

## ABSTRACT

Title: THE MOTIVATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF  
MEXICAN AMERICANS IN THE U.S. MARINE  
CORPS: AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS

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As one of the largest and fastest growing minority groups in the United States, Mexican Americans are reshaping the major institutions of American life, including the military. The Mexican American military population, although still underrepresented when compared to their presence in the American population generally, is a growing ethnic group. Although growth is occurring across the services, Mexican Americans have a large presence in the U.S. Marine Corps, a trend unlike the military behavior of African Americans, the next largest minority group in the military. This trend holds for both Mexican American men and women, even though the Marine Corps is the most combat-oriented of the service branches and the service branch with the lowest proportion of occupations open to women.

Using an intersectional approach and through in-depth interviews of Mexican American men and women serving in the Marine Corps, I examine the personal characteristics, motivations, and experiences that are associated with the decision to join the Marine Corps. I argue that Mexican American Marines, regardless of gender, share common motivations for service grounded in the intersection of their common ethnicity and socioeconomic position. However, while the majority of respondents were drawn to

the military because of occupational considerations, I also argue that they felt a connection to the Marine Corps because of its more institutional nature, which intermeshed well with their own individual values.

I also compare the experiences of the respondents while in the service. In regard to ethnicity, the majority of respondents discussed the large number of Hispanics in the Marine Corps, even as they noted stratification in the population. They did not view themselves as a minority, but as a population growing in size and influence. These commonalities decline with the application of an intersectional analysis, as gender becomes the most salient and divisive characteristic. Despite their diversity, the women were considered a unified category and as a token population, their proportions shaped the group culture in predictable, visible ways. I conclude by discussing how lived experiences are not only shaped by one's social characteristics, but by the social institutions in which one operates.

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IN THE U.S. MARINE CORPS: AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS

By

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## **Dedication**

To Tom – I could write another 300 pages detailing all the ways  
you have supported me with this project.

I hope it is enough to say that I noticed each one.

Thank you for being my rock  
and my partner in all of life's adventures.

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

### *Overview*

As the demographics of the United States shift to a more racially and ethnically diverse population, the composition of the all-volunteer military also has become more diverse, particularly since the military must grow its force through recruitment and retention, rather than selective conscription. Prior to 1973, wars were fought with a mobilized force consisting of draftees, militia members, draft-induced volunteers, and true volunteers, who were mainly male and racially white. However, with the transition from conscription to an all-volunteer force built around labor market principles, the demographics of the force changed substantially, partly in reflection of the changing demographics of the American labor force, but also because those disadvantaged in the civilian labor market joined in greater numbers. The military now has more racial and ethnic minorities, more women, and more women who are racial and ethnic minorities, than it had under conscription. This trend continues even though the United States is engaged in two almost decade long wars.

These demographic changes have been documented by the Department of Defense's annual reports on the social representativeness of the military. These reports track who serves, in what capacity, and whether their population representation in the military, which may be influenced by broader social forces as well as internal organizational policies and culture, is equitable with their civilian comparison group. From these data it is clear that the racial and ethnic demographics of the military are changing, with Hispanic men and women greatly increasing their representation across the military over time, and especially in the sea services.

As the largest and fastest growing minority group in the United States, Hispanics are reshaping the major institutions of American life, including the military. Hispanics, when compared to their proportional presence within the civilian labor force of comparable age, are underrepresented in the military, mainly because of their low high school graduation rates (Asch et al. 2009). However, when compared to the overall Hispanic population who meet enlistment standards, Hispanics actually are overrepresented in the American military. These numbers will continue to increase as more Hispanics meet the educational and linguistic requirements for service (Asch et al. 2009).

Their growing presence in the civilian population and the relative youthfulness of the Hispanic population make them a strategic recruiting pool for the military (Asch et al. 2009; Tienda and Mitchell 2006). Additionally, Hispanic youth demonstrate higher propensity to serve than whites (although a lower propensity than African Americans) and have had proven success in both basic training and in their first term of enlistment (Asch et al. 2009; Bachman et al. 1997). As a result, military manpower policymakers see the recruitment of Hispanics as a “win-win” situation for the military since it can focus on recruiting from a group with great propensity to serve as well as a history of success in the organization itself (Hattiangadi et al. 2004). As the overall youth population and the enlistment behaviors of other minority groups decline, Hispanics are an important source of military manpower, making an analysis of their motivations for service, their service branch selection, and their experiences while in the service, both as individuals and as a group, timely and necessary.

The recruitment of a volunteer military member during a time of war is a complex process that involves multiple intervening institutions, people, practical considerations, and subjective reasons. Past research has demonstrated that the decision to join the military is based on multiple factors, including exposure to the military lifestyle (Faris 1981; Kleykamp 2006); rational calculation of pay and benefits (Moskos 1988; Segal 1989); military standards (Asch et al. 2009); approval of key social influencers such as family (Orvis and Asch 2001; Sackett and Mavor 2003); constructions of military service as a legitimate display of gender (Bourg and Segal 2001; Snyder 1999); and individual sentiments of service and patriotism (Moskos 1988; Sackett and Mavor 2003). Although it is a combination of these factors which ultimately draws an interested individual into military service, certain factors may carry greater or lesser weight with different social groups. As a consequence, the demographic makeup of today's all-volunteer force does not mirror the American population directly, but is a reflection of which individuals view military service as a suitable or beneficial activity in their life course and which do not. Of those individuals who consider military service, they must also meet the educational, physical, moral, and mental standards of enlistment.

It also has been argued that certain social groups may have differing motivations to serve. In particular, racial and ethnic minorities may be motivated by considerations such as the pecuniary and educational benefits of service, the job security offered by military service, the on-the-job training provided to entry level servicemembers, and the military's commitment to equal opportunity, particularly when compared to their disadvantaged position in civilian work organizations (Lundquist 2008; Moskos 1988; Segal 1989).

Although the decision to join the military ultimately is an individual one, recruits may differ in their motivations because of constraints and opportunities specific to their social location, cultural preferences, by military policy which determines eligibility, and by military attempts to have a recruiting presence in a community (Asch et al. 2009; Bachman et al. 1997). These guiding factors and their influence on the decision to join the military may vary by ascribed characteristics such as race, ethnicity, and gender. Using a propensity and opportunity model, past research has documented the military's success with recruiting certain types of individuals, with men, African Americans, and those in lower socioeconomic status groups showing the greatest propensity to serve (Segal et al. 1999). The decision to serve also may be shaped by individual and group perceptions of service branch culture, mission, and opportunity, and may be reflected in the racial, ethnic, and gender demographics of each service branch (Lundquist 2008; Moskos and Butler 1999). Thus, women overall have their greatest proportional presence in the Air Force, partly because it is the service branch with the greatest percentage of jobs open to them due to its air and space, rather than ground, focus. Similarly, African Americans have had their greatest proportional presence in support, rather than combat or technical positions in the Army, which has been recognized for its diversity and integration initiatives (Moskos and Butler 1999). As a group African Americans traditionally have not scored as high as whites on the military's occupational placement exams, thus precluding them as a group from high placement in the most technical positions. However, there may also be an element of choice here since support positions have greater transferability in the civilian labor market over combat positions, potentially framing them as a logical choice for an individual looking to build occupational skills.

Unlike other minority groups, Hispanics are concentrated in the sea services of the Navy and the Marine Corps, although no sociological research exists on why they are drawn disproportionately to these services over the others (Gifford 2005; also see Appendix A for Hispanic representation by service branch). There is policy research on the sea services' success recruiting Hispanics, which highlights their highly organized recruiting system, especially for the Marine Corps, and the ability of their recruiters and their media campaigns to connect with key influencers, such as parents and extended family members (Asch et al. 2009; Asch et al. 2005; Hattiangadi et al. 2004). Yet, whereas this research focuses on the organizational strategies and tactics used to reach the Hispanic population as well as the role of educational and mental standards in stratifying recruits, little research has been completed from the Hispanic servicemembers' point of view regarding key intervening institutions, people, and considerations (Hattiangadi et al. 2004 is one exception).

To ensure that no single group disproportionately experiences both the benefits and burdens of service, the Department of Defense tracks trends in recruiting and representation by social diversity characteristics (OSD 2010). The service of minority groups within the military often comes under scrutiny because of concerns that disadvantaged groups, such as the poor and racial and ethnic minorities, disproportionately bear wartime burdens. Based on these data, we know that today's force is experiencing a shift in the racial, ethnic, and gender composition of its personnel, and that these changes are more pronounced in certain service branches (Segal and Segal 2004; also see Appendices C and D for African American versus Hispanic representation by service branch). The overall representation of African American servicemembers,



who were once overrepresented in the military (especially in the Army) has declined significantly since 2001, with the greatest decline being in the Army (Segal and Segal 2004; Segal, Thanner, and Segal 2007). This decline may reflect practical decision-making, as African Americans decide that the burdens of wartime service no longer outweigh the benefits of service that have been a large motivation in the past. It also occurs against the backdrop of the Army increasing its manpower requirements, leading to greater recruitment goals and a greater willingness to waive certain educational requirements (De Angelis and Segal 2009).

