noted, "[My mentor] wasn't like, 'You have to do this to be competitive for O-5 command and that is what you must do.' …he would realize [I might not] want to be a battalion commander. And he was open to that and would talk about [my interests]." Female officers' responses hint at the significant influence role models have on their perceptions and attitudes about future career paths.

Role Modeling for Family Management. The data suggests that role modeling in regards to family management was a bit harder to come by for female officers regardless

of their time in service. One female major shared her struggles to find a mentor and start a family: "I think not having any females anywhere [in the aviation community], that I could kind of look up to [was hard]." She continued to share her thoughts on having kids in the future with her active duty husband, "I don't know any dual Marine Corps couple who's had kids [while] they're both active duty." Another female captain noted, "But I think why it's important for me to see a female is because I do know that I want a family…when you look up the chain of command to see a female officer being successful, there's usually not a family that comes in tow with her." These comments reveal the struggle female officers have in finding a mentor who could serve as a role model for starting a family. However, one female major established a mentorship where she could talk about family concerns freely. She explained, "I think the fact that she was a female meant that there …was a greater opportunity to discuss more topics…there were plenty of male lieutenant colonels that I would consider mentors…for career advice…But not necessarily…the decision factors when thinking about starting a family." The majority of respondents who spoke about mentors in regards to family management revealed a lack of qualified mentors. Of the participants who spoke on this subject, only one female, after some struggle to find one, established a relationship with a senior female mentor to discuss family concerns.

Table 8.   Mentoring Functions: Role Modeling

Role Modeling	Negative	Positive
Career/Future Opportunities	• "And then after being a company commander, I categorically was certain that I did not want to be a battalion commander later…there wasn't anything that I was really intent on pursuing or really excited about." • "I wanted to be a platoon commander and looking at my future options…I just don't think that anything that I would do in the future I would be as passionate about what I'm doing right now. I don't know want to do it just to have a job." • "I remember only seeing one…female colonel when I was at II Marine Expeditionary Force when I was [with] 2nd Intelligence [Battalion]. And then there were many years before I saw another field grade female."	• "I looked at them, and I was like, 'Dang, I want to be you guys.' You have major…who's this Marine Special Operations Command guru before [it] became a thing. And you've got major…who has the family component and is just approachable." • "And he was a lot of the reason I ended up going [Combat Arms]…he had a probably two or three hour discussion with me where we just sat down and he was completely honest with everything. And he was like, 'I think these issues will be fine.' He's like, 'I think I'm concerned about these couple things.' And we had just talked about that for a while, and he's like but I don't think that women can't do it basically. And he was like if you choose to do it, I'll support you." • "My Officer Selection Officer [is] a female [adjutant officer who] had the same progression I did. And she's been one of those people who has experienced hard times, bad leadership, and risen above it…there were times where I would just like, 'Hey, can I reach out to you and just talk to you?' It was an in the moment, boom, we're talking about it, or let's go to lunch or, email correspondence check-up. The initiative wasn't just on my side, it was on her side, you know."
Family Management	• "But I think why it's important for me to see a female is because I do know that I want a family, and I want that aspect of life. And, usually, it feels like more often than not when you look up the chain of command to see a female officer being successful, there's usually not a family that comes in tow with her, or it's very strange, right. It's very rare…that you find both." • "I think…a lot of it is that I really haven't [interacted with] any [senior ranking] women. Command Element, Aviation Combat Element, Battalion Landing Team…no one above the rank of captain the entire time I was there. I don't even remember a female major. I think a part of it just exposure…I haven't really been in any kind of working relationship with senior women and nor really had a whole lot of interaction with them and [I] think it would be good, I just haven't had the opportunity."	• "I think the fact that she was a female meant that there …was a greater opportunity to discuss more topics. For instance, I wouldn't discuss having a family with a male lieutenant colonel. And there were plenty of male lieutenant colonels that I would consider mentors…for career advice…But not necessarily…the decision factors when thinking about starting a family." • "I was [conducting a] permanent change of assignment from the regiment…there was a female regimental commander coming in and she just looked like a completely different person than what our regimental commander was at the time…I wish I could have stayed...I wanted to see what kind of a difference she was going to make because the command presence that she carried was just a lot different and looked like maybe that's somebody that I would want to be like, but I didn't have the opportunity to learn from her…She smiled. She had a family. She looked like she enjoyed what she was doing…[that was] the first female colonel that I had seen that I would say that about."

Note: The researcher removed the respondents' filler words and spelled out acronyms.

B.   SOURCES

The analysis suggests that female officers search and possibly find mentorship in three key groups: direct supervisors, someone of higher rank, and peers as shown in Table 9: Mentoring Sources. Additionally, the data reveal that participants did not have one sole mentor throughout the duration of their careers. Rather, mentorship was piecemealed together from many different sources of advice and guidance.

Direct Supervisors. Some women had direct supervisors who were also their mentor. When one female officer described her relationship with her supervisor, she recalled, "I would definitely say…my first commanding officer was definitely one of the biggest influencers just on his mannerisms, his professionalism, and the way that he showed us how to take care of the Marines." Another woman spoke of her company commander and said, "He [was] prior enlisted, just exceptionally competent and caring and levelheaded…he was willing to take a bullet for all of us…He's still someone who I would reach out to after he left, and we got a new company commander." The cases where women had direct supervisors as mentors were less common than the other sources of mentoring.

Someone of Higher Rank. Women also spoke about mentoring relationships cultivated with senior officers from the same unit or activity/interest group. One participant described, "the two [mentors] that impacted me the most were not my Company Commanders…one was another female captain…[who] sat me down, pulled up all…these possibilities in the Marine Corps, about my career…she was awesome." Or another female noted, "[My mentor] was great…[she] invested in my personal development and my leadership development and pulling me into things that were beneficial…She was about fostering leadership and development in everybody." Interestingly, some women even spoke about how they preferred to not have a mentor who was their direct supervisor. One women explained, "She was professional and relatable and…everything that I [thought] an effective person would be regardless of what their position was…it was good that I didn't work for her directly because I had much more open communication with her that way." Another officer spoke about the difference between a mentor who was in her chain of command and another mentor who was not. She said, "I didn't feel like he was trying to press his agenda on me…He was just an interested engineer lieutenant colonel trying to

guide a company grade engineer in a career path, whereas [she] was my battalion commander who needed me to get on board with her priorities." These mentoring relationships with higher-ranking officers reveal that these participants want mentors who are more experienced and sometimes feel more comfortable establishing a relationship that is not within the chain of command.

However, some participants experienced barriers to establishing mentoring relationships outside the chain of command with senior-ranking officers regardless of how badly they wanted that type of mentor. For example, one officer noted, "And he was [an] awesome, awesome battalion commander, one of the best officers I've ever worked for. It was a shame that he was so high up because I was not mentored directly by him." Another female explained, "And it's tough because right now…he's a general, I'm just a lieutenant…I would feel like I'm taking up some of his precious time if I were to reach out to him." Another said, "I'm sure [my previous lieutenant colonel] would be more than willing to talk to me if I did reach out, but I don't feel like I have that level of comfortability in approaching him just because as the regimental executive officer lieutenant colonel and a lieutenant, there were a couple different [levels]." The analysis suggests that some participants believed that they could not approach a very senior ranking officer for mentorship due to their rank regardless of how inspiring they believed that officer to be.

Peers. The analysis reveals that peer support is an overwhelmingly apparent mentoring source that female officers seek out when dealing with tough situations. A female serving in a combat MOS noted the help she received from her mentor in gaining more peer-support when she said, "Probably the biggest thing she's done [is] introduce me to this world, the network of female Marines, which ended up actually being a lot more important to me I guess than I had thought at first." An additional example was a woman who shared, "I think that I am lucky that I have [mentorship] in my peers…it's good to see other female officers who I do believe in, who I do believe embody our core values and work hard and are good role models." A first lieutenant said, "And in a lot of those [challenging] moments I would call another female lieutenant, or…my [Marine] boyfriend…[or] my roommate about it who was also a female Marine." Almost all the

participants in the study spoke about peer support and how it provided psychosocial support throughout their career.

Respondents also mentioned using social media (primarily Facebook) or large groups (such as lean in circles) to connect with peers and receiving mentorship as a Marine. Some participants revealed that social media was useful in providing information and support from peers, while others noted they were not as comfortable using that forum. For example, a respondent recalled,

> When I got pregnant, I became part of a Facebook group called Breastfeeding in Combat Boots…it's a group of both active duty and reserve service members, and they kind of form a community. And it's an open forum. So, if you're going through something, you can ask a question, and more often than not, somebody in the group has gone through that situation before.