In contrast, the representation of Hispanics, who were once underrepresented in the military, has experienced a steady increase, particularly in the Navy and Marine Corps (Dempsey and Shapiro 2009; Segal and Segal 2004). This trend holds for Hispanic women, who equal Hispanic men in military representation in both the Navy and the Marine Corps (Segal, Thanner, and Segal 2007). Although their representation in the Navy reflects similar trends for women of other racial and ethnic groups, their overrepresentation in the Marine Corps is a unique trend, and one that runs counter to previous analyses on women's military participation, which focus on women's concentration in traditionally feminine fields, such as medical specialties that are not found in the Marine Corps (Segal 1995).

The increased presence of Hispanics in the armed forces may lead to a military that represents the society it defends, leading to increased social legitimacy (Janowitz 1960). A diverse military force means that no single group suffers a disproportionate percentage of wartime casualties. Concerns over combat casualties and race, for example, came to the forefront during the Vietnam War. During the first few years of the

conflict, African Americans disproportionately were affected by combat casualties, although this high proportion declined later in the conflict. Past studies suggest that African Americans were overrepresented in combat positions not because of racial prejudice or indifference, but because of class differences. Because of the military's reliance on bureaucratic efficiencies within the assignment process, African Americans were at a disadvantage with occupational placement due to being disproportionately poor and, therefore, less likely to have the testing skills or cultural capital to lobby for, or be placed into, occupational specialties away from the frontline (Badillo and Curry 1976).

As demonstrated by the racial inequities experienced during the Vietnam War, the increased diversity in the force may not be a fair distribution if Hispanics are in service branches and occupations that are at greater risk for combat service (Gifford 2005). Certainly, the transition from conscription to an all-volunteer force changes the calculus of equity and representation for recruits may express their preferences for occupational placement and, unlike conscripts, may choose not to enter into an enlistment contract if they do not like their options. However, the issue of testing skills and cultural capital remains, for recruits from more disadvantaged educational backgrounds may more routinely be placed in occupations, such as the combat arms, that do not require the highest educational or testing requirements.

During Fiscal Year 2009, the Marine Corps was the service with the second highest percentage of Hispanic recruits with 16 percent of male and 21.7 percent of female recruits self-identifying as such. The Navy led the service branches, with 22.3 percent of its men and 23.7 percent of its women recruits self-identifying as Hispanic. Prior to Fiscal Year 2009, the Marine Corps has led the services in percent of Hispanic

accessions. The Air Force had the lowest percentage of Hispanic recruits with 11 percent of men and 13 percent of women self-identifying as Hispanic. In contrast, the Army, which has the greatest percentage of African American servicemembers and the second largest number of ground combat positions, had a percentage that fell in between, with 11 percent of male and 12 percent of female recruits self-identifying as Hispanic (OSD 2009). The Marine Corps also has the highest proportion of Hispanic officers at 6 percent, while the Air Force has the lowest at 2 percent. These numbers are lower than the percentage of Hispanics in the comparable group of college graduates, which is around 10 percent (Crissey 2009).

Due to their concentration in the Marine Corps, Hispanics, particularly the men, may be at a disproportionately higher risk of wartime casualty because of their recruitment into the most ground combat oriented service branch. For example, Buzzell and Preston (2007) suggest that the rate of death in the Marine Corps is more than double that of any other service branch, and in the case of the Air Force, the death rate for the Marine Corps is more than 23 times higher. The risk of injury or death may be further exacerbated by the overrepresentation of Hispanic men in the combat occupational specialties, such as infantry, within the Marine Corps. In contrast, African American servicemembers are more likely to serve in support positions and white servicemembers are more likely to serve in technical positions, although they also have a substantial presence in the combat arms (Segal and Segal 2004).

Although in the current battlefield there is less of a clear line separating the frontline from the rear, certain occupations still face higher combat risk. In his study of combat casualties and race during the first year of the Iraq war, Gifford (2005) found that

no racial or ethnic minority experienced disproportionate casualties. However, during periods of active aggressive fighting, Hispanic casualties were higher than their representation in ground combat units. Building on Gifford's work, Buzzell and Preston, whose work examines military deaths in Iraq from 2003-2006, argue that there is clear variation in risk of death for Hispanics, who during this time period had a death risk that is 18 percent higher than that of non-Hispanics, and that this distinction applies even outside of periods of active fighting (2007). Buzzell and Preston do not explicitly link the increased death rate of Hispanics to their representation in the Marine Corps; however, their analysis clearly demonstrates the risks associated with service in the Marine Corps and the increased death rate experienced by Hispanics early in the Iraq War. Likewise, Gifford suggests that the social processes that sort Hispanics, as well as other racial and ethnic minorities, into certain service branches and occupations have not been studied in detail and that the Hispanic military experience is "underexamined and undertheorized" (2005:203).

Further, certain occupations, such as infantry, have less transferability into the civilian sector, making the transition from military servicemember to civilian job seeker more problematic. In her study on the effect of prior military service on hiring for entry-level work, Kleykamp (2009) finds that veterans with military experience in the combat arms do not experience a hiring advantage, regardless of race/ethnicity. Military service generally has been credited with providing a "bridging environment" for less-advantaged groups by providing access to and experience with certain dispositions that allow the servicemember to more easily integrate into civilian work environments (Browning, Lopreato, and Poston 1973; Fredland and Little 1985; Lopreato and Poston 1977). Thus,

Hispanics, who are concentrated in the combat arms, may find that their military service provides less social and cultural capital when compared to veterans who served in technical or administrative specialties. This potentially makes the occupational bridge from military to civilian work more difficult.

### *Hispanic: A Bureaucratic Definition*

The term “Hispanic” is an administrative category initially created by the federal government to represent individuals from twenty Spanish-speaking nationalities as well as those who were early settlers in the American Southwest (Tienda and Mitchell 2006). It includes people from a range of cultural backgrounds and immigrant statuses, including Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans, and Cuban Americans, among others. Because the term “Hispanic” privileges European Spanish origins over those indigenous to Latin America, the term may be offensive to some who choose to use other categorizations, such as Latino(a), Chicano(a), and/or Tejano(a). Each term has a different meaning and specifies different requirements for membership. The term “Latino” highlights ties to countries that were once under Roman rule, while the terms “Chicano” and “Tejano” refer to those Hispanics with roots in the American Southwest and Texas before those territories were gained by the United States as spoils of the Mexican-American War. The diversity of terms used for official categorization and for individual self-identification demonstrate how the construction of who is a Hispanic and a Mexican American may change over time and place as certain social forces shape definitions of ethnicity and who fits into what category (Oboler 1995).

Current research suggests that American Hispanics prefer the term Hispanic by a margin of three to one, a preference that is especially concentrated on the East Coast

(Tienda and Mitchell 2006:4). As I explain in the next section, I am focusing on group with a specific country of origin, to whom I refer as “Mexican Americans.” However, when referring to social trends that measure the entire ethnic group, including Mexican Americans, I use the term Hispanic.

### *Statement of the Problem*

By changing the demographic makeup of the American military, the increase in Hispanic servicemembers feeds into ongoing concerns of who is eligible to serve in today’s all-volunteer, wartime force and who actually does so (Segal and Segal 2004). It also continues the question of which types of bodies are best suited to serve and in what capacity and how these perceptions may be constructed along ethnic and gender lines (De Angelis et al. forthcoming). Building on past research on minority populations in the military, my dissertation examines the motivations for service, the service branch selection, and the military experiences of Mexican Americans serving in the United States Marine Corps during a time of war and frames these experiences through an intersectional lens that considers characteristics such as ethnicity, socioeconomic position, race, and gender.

I focus on Mexican Americans, rather than Hispanics generally, because of the need to specify a group within this diverse population, which represents twenty Spanish-speaking countries. At 75 percent, Mexican Americans are the largest group in the Hispanic American population; they also are the largest Hispanic group in the military at 4.49 percent. Puerto Ricans are the next largest group at 10 percent of the American Hispanic population, and 1.70 percent of Department of Defense personnel, followed by Cubans (Asch et al., 2009; OSD 2008).

Additionally, I focus on Mexican Americans not only because of their large numbers, but because there are important differences between Mexican Americans compared to Puerto Ricans and Cubans by citizenship status and how group members are incorporated into the American population. Puerto Ricans, by virtue of Puerto Rico's status as an American commonwealth, automatically are citizens of the United States (Office of Insular Affairs 2011), and thus do not have to use military service as a way of expediting citizenship. As citizens, they are free to live, work, and travel throughout the United States, although they may experience difficulties with language assimilation as Spanish is the official language of Puerto Rico. Cubans enjoy some of the most lenient policies regarding refugee and asylum status and have multiple avenues for legal migration and resettlement in the United States not available to other ethnic groups (Office of Cuban Affairs 2005; Wasem 2007). Although for this project I focus on differences within the Mexican American population, future research should consider if and how the different citizenship statuses by country of origin for Hispanics shape motivations for service.

Mexican Americans are unique in that a sizeable proportion of their population is indigenous to the United States: that is, they trace their ancestry to the American Southwest and Texas. The American Southwest, formally part of Mexico, became part of the United States after Mexico's defeat in the 1846 Mexican-American War. Prior to the war's end, the United States also annexed Texas, which had previously seceded from Mexico as the independent Republic of Texas, and became part of the United States in 1845.

In addition to the Chicano and Tejano population, there also is a sizeable proportion of Mexican Americans who are immigrants, or children of immigrants. Currently, Mexicans account for the largest proportion of immigrants, both legal and illegal, in the United States. Mexicans who are legal permanent residents of the United States may choose military service as a pathway toward expedited citizenship, an option that Puerto Ricans and Cubans do not have to consider.

Mexican Americans are increasing their numbers most dramatically in the Marine Corps as well as the Navy and, at 6.9 percent of the enlisted population, they are the largest minority ethnic group in the Marine Corps (Asch et al. 2009; OSD 2008). This trend applies to Mexican American men and women, and is different from the accession and retention behaviors of other large minority groups who are concentrated in other service branches. The Marine Corps also is the service branch with the greatest proportion of racially white servicemembers in both the enlisted and officer corps (OSD 2009).

Although untested by social scientific analysis, the military experience for Mexican American women has been conceived as a trailing behavior in line with traditional gender roles often associated with the culture of the Hispanic community; that is, the women are following the men into the Marine Corps (Segal, Thanner, and Segal 2007). Segal, Thanner, and Segal also hypothesize that Hispanic women may be overrepresented in the Marine Corps specifically because it is the service branch where women's opportunities are the most limited and most restricted to traditionally female occupations (2007). Because of these restrictions, Mexican American women are able to reproduce traditional gender differences through the social structural arrangement of the



service branch. Although these perspectives seem counterintuitive, especially since the military has long been characterized as a masculine institution, it is possible that Mexican American women who choose to serve in the Marine Corps may do so solely because they are following the lead of men and are not attempting to forge a new path. However, there is also the possibility that Mexican American women, similar to the motivations of military women more broadly, choose to serve because of personal goals and motivations that extend beyond deference and followership.

Even as the Hispanic military experience is under-theorized, explanations for why Mexican American men and women disproportionately enlist in the Marine Corps build upon ethnicized gender constructions which frame Mexican American men and women as functioning in the separate spheres of work and family due to the overwhelming influence of a “traditional” culture. The concentration of Mexican American men in the Marine Corps has been characterized as a logical extension of *machismo* within Mexican culture (Segal, Thanner, and Segal 2007). This perspective argues that Mexican American men are most attracted to service in the Marine Corps because it is the most ground combat oriented and the most synonymous with masculine dominance. In the past, the military service of men who were racial and ethnic minorities was resisted by fellow servicemembers, especially for African American men who were once portrayed as lacking the physical, mental, and moral ability to fight (Bogart 1969). However, both by formal policy change and informal cultural change, military service currently is viewed as a legitimate display of masculinity for most heterosexual men of all races and ethnicities (Bourg and Segal 2001; De Angelis et al. forthcoming). It also is characterized as a respectable form of breadwinning, especially for men who use military

service as an economic springboard for greater social mobility (Browning, Lopreato, and Poston 1973). Consequently, the decision to serve may be influenced by a combination of factors, including culture and one's socioeconomic position.

In contrast, the military service of women has been and remains much more contested. Gender discrimination and gender segregation remain legal in the military. Women, because of their gender alone, are forbidden from serving in offensive ground combat positions and may be separated in both training and combat environments from their male peers (Harrell et al. 2007; Manning 2008). Unlike the Air Force and the Navy, the Marine Corps maintains gender-segregated basic training. The Army also has gender-segregated basic training for men entering into those combat arms from which women are excluded currently. These structural limitations, as well as a male-dominated culture, affect women's social interactions and their presentation of self as they negotiate the competing demands of constructing femininity in a male dominated organization (Embser-Herbert 2000). Whereas past research has focused on the motivations, experiences, and successes of white women and African American women (Lundquist 2008; Moore 1996), the military experience of Mexican American women remains largely overlooked, even as they continue to serve in larger numbers.

To challenge these gendered and ethnicized assumptions concerning Mexican Americans, I interviewed Mexican Americans who served in the Marine Corps since 2001 on their decision to serve in the Marine Corps and, through their own words, frame how military service intersects with their conceptions of self. Using data from in-depth interviews of Mexican American men (n=19) and women (n=15) serving in the Marine Corps, I examine their motivations for service, their reasons for selecting the Marine

Corps as their service branch, and their experiences while in the military. I am particularly interested in the intersection of characteristics such as race/ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic position and whether motivations for service and experiences while in the Marine Corps differ among the respondents and if so, along what lines. I have two main questions guiding this research. My first research question is: **what personal characteristics or experiences are associated with the decision to enlist in the Marine Corps for Mexican Americans?** Additionally, because my dissertation examines the military experiences of Mexican Americans serving in the Marine Corps during a time of war, my second question is: **How do the military experiences of Mexican American men and women in the Marine Corps compare?** Additionally, a sub-question which guides my intersectional analysis is: **Do these characteristics and experiences differ by social characteristics, such as gender?**

#### *Contributions to the Field*

Although Hispanics, and Mexican Americans specifically, have a long, storied history in the American military (see Rosenfeld and Culbertson 1992 and Pew Hispanic Center 2003 for reviews), their representation as a separate ethnic group was not tracked until the 1970s and their motivations for service have not been examined to the same degree as white and African American servicemembers of both sexes (Burk 1995; Campbell 1984; Moore 1996). Because of this literature gap, the male Hispanic military experience, which has not been further divided by country of origin, often is theorized as a “non-white” experience within the white-Black dichotomy that shapes much of the military’s history with race, ethnicity, integration, and equity. Hispanics were not even identified by the Census Bureau, or by its military equivalent, the Defense Manpower

Data Center, as a unique ethnic group until the 1970s. When the Army sought to begin research on Hispanic soldiers in the early years of the volunteer force, it had to screen for Spanish surnames to identify research participants (Barton and Kinzer 1977). Hispanics also have received much less coverage from military equal opportunity programs, which emerged mainly in reaction to the poor race relations between white and African American servicemembers, and rarely acknowledged the integration experiences of other racial and ethnic groups.

Thus, although Hispanics and Mexican Americans increasingly are addressed in research, their experiences often are qualified as falling somewhere between the white and African American military experience, and rarely as something distinctly their own on issues such as propensity to serve, casualty rates, occupational selection, intergenerational military experiences, military families, retention behaviors, and motivations for service. As discussed in Chapter Four, Hispanics, and Mexican Americans specifically, have a unique history regarding their integration into the United States and distinctive social characteristics which loosely unite them as an ethnic group. This history and these characteristics separate them from other racial and ethnic groups and may influence their decision-making regarding military service and shape their military experiences in ways distinct from the white majority or from African Americans, who have an unparalleled history in the United States.

In general, the motivations and experiences of military women have been studied in detail, with historical, theoretical, policy-oriented, transnational, and work-family oriented research (Harrell and Miller 1997; Holm 1992; Iskra 2010; Manning 2008; Segal 1995; Smith 2010). For Hispanic women, including Mexican Americans, their military

experience often is approached through a gender lens, with the experiences of white or Black women as being the overall standard, with less emphasis on how ethnicity may shape experiences. For Mexican American servicemembers, an intersectional approach is needed to account for the unique confluence of characteristics such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic position, and gender and how these characteristics may shape individual and group experiences in the military. Additionally, this perspective allows us to consider how the women, as a token population because of their ethnicity and gender, experience life in a highly masculine organization.

This analysis also will contribute to the broader sociological literature on the intersection of gender with socioeconomic position and participation in the paid labor force, with an emphasis on Mexican American men and women who, because of cultural interpretations, are often described as subscribing to a traditional, separate spheres model of work and domestic life despite the actual diversity of lived experiences. The separate spheres model of work and family already has been critiqued by numerous sociological studies (Bergmann 1995; Blau, Ferber, and Winkler 2005), which question this model's assumption of middle class security, as well as its premise that women are the ones more suited for domestic life. There also are suggestions that the separate spheres model overlooks how economic necessity, in addition to individual choice, shape family structure and the decision to participate in the paid labor force. Although these critiques have led to the rise of new sociological theories and perspectives that focus on the intersection of gender, class, work, and family roles, Mexican American men and women are still often framed as existing in complementary, separate spheres because of the perceived power of culture and gender roles. My research will either further support this

viewpoint by demonstrating that Mexican American women are following the men into the U.S. Marine Corps and thereby fulfilling part of their traditional, cultural role, or it may challenge these assumptions and demonstrate a strong identification with work roles for both the women and the men. It also may demonstrate how blanket assumptions about the Mexican American population can be strengthened through an intersectional perspective that considers how gender and ethnicity (which in itself has many varied forms) intersect with other social characteristics, such as socioeconomic position and generational status, to create a diversity of experiences.

Further, although there has been research on Mexican American women's labor market experiences, it has focused on their overrepresentation in low-paying service, clerical, and farm work, their movement into professional work such as higher education, and their increasing presence and leadership in labor unions (Romero 1992; Segura 2003; Trumpboar and Bernard 2002; Zavella 1987). Research on Mexican American men follows a similar trajectory, with additional focus on their work in construction (Pew Hispanic Center 2007). Whereas research on Mexican American men in the military is scant (see, for example, Dempsey and Shapiro 2009), the research on Mexican American women in the military is almost nonexistent in the gender, work, and family and military sociology literature. My research aims to add an exploratory, baseline analysis to this literature gap. It also will challenge assumptions about gender roles and how they are enacted in work among Mexican American Marines through the use of an intersectional analysis. This research adds to previous work on men's and women's labor force participation by analyzing another occupation into which they are opting into at a steady rate. However, these individuals are not just entering a job, but are serving in positions

that make great demands on their time and loyalties, that require them to move to new locations away from traditional support systems, and that carry the risk of long deployments in dangerous wartime conditions (Segal 1986). Thus, this research also examines why military service, which offers both benefits and drawbacks, is an attractive option for these individuals, and whether this decision is shaped by structural and social factors related to their race/ethnicity, socioeconomic position, and gender. I discuss these potential factors in greater detail in Chapters Three (“Selecting, Building, and Integrating Marines”) and Four (“Trends in the Mexican American Population”).