Another female Marine, who is a part of a combat MOS unit, said, "[If] something comes up kind of female related, then [I] would absolutely [go to] my female peers. I've got two Snapchat story groups of girls. And we'll occasionally send each other stuff when something comes up or we're frustrated about something." On the contrary, females also noted some uneasiness with participating in a more public, online setting to connect with peers or trying to find mentorship. One participated explained, "There are online Facebook forums or whatever, but I'm not the type of person who's going to post and…ask a bunch of strangers a question about [pregnancy] stuff." A female officer added,

> A female major…reached out to all of us Lieutenants and Captains and…we just all met together and sat down and talked about stuff. And she wanted to keep it a regular thing. I ended up only going to that one meeting though…I think it was a little bit awkward just because I didn't really know her…I appreciated the gesture to some degree, but I think in a big setting like that, it's hard to get mentorship properly…There were probably a good seven to eight of us. And [that] wasn't the setting where I wanted to sit there and talk about anything because I felt really vulnerable. And if I talked about getting out of the Marine Corps, I didn't know if people around me might judge me because they're in it for the long haul.

The analysis suggests that while social media and large groups are great methods to creating communities of peers and mentorship, it might not suit everyone. Additionally, mentorship is developed and formed in many different ways depending on the individual.

Table 9.   Mentoring Sources

Sources	Quote
Direct Supervisors	• "The fact that [my future boss] told me that, he's ready to…give me a fair shot or whatever, I always kind of have that in the back of my mind as I finished The Basic School. And then once I actually got there, he ended up being a good mentor to me. He would help me through stuff. He definitely wanted to see me succeed. He put me in positions to do well. He gave me billets." • "And he kind of instilled that, and that was really, really important as a brand new second lieutenant platoon commander. Because I feel like there were so many other things working against that feeling of capability where he did a really good job of reinforcing it. [He] made us all feel like we were a part of the team and would bring us in and mentor us. And I think that's really, really important."
Someone of higher rank	• "I just kind of recognized that she was someone who I could go…talk to. It wasn't something that we formalized, and she said, 'if you ever need anything' or, 'hey, I'd like to be your mentor.' It just kind of developed organically. And we still keep in touch." • "I really didn't get a good role model or mentor until I was a senior captain. And that was when I met a female lieutenant colonel who was awesome. And she got out of the Marine Corps, but I still talk to her, and she still provides mentorship…it really wasn't until a little bit later on, that I meshed well with somebody and could relate to them and kind of got some useful mentorship." • "My executive officer…was the absolute best...showing that he knew about our families, showing that he cared about how we were performing and if there was any areas that we could do better. And I always felt…more comfortable going to [him] about any situation just because he…had a much more relaxed atmosphere, which I like better."
Peers	• "My husband is five years my senior. So, he's seen a few more things than I have. So, it's actually been really difficult when he's deployed or something like that because I feel like I don't have an outlet. Some things you just feel more comfortable talking to your spouse about…I trust him. And I know that the conversations that we have won't leave the house…a question that I may think is silly I'm okay talking about that." • "I just talked to one of the girls in my platoon [at The Basic School]. She called from her ship on the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit, and we talked for like two hours about shared struggles and things that are going on. So, that part is really cool, the tight knit portion of peers looking out for each other." • "I feel like the fact that we share a lot of about our careers with [peers], to me, [it] honestly does more than any sort of, some older, higher ranking mentor figure. I think our very frank and honest conversations especially because we're kind of going through this all together."

Note: The researcher removed the respondents' filler words and spelled out acronyms.

C.   MENTORING AND CAREER DECISIONS

The psychosocial function of role modeling plays a large role in the career decisions of women entering and leaving the service. The participants' responses overwhelming suggest that the psychosocial function of mentoring, specifically role modeling, influences female officers' career decisions to join the Marine Corps and continue to serve as shown in Table 10: Career Decisions.

1.   Joining the Marine Corps

The psychosocial function of role modeling influences women's desire to join the Marine Corps. All the participants noted that they had other options whether it was joining another military branch or a civilian career path. However, their choice to be part of the Marine Corps was tied to the challenge and future possibilities they saw. The Marine Corps possesses an "elite" appeal to the women who desire to join the service. This was a common thread among participants. Many participants spoke about how they saw the Marine Corps as "an elite organization." One noted the Marine Corps "had a sense of pride and discipline" and "elite competence…the most levelheaded, no nonsense, forward thinking people that our country has to offer." This perception was consistent throughout the responses of the women who became interested in becoming a part of the organization. Additionally, the stated motivation and interests of the females choosing the Marine Corps were similar to one another, speaking to the values of the Marine Corps. One female said, "I want to be one of the best. And it was never a question about what branch I was going to join…that's what I wanted to do." Another officer recalled, "I was very involved in sports…so that competitive drive…seemed like I would be the type of person the Marine Corps was looking for. And there was also a prestige sort of aspect to it as well." Another respondent believed that the Marine Corps "just fit kind of with everything that I envisioned for myself…the perception of Marine Corps leadership really fit with my personal values as well." All of these responses reveal that the female officers who look at the Marine Corps as their future service selection believe the organization to be the highest caliber and are joining for the physical and mental challenge.

Women also spoke about having mentors or role models who encouraged and supported their decision to join the Marine Corps. For example, one participant recalled, "I met a recruiter in high school…he was the one that set me up with a [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] interview and he helped me out through the whole thing." And, she further explained, "for that reason alone, he was a big influence in me actually joining the Marine Corps…and going the officer route too." Another female spoke about her experience with her interest in the Marine Corps coming from "a female lieutenant colonel…doing a year fellowship at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, and she was awesome." She

further commented, "this is a good fit…I like where this person is coming from…I feel like I want to be in the same organization as this person." Another spoke about her enthusiasm in realizing the opportunity to join after meeting a Marine. She recounted, "His wife was a Marine. I met her and I could not stop talking to her [and] picking her brain…I was like, 'Wow, so you're telling me that I can put on the same uniform?...sign me up.'" The experiences of these women reveal the importance of exceptional role models in their decisions to join the Marine Corps.

2. Staying in the Marine Corps

While there are many factors influencing women's decision to depart the service, the analysis reveals that mentoring and the function of role models are important in female officers' desires to stay in the Marine Corps. For example, one female who left the service recalled, "I just realized that it was kind of diminishing returns the longer I stayed in because I'd already had the experiences that I wanted…I wasn't really that interested in a lot of the staff positions and company grade positions that were open to me." She further explained, "There was a couple other things I was interested in, but I was just so dejected at how little input you have…that I [thought] it's not really worth it staying in any longer and having no say where you go and what you do." Another female thought about her potential future and noted, "I wanted to be a platoon commander and looking at my future options…I just don't think that anything that I would do in the future I would be as passionate about what I'm doing right now. I don't know want to do it just to have a job." Another female who departed the service reminisced on her decision to leave and recounted, "I was hoping that [my mentor] would tell me emphatically that I should stay and...[that] the Marine Corps needs officers like you…[and] there's a lot ahead for you in your future in the Marine Corps, and you have so much potential. And he really didn't say any of that."

For women who have voiced their willingness and desire to remain in active duty service, the analysis suggests mentoring shapes their perceptions about the future and future opportunities. As one female officer described her desire to stay active duty she noted, "then I think another big part of it is both peers and supervisors who have been really

encouraging and that acknowledging you, saying, 'you're a really hard-working person' [or] 'you really benefit this organization' [or] 'I hope that you stay in'…and actually caring that you stick around." Another female captain said, "Being in [my current billet] really opens your eyes to all the unique opportunities that the Marine Corps has to offer, [such as] exchange billets and fellowships and the one-off billets that no one knows about…I want to go and do things that excite me and that are also beneficial to the Marine Corps that people don't really know about." These insights suggest that mentoring through traditional counseling or role modeling can directly or indirectly influence career decisions.