In addition to gender and work research, this research contributes to the military sociology literature that focuses on the relevance of social representation in the force, especially during a time of war, and how this representation is changing. Demographic data on the military demonstrate that Mexican Americans are serving in greater numbers, which reflects their growing presence in the American population generally, and that they are choosing to do so predominantly in the sea services. We also know that other minority groups have a greater presence in other service branches. African American men and women, for example, disproportionately serve in the Army, while Asian American men, who have low representation in the Armed Forces generally, have a sizeable presence in the Air Force. Although data suggest that racial and ethnic groups are concentrated in certain service branches, it is not known what forces - such as entrance standards, service branch culture, effective marketing, or social networks among minority members - shape these decisions. By focusing on the motivations of a specific ethnic group, this research contributes to the larger theme of who chooses to serve and in what capacity while also adding specificity to the motivations of the Mexican American

population. Research on Hispanics often lumps them into one analytic category, despite the diversity of cultures, motivations and influencers found within this bureaucratically-marked group. Although there is still the need for finer distinctions, such as citizenship status, this research provides an important baseline to an understudied group.

This research also contributes to the military sociology literature on Moskos' Institutional/Occupational (I/O) model. Beginning with the 1973 transition from selective conscription to an All-Volunteer Force, Moskos argued that the way the military interfaces with civilian society and its reliance on citizenship obligations has changed in meaningful ways. In particular, he focuses on the motivations that bring one into the military and argues that today's servicemembers are motivated by more occupational factors than their draft-era predecessors and that military service now is more of a job than a calling. My research on the personal characteristics and experiences that are associated with the decision to enlist in the Marine Corps may support Moskos' premise or challenge it. This is an important consideration since Moskos published his theory in 1977, after the Vietnam War and in the midst of the Cold War. Motivations may differ now that servicemembers, as volunteers, have been ordered to fight in two, long wars.

Finally, from an applied sociological perspective, this analysis also provides insight into an increasingly important recruiting pool, which is relevant for policy on military manpower. The transition to an all-volunteer force means that political and military leaders must always recruit - and, if possible, retain - personnel if they are going to have a numerically-sound fighting force. They also must know whether the force reflects the social demographics of the civilian population, for disproportionate representation may negatively affect civil-military relations (Janowitz 1960). Both



currently and in the past, minority populations have been critical to the all-volunteer force's success. Manpower goals would not have been met were it not for the service of African American men and women of all races and ethnicities. With the current long wars, African Americans have decreased their enlistment numbers, although they are still serving in proportionate numbers; women, whose numbers increased substantially with the implementation of the all-volunteer force, consistently remain around 15 percent of the military population (OSD 2011; Segal and Segal 2004). Because of these changing and stagnating numbers, policy makers also must consider the motivations of one of the fastest growing minority groups in the United States: Mexican Americans. Recruiting Mexican Americans into the military is critical for maintaining a socially representative force and for reaching annual manpower goals during a time of war.

### *Overview of the Study*

This dissertation consists of eleven chapters. In this chapter, I provided an overview of the study, with attention to the research questions and the contributions this dissertation makes to both academic and policy-oriented areas of research. In the second chapter, I review the main theoretical orientations and literatures used to frame my research questions and in Chapter Three I discuss how Marines are recruited, selected, and integrated, with a focus on the Marine Corps' culture, formal standards, and the factors that shape decision-making and experiences. The fourth chapter describes trends in the Mexican American population, both within the American population more broadly and in the American military. I discuss my research design and methodology in Chapter Five and provide a thorough profile of the respondents in Chapter Six. I present results in both Chapters Seven and Eight with a focus on motivations for service and service branch

selection. In Chapters Nine and Ten, I discuss experiences in the United States Marine Corps through an intersectional lens. The final chapter, Chapter Eleven, is a discussion of the findings, including theoretical and practical implications. I also suggest areas for future research.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

This section places my research in a theoretical context by discussing social constructionism; gender, including the role of tokenism; and intersectionality. Using a critical lens, I also tie the first three theories together in a discussion on Mexican ethnicity and gender role constructions, with a focus on *machismo* and its perceived influence among Mexican Americans. I challenge the focus on culture as the main explanation for group trends and instead push for a well-rounded intersectional perspective that considers the role of other systems of power that shape lived experiences, with attention to ethnicity and gender as well as race, socioeconomic position, and immigrant status (Zambrana 2011).

### *Social Constructionism*

Rather than approach gender and ethnicity as essential characteristics, I use a social construction perspective. This foundation is important because it stresses the malleable nature of social life and provides space to consider how characteristics, which may seem immutable, actually shape and are shaped by broader social forces. Social constructionism, based on Berger and Luckmann's theory on the social construction of reality, argues that what individuals believe to be "real" at any moment are actually social productions that are continually produced and reproduced in the social world (1966). Thus, society does not exist outside of human activity, and ways of distinguishing people, such as through ethnicity and gender, do not exist outside of social interaction. We define what ethnicity and gender mean; there is no one set narrative.

Over time and through ongoing social interaction, society becomes more objective and appears to have its own energy and existence. Social characteristics become externalized by participants as being “real” in nature, and groupings by gender and ethnicity seem natural, obvious, and permanent. Building on Berger and Luckmann’s work, these characteristics do not emerge out of social interaction alone, but also are formed alongside social structures and institutions, like the military (Bour and Segal 2001; Kanter 1977a and 1977b). These characteristics and their “real” nature evolve as more environments, interactions, and institutions enter into and change the social world. Based on this evolving nature, social characteristics change with time, as assumptions associated with them reflect broader social realities. Using this perspective, I approach characteristics such as gender and ethnicity as social constructions specific to one’s time and place, rather than organic, universal forms. This allows me to consider, for example, how the construction of who is a Hispanic and a Mexican American may change over time and place as certain social forces shape definitions of ethnicity and who fits into what category (Oboler 1995).

Due to their social construction, race, ethnicity and gender are considered ascribed, rather than achieved characteristics, and extend beyond the individual to group categorizations. Ascribed characteristics cannot be changed, although their social meanings can, because they are constructed through biologically-determined attributes such as sex and skin color, which gain social meaning. Ascriptively-defined groups, as developed in Segal and Kestnbaum’s work on professional closure, are assigned group-based characteristics that often trump individual merit (2002). Depending on their personal social status, these characteristics may open or limit opportunities for

individuals. They also may function, as demonstrated through military history, by excluding populations from institutional participation, despite achieved individual skill. Thus, for example, from the end of the Civil War to the Korean War, African American men were limited to serving in racially-segregated units, including combat units, because of concerns regarding their loyalty and morality. Further, they were concentrated in a few menial occupations such as servant, laborer, and steward because of beliefs that they had lower mental ability than their white peers (as well as the fear that they would target their white counterparts with misguided violence) (Gropman 2006; Mershon and Schlossman 1998). Although African American men are now allowed to serve in all positions in all units, up until the Korean War there was a socially constructed view that they did not have the same moral fortitude, bravery, or mental aptitude as their white counterparts and as such, they were limited in where, when, and in what capacity they could serve.

Currently, women of all races and ethnicities are limited from offensive ground combat positions because of their sex, regardless of their actual physical and mental capabilities. This limitation stems from a socially constructed view of which types of bodies are best suited for military service, with the most influential perspective being that women lack the physical ability to serve in ground combat and that their presence would limit the fighting prowess and cohesion of their male peers (Devilbiss 1990). However, there is the possibility that this limitation could be modified, not because the abilities of women have changed, but because perceptions of their proper role in the military have evolved to reflect wartime realities (Segal 1995). Current experiences in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, as well as twenty-first century organizational and technological

changes in the military, demonstrate that formal assignment policy does not always match battlefield realities or previously articulated concerns regarding the possible deleterious effects of women in ground combat. Previous beliefs about women in combat are now being superseded by calls to legally allow women to serve in offensive ground combat positions (Harrell et al. 2007). Today's wartime realities, such as the need to have female servicemembers available to interact with and search local women, have changed the social construction of where and how women should serve. As Segal's and subsequent cross-national analyses demonstrate, the military's need for personnel during times of national crisis generally leads to an increase in women's military participation; however, this increase also is moderated by cultural values and gender roles that restrict women's participation and then facilitate contraction once the crisis is over (Iskra et al. 2002; Sandhoff, Segal, and Segal 2010; Segal 1995). Perspectives on who can serve and in what capacity change based on social urgency, rather than because of any fundamental change in the body itself (Segal and Kestnbaum 2002).