Table 10.   Career Decisions

Career Decisions	Quote
Joining the USMC	• "I was really impressed by the two [Marines in the Marine Corps Enlisted Commissioning Educational Program]." • "The officers and the senior enlisted carried themselves better, [they] were always put together. [They even] look good in uniform; were really fit; were outgoing." • "The cream of the crop. Everybody was going to be scoring 300/300 on their physical fitness test and combat fitness test. Everybody would want to be chasing that perfect score in all aspects whether it's on the rifle range, physical fitness tests." • "I realized that the midshipmen leaders that I looked up to the most were all going Marine Corps." • "I was just so gung ho [and]…I can't be infantry…so I want to get as close to the fight as I can and the best and the only way I can do that is to be a pilot as a female…this was 2008." • "I think at the Academy there was this perception of Marine female officers being the biggest of go getters." • "He was fantastic and was such a great leader and person and just calm and intelligent that…if I had not done that National Outdoor Leadership School trip, and he had not been an instructor on it, I don't know if I would have gone Marine Corps because he definitely was kind of the first Marine that I had seen who [was] level headed."
Staying in the USMC	• "But now, being in the aide position, it really opens your eyes to all the unique opportunities that the Marine Corps has to offer [such as] exchange billets and fellowships and the one off billets that no one knows about. So, it's really gotten me interested in looking at how I could take my career to a completely different path…I want to go and do things that excite me and that are also beneficial to the Marine Corps that people don't really know about." • "My aspirations, I think they changed when I was sent to get my master's degree…while also being a General's Aide, watching the people behind the scenes make big Marine Corps decisions, I realized…we have a lot of complex problems that we were faced with, and it's not as simple as make a policy [on] sexually assault, sign it now...I think the fact that the problems get more complex as you go up the ranks, you get to be invited in the room and [participate in] operation planning teams…[and it] has kind of motivated me quite honestly."

Note: The researcher removed the respondents' filler words and spelled out acronyms.

D. ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

While these following themes did not directly address the research question, they were overwhelming apparent in the analysis and motivated the researcher to note these patterns and include them in the study.

Fitness Reports (FITREPs). An overwhelming amount of responses revealed that many participants did not believe they received adequate guidance to be successful in their career. This lack of guidance caused a lot of frustration for the participants. The type of guidance they spoke about revolved mostly around FITREPs and the participants not receiving beneficial counselings such as how to effectively execute their job or improve their performance. One female explained, "[my reporting senior said], 'You're doing great. There's nothing that you can improve on. You're just a junior captain.' And I was like, 'Well…how is that if I'm the bottom of your profile?'" Another participant noted, "I'm considered a high performer. [But] I'm never given any kind of feedback or criticism on how to continue to grow…I know that I need to keep growing as an individual and I'm not okay with maintaining the status quo." Furthermore, a participant recalled,

> [My reporting senior] submitted [the FITREPs] days before he counseled us, so there wasn't anything I could do anyway. He rolled up to the construction site, got out of an air conditioned van, and it's like 110 degrees outside. And he told me, 'You and the two other lieutenants I had to report on were all rock stars, so it was really hard to differentiate you. But, the two others just had more experience, so you're three out of three. But you guys are all rock stars so don't take to heart, keep doing a good job.'

A participant even quipped on her first counseling experience, "I'd been in the Marine Corps for nine years and…that was the first time that anyone had actually told me what the expectations were….I've had more than ten [reporting seniors]." The responses show the disappointment in the FITREP counseling system and the lack of guidance they received even with that system in place.

Pilot Leadership. The analysis reveals that there is a stigma when it comes to pilots and leadership that is not solely unique to pilots in the aviation community. Marines work with pilots as ground officers in squadrons and many participants who worked under pilot supervisors noted "pilot leadership" as a stereotype. One participant who works primarily

with the aviation community said, "But he was a pilot, and pilots are pilots, not necessarily good leaders." Another participant noted,

> You work for [a pilot] who doesn't really know what you do, who doesn't know how really to employ you or best use you and is also evaluating you against pilots or hasn't written on second lieutenants before because pilots get to the fleet as first lieutenants, so you're making their profile…They don't really know how to take care of you or counsel you positively.

A major explained the time when she worked in a flying squadron, "So, you know what I'm talking about when I talk about pilot leadership? And not in a bad way. It's just they have an awful lot put on them. So, not only are they flying and the incredible burden…to [not] screw up, they're also…the 4, [or] the 3, now you're this, and it's like Jesus, they're working their asses off." These comments revealed that there is a great deal of burden placed on pilots and therefore it may affect their ability to properly lead and counsel their Marines.

Belonging. Some responses show that there is a feeling of loneliness amongst women in the Marine Corps and that they do not belong. For example, a captain noted, "I don't think I've ever felt comfortable as a Marine." Another participant explained, "I sometimes felt like an outsider within the Marine Corps in that sense…I almost felt guilty because I didn't feel that way." A major said, "And I don't know anyone in that situation. So I guess sometimes it feels a little lonely." These responses suggest that female officers have a hard time adjusting, potentially leading to a desire to attrite or not be as committed to the organization.

Disheartening. Many participants revealed a feeling of disheartenment or disenchantment with the Marine Corps after some negative experiences. One participant said, "So many of the people that are above me right now and just my perception that they care about their careers more than they care about any of their Marines it's just kind of disheartening." Another participant explained, "That's kind of disheartening that…I could stick around for that long, and there are people like [my boss] that are still going to be around and that will still be my superiors, and that I still need to work under. So, I guess that's a pretty prime example of just the kind of poor quality of leadership or just officers around me." Moreover, a major noted,

Being a little bit disenchanted with the fact that the Marine Corps is supposed to be this really honorable organization, and what I've seen it at very low tactical level, just at a squadron level hasn't always corroborated that. And then hearing from [a mentor] that at the strategic level…it's just even worse…definitely saddens me a little bit more and definitely I find [myself] to be a little bit more disenchanted.

These responses reveal a sense of disappointment in the culture of the Marines in the varying experiences and types of leadership endured by these participants.

Dual Active Military Relationships. Family was a common factor in many participants' career decisions, which, as stated earlier, is partly due to the lack of female role models who they have seen successfully manage a family in the Marine Corps. However, the analysis also reveals that 14 of the 17 participants are married or in a relationship with another active duty military member (all were Marine Corps officers except for one who married to a Navy officer). Additionally, of the three participants who were not in a relationship, one was previously in a relationship with a Marine Corps officer. This analysis reveals that there may be additional influence factors for women in dual military relationships. More interestingly, the concerns were not solely on raising children. The main concern, especially with the officers early in their careers, was how to juggle two active duty careers. The respondents were eager to have just as fulfilling and successful careers as their partners.

E.   SUMMARY

Mentoring. The emerging themes from the interviews suggest that female officers believe there are a plethora of varying barriers and obstacles curtailing the longevity of their careers; however, the analysis suggests that mentoring influences both groups of women desiring to remain in or depart the service. The overall discovery of the study proposes that mentors are not the sole, direct influence on career decisions for female officers when deciding to remain in or leave the Marine Corps—that is, a mentor is not the only source, but one of many. However, the other findings in this research reveal that there are many perceptions formed and potential career decisions made by these female officers based on their interactions with mentors. This study's findings suggest that these female officers inevitably deal with one or more challenging experiences: bad leadership, female-

specific issues, and adjusting as a brand new officer. Moreover, the study proposes that mentoring in the Marine Corps lacks in both career and psychosocial support. The study suggests that there are no gender preferences for career mentoring functions, revealing that women seek out both male and female mentors for career advice and assistance. Furthermore, there analysis reveals that women may desire psychosocial support from other women. The participants have a gender preference in the psychosocial support from female role models for family management. This reveals that women want to be able to see other higher-ranking women successfully manage their family and a career in the Marine Corps. In the Marine Corps, it is particularly apparent that there is a lack of female role models for female officers to emulate when it comes to work-life balance. Additionally, the findings suggest that the most frequent form of mentoring and support female officers receive is through peers. This is especially true when there is no mentor-figure around or available. Finally, the study reveals that the psychosocial function of role modeling is a highly favorable factor in the career decisions of female officers when they decide to enter the Marine Corps or attrite.

Additional Items of Interest. The analysis also suggests that other underlying factors also influenced the experiences and perceptions of female officers. These issues are in regards to FITREPs, pilot leadership, sense of belonging, disheartenment, and dual-active military relationships. These items indirectly related to turnover or mentoring however, because of the frequency of these topics addressed, the researched felt inclined and inspired to analyze them.

The next chapter covers the discussion and recommendations based on the analysis and findings of this research. The findings shaped the conclusion with recommendations to future policies and future studies.

VI. CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

A. FINAL CONCLUSION

This research sought to answer three questions regarding experiences of female Marine Corps officers with mentors and early supervisors and the influence of these experiences on retention. Analysis of interviews with active duty female Marine Corps officers offers answers to the questions. This study also provides recommendations for Marine leaders and areas of future research. The conclusions follow the initial questions the study posed.

1. How do early supervisors/mentors influence female officers' career decisions in the Marine Corps?

Among the participants in the study, the analysis reveals that early supervisors and mentors do not directly influence their career decisions. When women spoke about resigning from service, mentors and supervisors were unsuccessful in convincing the participants to remain. The responses suggest that early supervisors and mentors are not a direct link to female Marine officer attrition. However, the responses reveal that mentors and early supervisors do shape female officers' perceptions of job opportunities, work-life balance, and their overall potential as a Marine Corps officer, which indirectly influence career decisions. The data also shows that mentorship influences positive and negative perceptions that participants develop and use as part of their career decisions.