As ascribed characteristics, gender and ethnicity carry certain stereotypes and labels which dominate institutional and cultural perceptions. The discourse used to categorize a group of people shape perceptions of group members and how they are incorporated into social institutions, like the military (Santa Ana 2002). These stereotypes and labels also may provide positive social frameworks, such as those experienced by the dominant group of white men, or they may provide obstacles, such as those often experienced by racial minorities, women, and those individuals who embody the intersection of multiple minority statuses (Embser-Herbert 2005; Moore 1996). There is a hierarchy of ascribed characteristics in most social institutions with group

membership determining who has access to power and privilege (Acker 1992). These rankings and their accompanying power relations can change across generations, within an individual's own life course, or even within specific situations (Waters 2002).

Building on this perspective, my research considers how individual perceptions of one's social characteristics influence and are influenced by the decision to serve in the Marine Corps and whether these perceptions change with service; that is, whether social characteristics previously considered "real" in nature evolve by immersion in the military environment and its accompanying interactions.

### *Gender, Culture, and Organizations*

Whereas a strictly biological, or essentialist, perspective categorizes gender differences as innate to the physical body and most often shaped by reproductive capacities, I approach gender using a social constructionist perspective. Sex is often cited as strictly biological; it is the sexual-physical form of the body (Hartmann 1981). Gender, in contrast, is the social construction of meaning, and depending on the perspective, of power around sexed bodies (Coltrane 1994; Hartmann 1981). A social constructionist perspective views gender as a byproduct of social structures, organizations, and processes (Coltrane 1994). Although I focus on intersectionality in the next section, I discuss gender first, not because I am prioritizing it as a theoretical foundation to my research, but because the military, as a social institution, is a fundamental site for the creation and reproduction of gender roles in American society (Bourgeois and Segal 2001; De Angelis et al. forthcoming). I also discuss Kanter's theory on the effects of proportions on group culture and how tokenism emerges in organizations, like the military, that operate with a skewed population.

Using the social constructionist perspective, I approach gender as a fundamental building block in social interactions, processes, and structures. As such, it is a multi-level system of power open to multiple levels of analysis, including individual, interactional, structural, and cultural (Coltrane 1994). At the micro level, gender is an ongoing, interactive process embedded in the actions of everyday life; it is a routine production learned through socialization (West and Zimmerman 1987). Although it may seem natural, gender is a “patterning of difference and domination” between biologically-sexed bodies (Acker 1992:565). These differences become so imbued with meaning that they are interpreted as essential differences, rather than as socially constructed. Thus, women are viewed as having an inherent feminine nature that naturally predisposes them to mothering and nurturing and removes them as serious, effective participants in war-fighting. Further, because gender roles are learned through socialization, intense experiences, such as basic training, can facilitate the strengthening of previously articulated gender constructions as well as the building of new ones (Arkin and Dobrofsky 1978).

However, gender differences are mutable and may be disrupted, or challenged, by individuals and/or interactions that do not follow the scripted production (Lorber 1994). Some individuals may do this intentionally and repeatedly. Other individuals may go to great lengths to communicate adherence to gendered norms through their presentation of self, despite their involvement in organizations or groups, such as the military, that are dominated by men, both numerically and culturally. Thus, some men may view service in the military as a logical demonstration of their masculinity and may use the accoutrements available to the male military servicemember – the high and tight haircut,



the clean-shaven face, the tucked in shirt and ironed clothes - to demonstrate their affiliation with an institution associated with war and fighting. Similarly, women may desire to use the symbols of military service to demonstrate their own internalization of a masculine identity as a way of showing toughness and elitism (Dunivin 1988). However, they also may insist on maintaining a feminine appearance by maintaining long hair, wearing makeup, and by choosing to wear a skirt rather than pants with their formal military uniform. The organization also may make this decision for them. Although the military has lessened the restrictions it has for military women and their appearance, women are still restricted from appearing either overly masculine (e.g., very short hairstyles are not authorized) or overly feminine (e.g., there are restrictions on the amount of jewelry and makeup one can wear). The presentation of self is an important mechanism for communicating group membership and by extension, one's own gender identity (Hillman 1999).

As a multi-level system of power, gender also is a key organizing principle at the structural level. This means that organizations, rather than being gender-neutral, are gendered in a way that privileges certain types of bodies through legal protections, the distribution of resources, and through motivational symbols, at the expense of others. The American military, including the U.S. Marine Corps, is a hierarchical, gendered organization modeled around the male body and certain conceptions of masculinity. This critical perspective suggests that the structures, processes, and distributions of power that guide military life, including those that shape what bodies are acceptable for military service, are categorized along gender lines and are determined by the images, needs, and strengths of the male body (Acker 1992). Sex segregation within basic training, for

example, is one way gender becomes a “remarkable organizational device” within the Marine Corps (Goffman 1977:315). Unlike other contested organizations, the military does not present itself as gender-neutral, but rather explicitly presents itself as a male domain, defined by the absence, or the reduced presence, of women, and in opposition to femininity. Gender, then, emerges as a way of ordering who has access to membership and power in the American military, and who finds military service incongruent with their stigmatized bodies (Acker 1990).

At the structural level, the proportional presence of gendered bodies (in addition to other master status characteristics) also may shape group culture in an organization. Specifically, the small numbers of women in organizations like the military shape group dynamics, and the larger group culture, in predictable, visible ways (Kanter 1977a and 1977b). In her theory on tokenism, Kanter argues that proportions of different categories of people within an organization shape interaction (1977a and 1977b). She describes “skewed” groups as consisting of numerical dominants and numerical tokens where the ratio of the dominants to the tokens is approximately 85 to 15 (1977a:966). There are certain perceptual phenomena and typical responses that characterize the culture in organizations with skewed groups. Due to their limited numbers, tokens encounter increased visibility, exaggerated stereotyping, and heightened boundaries between them and the dominant group (1977a). These phenomena generate performance pressures which tokens may counter with certain strategies.

In regard to heightened visibility and the desire to counter negative stereotypes, tokens may perform with the knowledge that their actions represent not only themselves, but their group. They also may operate with the awareness that the master status that

categorizes them as a token (their gender or race, for example) supersedes all other aspects of their performance; thus, it can be difficult to have one's performance noticed above one's status as a token. As a consequence, tokens may push themselves to perform at a higher level than is expected of the dominants despite increased stress; however, they may do this guardedly because of fears that their performance is really an attempt of one-upmanship against the dominant group. Tokens may also counter this increased invisibility with attempts to blend in by making themselves as nondescript as possible. Because of this additional pressure, the operating conditions for tokens are different from those of the dominants (Kanter 1977a).

Tokens also may encounter exaggerated stereotyping in their organization which can manifest itself either through status leveling or through the application of specific stereotyped roles. Thus, women who work in a masculine organization like the military may be mislabeled as military wives rather than military servicemembers themselves. They also may have to deal with stereotypes in the organization that categorize them as whores, lesbians, tough disciplinarians, or sibling-like pets. The tokens may accept the stereotyped roles to avoid corrections in undefined relationships, but at the risk of further distorting their own impressions of self (Kanter 1977a).

There are three social phenomena in the public discourse in line with Kanter's theorized process of boundary heightening. The first is loyalty tests, which involves the tokens uniting with the dominants against others who challenge the majority group, particularly those who share the tokens' ascribed characteristic. By reassuring the dominants that they will not collude against them, the tokens gain further acceptance into the group (Kanter 1977a: 979). The second is an exaggeration of the dominant's culture

by focusing on norms and understandings exclusive to the group, particularly those that distinguish the dominant group from the tokens. This focus on the dominant's culture often leads to increased group solidarity (Kanter 1977a: 975). The third is the use of formal in-group recognition as reminders of difference between the dominants and the tokens. This phenomenon involves explicit recognition by the dominants, such as the use of apologies on the appropriateness of actions or comments, that the token is an outsider whose presence disrupts the normal flow of events (Kanter 1977a: 977). In regard to boundary heightening, tokens have two general responses: they can either choose isolation from the dominant group or they can attempt to become insiders by accepting the dominant's culture and passing loyalty tests. Often, this involves uniting against one's own social category and would manifest itself, for example, by military women claiming to be different from women in general (Dunivin 1988; Kanter 1977a). As discussed in the next chapter, women are approximately 15 percent of the American military force, making them a token population.

Yoder critiques Kanter for presenting a gender-neutral framework and adds that tokenism effects do not carry over to all combinations of dominants and tokens. Yoder argues that other causal processes, such as gender status, job prestige, and occupational gender-inappropriateness, must be considered in tokenism processes (Yoder 1994). Additionally, she argues that researchers need to account for the impact of organizational gender discrimination (Yoder 1994). Thus, the impact of tokenism may be further exacerbated in organizations, such as the military, where women occupy high prestige occupations typically associated with men and masculinity (Yoder 1994).

In addition to potential tokenism processes, the organizational structure of the military, both in its hierarchical form and in the demographic composition of its workforce, directly shapes American military culture, which constructs and then reproduces conceptions of gender (Bourg and Segal 2001). Masculinity and femininity are not static, uniform constructions, but are stratified on a spectrum, with dominant and subordinated forms (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Individuals situated within certain social institutions, such as the military, must encompass institutional and culturally specific constructions of gender to gain acceptance into the institution. Within the military, hegemonic, heteronormative masculinity is the dominant form, leading to a culture that privileges certain forms of heterosexuality and that denigrates subordinate gender constructions, including all that is feminine. This stratification of gender marginalizes the military service of groups whose bodies and performances do not fit the script.