2. How does interaction with early supervisors/mentors affect female Marine Corps officers' perceptions of their ability to perform in the organization?

The analysis suggests that positive interactions cause female Marine officers to feel accepted, confident, and successful, leading participants to conduct their roles and responsibilities with an empowered mindset. Conversely, the analysis also reveals that negative interactions cause female Marine officers to feel burnt out, distrustful, and undervalued. The participants related poor leadership, unsupportive supervisors, and "anti-mentors" (i.e., poor role models that women did not want to emulate) to negative feelings.

The researcher identified at least one of the three aspects of negative feelings in all of the experiences of participants who have left the Marine Corps. Conversely, the participants related inspiring leadership, positive mentors, and supportive peers to positive feelings. The researcher identified theses three aspects of positive feelings mostly in the responses of participants who plan to stay in the Marine Corps.

3. How do female Marine Corps officers' perceptions of the availability of high-ranking, female mentors influence their perception of future career options?

The analysis suggests that a lack of female mentors decreases female Marines' perceptions of future career options, in particular for considerations related to balancing family and career. Participants did not show any gender-preference for a high-ranking officer who could *assist* them with their career, but did show gender-preference for a high-ranking female officer who could be a *role model* for their future career. Additionally, the responses suggest that the lack of female mentors causes women to seek out a peer to fill the role of a mentor. Responses suggest that even when the peer cannot provide wise and experienced insight, participants value peer mentors because they are able to provide mutual understanding and support based on shared experiences.

B. DISCUSSION

1. Reasons for Turnover

The responses of the participants were in line with the literature on turnover. The responses reveal that for the women who left the Marine Corps and women who would consider leaving, there are many influencing factors, including combinations of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, relational demography, embeddedness, supportive supervision, and work-family conflict. Of the reasons given for considering leaving the Marine Corps, job satisfaction was the most common among the participants. The responses suggest that not everyone desires to be a battalion commander and take the "golden path" set out by the institution, rather they would want to pursue opportunities in the Marine Corps that are interesting to them. It appears that participants highly value the opportunities of billets presented in the Marine Corps.

2.   Lack of Mentoring

The analysis reveals a lack or mentorship from higher-ranking officers. The participants indicated a desire for mentorship but found barriers standing in the way. The barriers were either the participant being too shy to approach a mentor of higher rank or waiting for a mentor to approach them. Mentorship must be a two-way street because it fulfills the individual's essential needs, especially when their career might be stagnating during the middle-years (Erikson, 1978). Therefore, it is crucial that higher-ranking officers are mentoring junior officers by reaching out—especially women mentoring women in regards to family management. Furthermore, the analysis reveals there may even be a lack of FITREP counselings, which also contributed to an overall feeling of lack of mentorship amongst the participants.

3.   Dual-active Military Relationships

Although it was not initially hypothesized or a main focus of the study, the researcher discovered that 83% of participants are in dual-active military relationships (either married or in a relationship). Additional studies on the impacts of active-dual relationships could help explain differences this may cause in career decisions for military service members.

4.   Women's Career Goals

It is apparent from the analysis that the participants' desire to have successful career in either the military or the civilian sector, and that none are seeking to "opt out." This is consistent with the literature on gender-related issues. Although it may be perceived that women are leaving due to motherhood, it may be other organizational issues causing women to leave (Ely et al., 2014; Tinsley & Ely, 2018).

5.   The Marine Corps' "Golden Path"

Participants often noted the perception of the "golden path" and future opportunities that the Marine Corps predetermines, as shown in sections "role modeling for future opportunities" and "mentoring related and career decisions." The analysis suggests that many of the participants begin to think about leaving the organization when they perceive

their options to be limited to the preplanned, mandatory career path. Additionally, the analysis revealed that participants who view their career path to be more flexible from the influence of mentors have a higher willingness to remain in the service. However, if their desired options become unavailable or unsupported, they would consider leaving the organization. Mentors also play a role in shaping those perceptions as discussed earlier in Chapter IV, but there is a common idea that participants should want to be a battalion commander. Many participants who contemplate leaving the service had a common perception that they should leave the service if their goals must align with taking and accepting career options that lead to commanding at the battalion level.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis of responses identified numerous areas that are lacking in regards to mentorship in the Marine Corps for female officers. The following are policy suggestions to lessen the barriers for women to attain mentors but also for all Marines to attain positive, beneficial mentors and also to retain high performing Marines.

1. Training and Education

Boosting the mentoring program through training and education starting at The Basic School (TBS) may help create a culture that prioritizes mentoring relationships among the officer corps. Studies reveal that individuals do not seek out mentors because they do not realize the positive impacts (Larwood & Kaplan, 1980). Additionally, TBS is a training and education environment where officers should be educated on the fruitful benefits of a mentor and trained on how to properly mentor.

2. Network System

The Marine Corps should look to create an easier network system for all Marines to find a mentor. Research shows that a barrier to mentorship for women is lack of access to networks (Nelson & Quick, 1985). While there are various facebook groups and "lean in" circles available, the data analysis revealed that not everyone is comfortable using those methods. A larger and more official system where mentees are matched with mentors would be a useful platform. An example would be a site, similar to a LinkedIn, that uses

an algorithm to link similar people together based on personality traits and career experiences and aspirations. Marines could search for the type of mentor they want and vice versa. To reiterate, it is not recommended that mentors be assigned as past research suggests that this fails to generate genuine relationships (Rauschelbach, 2013), however a system where individuals could have input into a potential mentor or mentee match would be ideal and create a more genuine relationship.

D. CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While the researcher's own curiosity, coupled with doctrine and past studies, formulated this research topic, the following are suggestions for further research based on the findings and analysis.

- Conduct the same study for male Marine Corps officers in order to compare responses.

- Conduct a follow on study for female enlisted.

- Conduct a quantitative meta-analysis using the data from this qualitative study.

- Conduct a comparative analysis against the civilian sector mentoring programs and their effect on turnover.

This study also uncovered several ideas among participants' responses that were not directly related to the research questions but should be further explored. These include:

- How effective are FITREP counselings and can they support mentoring?

- What are the effects of being a pilot on leadership?

- What are the effects of changing the rigid career path of a Marine officer and would that have any impacts on retention?

- What is relationship between dual active military couples and retention of women in the Marine Corps?

- Do female pilots face greater barriers in having a career compared to other ground MOS' in the Marine Corps?

This study contributes to the knowledge on mentorship experienced by female Marine Corps officers and its influences on career decisions, with a particular focus on retention. This study examined mentor influences, mentor effects, and mentor perceptions regarding female offices in the Marine Corps. Across the 17 one-on-one interviews conducted, the findings reveal that there appears to be no direct link between mentorship and attrition. However, the analysis suggests there is a lack of career mentorship and role models in regards to family management. The research also finds that mentorship provides many positive benefits to the protégé. In respect to turnover, the findings suggest that the top reasons involve job satisfaction and work-family conflict. Female officers want to pursue future opportunities in the Marine Corps that are interesting to them and they are passionate about, but two conflicts arise: (1) the Marine Corps plans out the "golden" path and/or (2) their active duty relationship causes strain in pursuing those opportunities. The findings of this study hope to help influence future policy initiatives in order to retain high performing, highly talented female Marine Corps officers.

APPENDIX. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Master's thesis: An exploratory study of female Marine officers and early supervisors
The interviews will be semi-structured. Participants will be asked open-ended questions and encouraged to recount their experiences with supervisors and mentors early in their military career.

A.   BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

- How did you commission into the Marine Corps?
- What were your previous units/deployments?
- How did you become interested in the Marine Corps?
- How have your perceptions of the Marine Corps changed since joining?
- Please describe your current military career aspirations.
    - Have your aspirations changed since joining?
- What has influenced your career aspirations?

B.   MENTORING QUESTIONS

- How did your first supervisor influence you?
- How did that supervisor influence your perceptions of the Marine Corps?
    - How did your second/third supervisor influence you?
    - How did that (second/third) supervisor influence your perceptions of the Marine Corps?
- Can you tell me about a mentor that you had early in your career?
    - How did you form a professional relationship with the mentor?
    - Describe the relationship that you had and how it impacted you.
    - How did that mentor influence your perceptions with the Marine Corps?
- Can tell me about a time when a supervisor/mentor was influential in your decision making related to your career?

C.   POTENTIAL PROBES

If they are not addressed in the story, the researcher may probe with the following questions:
- Were your mentor(s) in your direct chain of command?
- Were your mentor(s) formally assigned or spontaneous?
- How often did you talk to or meet with your mentor(s)?
- How did your mentor(s) influence your perceptions of your capability?
- What types of topics would you discuss with your mentor?

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