Women's presence in the military changes gender norms, creating different social constructions and influencing the formal and informal rules regarding gender interactions (Mills and Mills 2000). Despite this evolving logic, women must negotiate the gendered paradigm, or broad assumptions, which provide the framework to the military community. Dunivin characterizes the foundation of military culture as consisting of a "combat, masculine-warrior paradigm" which penetrates military culture with a "cult of masculinity" (1994). She argues that the military embraces the masculine paradigm, even though it contradicts the increasingly-diverse model of military culture. Dunivin states that social change will come from external forces, some of which the military will accept,

but that the military will go to great lengths to protect its underlying paradigm (Dunivin 1994).

Finally, although I use social construction theory as a framework for my research, it is important to note the role of power and agency in social life, for individuals often are not equivalent in their interactions (Collins 1995). Rather, they must negotiate power dynamics, whether within interaction or as a larger part of the “formidable inertia” of social institutions, that increase or reduce their voice (Winant 1995: 504). Women, as a social group, face discrimination in the military. Some of this is legal, such as their exclusion from certain occupational specialties. Other forms are illegal and against organizational rules, yet continue, as demonstrated by recent research on gender relations in the military workplace (Rock et al. 2011). Women have agency to act against such inequality, but they also are struggling against the “historical weight” of the status quo, and all of its accompanying legal and cultural restrictions (Winant 1995:504).

This means that the decision-making processes for women and men who enlist in the Marine Corps may differ due to their knowledge of Marine Corps policies and culture. Female recruits may enter the Marine Corps knowing that they are going to be in the minority and that they will be limited in their occupational opportunities and, as such, they may frame their decision to serve as a marker of individual agency. Yet, their decision also must be considered against the backdrop of policies regarding how individuals, based on their sex, should be employed in the organization. This is one example of how gender marks who is able to serve in the military and in what capacity.

### *Intersectionality and Culture*

Although gender has a primary role in the culture and organizational structure of the military, as a multi-level system of power, it never operates in isolation, but in tandem with other systems of power. It always intersects with other characteristics to shape one's lived experience and personal lens. Broadly speaking, intersectionality critically frames gender stratification as existing within other systems of power, including race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic position. Rather than operating independently of each other, these systems intersect with each other at multiple levels, leading to a historically-grounded "interlocking system of oppression" for those in the lower statuses of these dimensions (Collins 2000:3). This perspective argues that men's and women's lived experiences are determined not only by gender, but also by race, ethnicity, socioeconomic position, generational status, community of origin, and educational level, leading to multiple combinations of how social lives are constituted and how they are incorporated into social institutions (Glenn 2002; McCall 2001; Zambrana 2011). As described by Dill and Zambrana, intersectionality, "finds approaches and ideas that focus on the complexity rather than the singularity of human experience" (2009:2).

Overall, there is no archetypal type of oppression or inequality, as articulated by the numerous combinations of race, ethnicity, nationality, class, and other systems of power. There is also the potential that different systems may contradict or change each other (Collins 2000; Pelak 2007). However, at the structural level, this perspective also challenges the tendency to look at decisions in the life course as solely personal ones based on individual agency (although this is still an important component) and to consider broader patterns based on social characteristics and how they are embedded and

incorporated into social structures. This perspective allows me to turn my research questions into an analysis of patterns in group identity and experience and to move beyond assumptions that behaviors are shaped by a uniform Mexican American culture.

Intersectionality provides a framework to consider both the obvious and fine gradients within and among systems of power, leading to individuals and groups who are doubly-disadvantaged (or more) as well as those who enjoy multiple, intersecting privileges because of their social characteristics. Using an intersectional perspective, women can no longer be considered a unified category with an essential, universal experience, although they may share some commonalities and a collective standpoint in some cases (Collins 2000). White women, for example, may experience different oppressions from African American women due to their privileged race as well as their greater association with white men. Although some Hispanic women may enjoy the privilege of being racially white, they also may have different lived experiences because of their ethnicity and how this intersects with their gender. Nor are Hispanic men and women a unified category, although their common ethnic background may provide them with similar cultural views and social experiences. Hispanic men may claim patriarchal dominance over Hispanic women, even though the masculine status of Hispanic men may be challenged by other men. Differences also extend beyond race, ethnicity, and gender to include other social characteristics, such as socioeconomic position, education, community of origin, and generational status, that shape one's lived experiences. Hispanics with a middle class socioeconomic position, for example, may experience more privileges while interacting with others and with social institutions than Hispanics who are first generation immigrants looking for a better standard of living (Zambrana



2011). And there are Hispanics who are racially black creating new questions of how race and ethnicity intersect, and challenging stereotypes of who is a Hispanic and how different categories of people united by a label are incorporated into social institutions (Dzidzienyo and Oboler 2005; Oboler 1995).

These status differentials have consequences for social movements, as Hispanic men and women may share a common structural location because of their ethnicity, but the framing of collective change may differ based on gender, class, or other systems of power. These status differentials also apply to the experiences Hispanic men and women may have in the U.S. Marine Corps and may shape their willingness and/or ability to challenge informal norms and formal rules in the organization. For example, Hispanic men, who are eligible to serve in all occupational specialties and in all Marine Corps units, may not question the systems of power that currently exclude women from ground combat positions and units.

Similar to gender, an intersectional perspective includes different levels of analysis, including individual, interactional, organizational, and cultural (Weber 2009). At the individual and interactional level, gender, race, and ethnicity and other social characteristics are all routine, ongoing accomplishments that are experienced simultaneously (West and Fenstermaker 1995). Key to this perspective is the notion of simultaneity: these systems are not operating in an additive, multiplicative, or geometric way, rather, they are operating together and without a rank order of which system is more pronounced than the other (West and Fenstermaker 1995). Like gender, these differences become so imbued with meaning that they are interpreted as essential differences, rather

than as socially constructed. They evolve with broader social forces, but they also are reproduced through daily interactions.

At the macro level, race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic position, and other social characteristics are key organizing principles in social structures, framing historically-specific discourses and group relations. They also are manifested in organizational laws and resources which may broaden one's role because of certain characteristics, while simultaneously enforcing restrictions. African American men experienced this during World War II, when they were allowed to serve because of their gender, yet forced to serve in segregated units because of their race. At this level of analysis, an intersectional perspective allows us to see how certain groups are positioned within and among major social institutions, like the military.

The use of an intersectional perspective provides a new way to approach and challenge the motivations and experiences of Mexican American Marines by demonstrating the importance of looking at the many combinations of social lives, rather than each one separately. By doing so, this allows us to parse out a more nuanced view of group relations, organizational culture and policies, and inequality within a major social institution of increasing relevance to the lives of Mexican Americans (Dill and Zambrana 2009).

An intersectional perspective also provides space to challenge previous conceptions of Mexican Americans as a "culture-bound group" where certain trends, such as high fertility rates, for a subset of the population are explained as cultural consequences, and where this cultural explanation comes to describe the social lives of the entire population. (Zambrana 2011:40). Prior to the emergence of intersectionality,

the tendency was to approach Mexican Americans, as well as other minority groups, as driven to act in a certain ways because of cultural influence. In the last two decades, this perspective has been challenged with research that applies a more nuanced, intersectional approach that accounts for how different combinations of race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic position shape lived experiences and by extension, social scientific analyses of different variables and their effects.

In the cultural approach, which generally does not apply an intersectional lens, the dominant gender perspective on Mexican Americans suggests that they hold a traditional view of work and family, undergirded by Catholicism, as gendered, separate spheres (Marín and Marín 1991; Valentine and Mosley 2000). Women's maternal roles are sacralized – they are the moral heart of the family and the ones who garner most respect - while the father's main role is breadwinner. Mothering focuses on the care of children and the maintenance of the home, while fatherhood is about providing economic security and maintaining honor in the family (Dreby 2006; Gutmann 1996). The woman, as mother, is supposed to be the moral and emotional heart of the family, even if this means subverting her individual preferences for the greater good. This role also serves as an effective way of regulating the sexual behavior of Hispanic women (Andrade 1992; Ybarra 1982; Raffaelli and Ontai 2004; Zinn 1979). Mexican motherhood is embodied in La Virgen de Guadalupe – a parallel icon of the Virgin Mary – who is revered by Catholic Mexican Americans for her self-sacrificial moral strength (Melhuus 1996; Stevens 1973). This cultural stereotype of Mexican Americans has gained theoretical and practical power – the “culture-bound perspective” continues – despite research that suggests the power of these traditional gender roles decline with education and

generational status and thus, are not driven by culture, but a combination of gender, ethnicity, education, and other social characteristics (Telles and Ortiz 2008; Zambrana 2011:40).

For the men, their appropriate gender role often is characterized as *machismo*, a concept whose meaning has varied considerably over time (Neff 2001). It has been used as a defining characteristic of Mexican American men, explained as the core (although yet still nebulous) part of their temperament (Neff 2001). Historical and anthropological perspectives link *machismo* to the Spanish conquests of Mexico and the linking of *conquistadores* to the elements of bravery, stoicism, masculinity, and invulnerability (Riding 1985). Building on this linkage between nature and environment, a psycho-developmental perspective frames *machismo* as a characteristic that emerges in child-rearing practices specific to Hispanic families, which often are characterized as matriarchal (Giraldo 1972). This perspective, which focuses on the influence of Hispanic family structure on personality, provides a foundation to the view that *machismo* is connected to pathological tendencies that manifest themselves in “hypermasculine” behaviors such as excessive drinking, philandering, and domestic abuse (Neff 2001).

Research in ethnic and Latino studies has worked to emphasize both the negative and the positive elements of *machismo* (Mirandé 1986). Although it is still associated with the tendency to act in an emotional, aggressive way, *machismo* also connotes bravery, honor, respect, and family loyalty. Most importantly, the concept is no longer limited to masculine bodies, but applies to a way of being that can be fulfilled by both men and women. Additionally, as the concept of *machismo* has gained conceptual clarity, its use as an all-encompassing explanatory device for trends in the Mexican American

population also has become more attuned to differences within the group by social characteristics, such as socioeconomic position. For example, research by Peña (1991) and Mirandé, Pitones, and Diaz (2011) suggests that adherence to traditional beliefs about gender and *machismo* is more prevalent among Hispanics who are recent immigrants and who work in lower-class jobs and is not a marker of Hispanics who are more fully incorporated into American society and who live a middle class existence. An intersectional approach allows us to see differences by class and generational status, rather than apply a cultural explanation across the population, and provides a powerful tool to dismantle previously-articulated theories on the uniformity of culture.

Additionally, despite the separate spheres conceptualization used to characterize Hispanic gender roles and families, cultural and religious expectations do not fully explain the intersection of gender, work, and family in Mexican American families. Mexican American women, for example, often must work due to financial necessity; however, their labor force participation does not violate traditional gender roles because it is viewed as legitimate since it is vital for family survival. Gender role expectations are durable, yet flexible when confronted with bleak economic circumstances. This may partly be connected to an overstatement by previous scholars of the pervasiveness of traditional gender roles within the Mexican American population, a possibility found in past studies unable to document the staying power of traditional gender roles, especially when factors such as social class and generational status are considered (Amaro 1988; Leaper and Valin 1996; Phinney and Flores 2002; Vazquez-Nuttall, Romero-Garcia, and De Leon 2008). Changing gender roles also may be affected by the greater educational and employment opportunities for Hispanic men and women in the United States than in

majority Hispanic countries (Valentine and Mosley 2000). They also may be shaped by the assimilation and racialization of Hispanics into American social institutions (Telles and Ortiz 2010). Overall, the importance of these gender roles as a marker of culture can be overstated, and all too often can become a quick and easy fallback explanation for why Mexican American women and men may collectively show certain behaviors and demographic trends perceived as different from the dominant American population.

### **Chapter III: Selecting, Building, and Integrating Marines**

In the previous chapter, I challenged previous conceptions of Mexican Americans as a culture bound group and argued for a more nuanced intersectional perspective. After providing basic summaries of social constructionism and intersectionality, including how I use them to frame my questions and data, I now discuss social characteristics and processes that facilitate one's incorporation into the military. I also look at past research on the role of military service in the life course. I transition from a theoretical application of the various stratification perspectives to a perspective that focuses on how social characteristics shape one's connection and experiences to the organization of the U.S. Marine Corps. I follow with a discussion of the Institutional/Occupational Model and its connection to the U.S. Marine Corps. Throughout this section, I link empirical studies and formal policies to my theoretical framework, thus bringing together the academic approach of theory with the decisions, standards, and environments that current Marines may experience.

#### *Selection into the Military: Individual and Group Considerations*

The decision to enlist in the military is not a random event, but a complex process that involves multiple intervening institutions, people, practical considerations, and socio-emotional factors. In this section, I move past theoretical perspectives on how we may classify servicemembers to review research on the recruitment model of the All-Volunteer Force and how different pathways into the military are influenced by race, class, and other social characteristics. I also discuss whether the decision to serve in the military has had a net positive or negative effect on the life course of past generations of veterans. As a way of demonstrating how opportunity structures may shape enlistment

behaviors, I include past research on propensity to serve across different sub-groups of the American youth population.

Overall, military recruits are a highly selected group who differ from their civilian peers in meaningful ways. Currently, the military must grow its force through a recruitment and retention model, rather than the selective conscription model of past decades and wars. This is a particularly difficult endeavor during a time of sustained war. In the past, wars were fought with a mobilized force consisting of draftees, militia members, draft-induced volunteers, and true volunteers. These servicemembers were mainly male and racially white, although, despite this uniformity, there was a broader sense that this mobilized force was representative of society (Segal 1989).

There were race, class, and gender disparities noted with conscription. Initially, educational and marriage deferments, for example, exempted more privileged men from service because they were enrolled in higher education and/or were married (Geva 2011). Women were never and still are not part of the selective service system and during the Vietnam War, there was a general perception that African Americans were disproportionately serving in combat positions (Badillo and Curry 1976). However, selective conscription was also a model that touched a larger proportion of the American population than experienced today, as the military expanded greatly during times of conflict, requiring a rapid, dramatic influx of personnel. This changed with the advent of the Cold War as we transitioned to a force-in-being, and with the 1973 transition from conscription to an all-volunteer force built around labor market principles (Segal 1989).

The transition to an all-volunteer force brought concerns that the military would become less socially representative as demographic groups who were disadvantaged in



the civilian labor market would join the military in disproportionate numbers (Marmion 1971). In fact, this concern became a reality as the demographics of the force changed substantially with the transition to a volunteer model: the military now has more racial and ethnic minorities and more women than it had under conscription. In some cases, these trends in representation are considered equitable; in other cases, especially in the case of women, they are considered to be increasing, but are far from being equitable (I discuss trends in military participation by social group in the next chapter). This increase in minority groups brings concerns about institutional equity, social mobility, and the consequences of service on an individual's overall life course, especially since the recruitment of an individual into the military is a somewhat systematic process.

A primary consideration for individuals transitioning into adulthood is whether they plan on continuing their education, entering the civilian job market, or enlisting in the military; the military now competes with the labor market and higher education for its work force (Hogan and Astone 1986). Individuals from a more advantaged social location are more likely to choose higher education or the labor force as their transition point whereas individuals with lower socioeconomic status, no desire to enter college, lower high school grades, and non-college educated parents are more likely to self-select into the military (Bachman et al. 2000; Bachman et al. 1998; Segal and Segal 2004). For the enlisted corps of the military where a college degree is not required, there is a social class inequity on who serves. Those who do not have the means to attend college, even if they desire to do so, are likely to select the military as a pathway that will provide the financial support and occupational experience needed to transition successfully into higher education or the skilled labor force. Military service, then, becomes a perceived

means to higher status attainment. As discussed before, groups who are more disadvantaged in the civilian labor market, such as Hispanics and African Americans, also are more likely to serve in the military than their white peers. And for those African American men who serve, past research suggests that those considered to have the same skills that would make them valued in the civilian labor force (“high quality” personnel) show positive selectivity effects for the military. This is especially true when they are compared to white peers in the military who tend to be from less privileged backgrounds than whites who choose a job or college (Teachman, Call and Segal 1993).

Although individuals may choose to serve because of a belief that it will increase their quality of life, the long term effects of military service are mixed. Research on the impact of service on the life course for the current generation of military servicemembers is ongoing, but previous generations of veterans have been studied in detail, with a focus on issues such as marriage and family, crime rates, combat exposure and long-term health, educational outcomes, and integration into the civilian labor market (see MacLean and Elder 2007 and Modell and Haggerty 1991 for a review of the implications of wartime service for past generations). Overall, the effects of military service are shaped by the context in which one serves, including time period of service; military occupation, especially whether one served in the combat arms; and individual characteristics such as race and family status, which frame one’s social world and available opportunities.

The decision to serve may pay-off as intended, meaning that veterans may experience an increased standard of living because of the skills and experiences they earned in the military. This was the case for World War II veterans generally (Elder and Chan 1999; Modell and Haggerty 1991). In contrast, it is not always beneficial to serve,

as demonstrated by the decreased earning potential of Vietnam era veterans who experienced a pay penalty when compared to their nonveteran peers who did not leave the civilian labor market for military service (Mangum and Ball 1987). However, the decision to enlist often is framed by the potential benefits of service – such as job security, pay, health care, and educational opportunities - rather than the burdens of wartime deployments. In some cases, the burdens are considered, but the positives still outweigh the risks of staying in one's home community. African American men in the Army, for example, may encounter a significantly lower homicide death rate in the military than they might experience in the civilian population (Buzzell and Preston 2007; Rothberg et al. 1990). This may make the burdens of service appear as less consequential.

For certain groups who are disadvantaged in the civilian labor force and who are also less likely to have the means to attend college, military service may emerge as an attractive option, leading to subgroup differences in propensity to enter and desire to serve in the armed forces. The recruitment of a military servicemember begins early, with research demonstrating that eighth graders with defined feelings about the military are not likely to change their minds during high school (Segal et al. 1999). There also is a difference between expectations that one will serve (or propensity) and one's desire to serve. In some cases, groups may have higher expectations to serve than desire to serve, demonstrating a perception that military service is an acceptable, and at times, required way to earn decent pay and benefits. In other cases, groups may have a higher desire to serve than expectation to serve, suggesting the possibility of cultural or structural obstacles to enlistment. For men, there is a positive relationship between propensity to serve and actual enlistment behaviors; that is, the behavior matches the attitude. The

relationship is less straightforward for women, who demonstrate more unpredictability, and are less likely to enlist even with positive propensity (Bachman et al. 1998; for more on gender and propensity to serve, also see Segal et al. 2001).

In the case of Hispanics, there is a clear trend regarding propensity and desire to serve that differs by gender. Hispanic men report higher propensity to serve than desire to serve; however, this gap has begun to close (Achatz et al. 2000; Segal et al. 1999). This trend aligns more with African American men, who report the highest propensity to serve coupled with a decreased desire to serve, than with white males who show low propensity to serve and report a similarly low desire to do so (Segal et al. 1999). Hispanic women report greater variability than their male peers in propensity and desire. Like women overall, they report a greater desire to serve than actual propensity. However, the gap between propensity and desire has been narrowing for Hispanic women, a trend that is also occurring among African American women. These women may perceive fewer obstacles to service or they may view the obstacles as less burdensome when considered against the civilian labor market or higher education (Segal et al. 1999).

It is not clear why minority women are viewing the military as a probable and desirable employer; however, it is possible that they are being drawn to military service because they are “doubly disadvantaged” in the civilian labor market because of the intersection of characteristics that shape their lived experience (Segal, Thanner, and Segal 2007). The wartime burdens of military service are severe and the military is a demanding institution even during peacetime, yet military service is still desired by many due to the occupational opportunities it provides (Binkin and Eitelberg 1982; Moskos and

Butler 1996; Moskos 1988; Segal 1986). The military often is viewed as a desired employer, particularly because it offers “pull factors” such as standardized pay, equal entry at the bottom ranks, and a willingness to train unskilled personnel (Moore and Webb 2000). Thus, racial and ethnic minorities may enlist in the military as a strategic calculation of occupational benefits.

The military generally, including the Marine Corps, emphasizes the necessity of knowing and following formal policies. Military culture emphasizes the importance of clear communication followed by immediate compliance with all lawful orders, including those that are classified as formal organizational policies. In the case of race, ethnicity, and gender, there are clear guidelines regarding equal opportunity and the need for inclusive command climates. These guidelines are centralized within the Department of Defense which then gives each service branch the latitude to make their own policies even more restrictive. These policies may influence whether a potential minority recruit considers military service and also the type of environment racial and ethnic minorities and/or women may encounter while serving.

In the case of racial and ethnic minorities, the predominant history of racial integration in the United States military involves African Americans, who remain the largest minority group in the military. African Americans are not unique in either their familiarity with individual-level prejudices or in their experience with legally-required segregation. Hispanics, for example, also have encountered discrimination (Rosenfeld and Culbertson 1992). However, African Americans are unique regarding the duration and harshness of their conditions of service, including their past segregation. Racially white Hispanics, in contrast, were allowed to serve alongside whites. Because of this

difference, it is the experiences and history of African Americans which have shaped current equal opportunity policies on race and ethnicity. However, the current policies not only shape the experience of African Americans, but also influence the motivations and experiences of Hispanic servicemembers.

The first major change in military policy regarding race and ethnicity occurred after the successful conclusion of World War II when President Truman issued Executive Order 9981 which called for “equality of treatment and opportunity” regardless of race or national origin (Dansby and Landis 2001; Gropman 2006:204). This order, which often is credited with desegregating the military, actually did not lead to the integration of units, but rather reinforced separate units built around the perception of equal opportunity. Rather than from the civilian agencies of government, the real change came later during the Korean War from military leaders who realized that segregated forces were expensive and ineffective and pushed for change within their own service branches.

The Air Force desegregated first in 1949 by ending racial quotas, placing personnel in occupations where they qualified, and ending Jim Crow segregation on base (Gropman 2006). Integration in the Army began in the combat zone in Korea so that Black replacements could be assigned to previously all-white units that had taken combat casualties and fatalities, rather than waiting in replacement depots for openings in Black units, and by 1954 the entire Army was integrated. The Marine Corps and Navy began to integrate in 1951, but took much longer to complete the process.

The second major change in military policy regarding race and ethnicity came after the Vietnam War. The desegregation experienced during the Korean War did not remove the racism which continued to shape the experiences of African Americans and

other minority groups. In particular, this racism manifested itself in race riots aboard several Navy ships, including the carriers USS Kitty Hawk and USS Constellation, as well as at Travis Air Force Base in California. (Astor 1998; Dansby and Landis 2001; Gropman, 2006). In response to these riots, the Department of Defense mandated race relations education, complete with equal opportunity officers, to assist commanders with maintaining an unbiased, racially diverse command climate (Dansby and Landis 2001). It established the Defense Race Relations Institute [DRRI] (now the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute [DEOMI]) to train race relations officers (Hope 1979).

This equal opportunity focus later expanded to include ethnicity, national origin, and gender (Moskos 1994). Although women experienced a broadening of opportunities that began during World War II through the expansion of the military's equal opportunity policy, the integration of women into the military has been through incremental policies that still do not allow for their full participation. Women's occupational opportunities are the most limited in the U.S. Marine Corps, preventing them from serving in the most elite combat units. Even though female Marines must negotiate this inequity, which is mandated by federal law, they also are protected by formal equal opportunity policies.

The current Department of Defense policy continues this mandate, with the Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps enforcing it as, "Every Marine...has an absolute right to be treated with dignity and respect – regardless of race, color, gender, religion, age, or national origin. Discrimination and harassment, in any form, are violations of who we are and what we stand for as a Corps" (Amos 2010).

The military, including the Marine Corps is very clear in communicating these policies and it is expected that all military personnel will follow them in their intent. However, minority experiences in the military are not only shaped by formal policies, but also are influenced by organizational culture and informal social norms. As a result, experiences, whether real or perceived, do not always match command expectations. At the most extreme level, flagrant violations of the Commandant's policy would include actions such as sexual harassment or racial discrimination in formal military processes, such as promotion. Current research, which I discuss below, suggests that the organizational climate concerning these factors is improving in the Marine Corps, but that issues still exist.

The Marine Corps completes service-wide climate assessments sporadically, but normally between every four to five years, with the most recent one in 2007. This survey sampled 24,978 active duty Marines and received responses from 4,559 for a 19 percent response rate. Overall, Hispanics reported higher satisfaction with life in the Marine Corps than whites, a trend which has steadily increased since 1994. Only 5 percent of Hispanic respondents reported racial discrimination in 2007, down from a service-wide high of 29 percent in 1996. Yet, at 54%, Hispanics were also the least likely to report that the Performance Evaluation System was fair and only 72% stated that senior Marine Corps leaders support diversity, the lowest score for any racial/ethnic group. This difference in perception demonstrates that Hispanics are experiencing positive work environments and interpersonal relations, but that there are still concerns regarding formal appraisals and the attentiveness of senior leaders to race and/or ethnic issues (Navy Personnel Research 2008).



The report also provides insight into the experiences of female Marines, although it does not further parse their responses by race and ethnicity. Like racial discrimination, reports of sexual harassment and gender discrimination have decreased. In 1995, the Defense Manpower Data Center reported that 56 percent of surveyed female Marines had experienced sexual harassment in the last twelve months; in 2007, this percentage had decreased to 34 percent. Of those who reported sexual harassment, 56 percent had experienced crude or offensive behavior, such as jokes, gestures, or comments about appearance. From this same group, approximately 50 percent reported being sexually harassed by their supervisor. Further, in 1997, 39 percent of surveyed female Marines reported gender discrimination; this percentage decreased to 23 percent in 2007 (Navy Personnel Research 2008).

As demonstrated by the decrease in reported sexual harassment, the formal policies are making an impact on individual behavior. However, it is significant that the majority of harassment comes in the context of crude behavior or what could be labeled as a negative work environment. Although this type of behavior does not necessarily target a specific individual, it does create a hostile work environment and may be used as an effective way of silencing others or forcing them out of the organization. Hostile work environments also facilitate the acceptance of individual harassment, possibly feeding into serious offenses (Firestone and Harris 1994). Thus, even though the Marine Corps has a formal policy of equal opportunity, there is the strong possibility that a female Marine will experience a hostile work environment at some point in her career. As suggested by Segal, Thanner, and Segal (2007), female Marines may be motivated to serve in the Marine Corps precisely because it is the most limiting in its occupational

opportunities for women. However, they may also choose to serve because they believe in the efficacy of the policies and expect to experience an equal opportunity environment.

Even though this perspective helps to understand broader enlistment patterns, it does not sufficiently explain why Hispanics have a large presence in the Marine Corps, the most combat-oriented of the service branches. Although all of the service branches have an important role in the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Army and the Marine Corps have experienced the longest deployments (Marine Corps deployments are typically seven months long, while Army deployments range from 12-15 months in duration), the greatest manpower demands, and the highest casualties (Leland and Oboroceanu 2010). Groups motivated by mainly practical considerations would enlist in the less ground combat-oriented of the service branches – the Navy and the Air Force – if they were able to meet the more stringent standards. In fact, African Americans, who for decades were concentrated in the Army, have decreased their numbers in the Army and are increasing their representation in the Navy, a demonstration of rational behavior. Meanwhile, Hispanics have maintained a strong proportional presence in the Marine Corps, and the representation of Hispanic women has increased through the past decade.

However, the decision to join the military is not based solely on strategic calculation, but also is shaped by one's community; factors, such as values, and key social influencers, such as family members. Past studies, for example, demonstrate that children who come from families where at least one parent served in the military have higher enlistment behaviors than their peers and are more likely to serve for a career once enlisted (Faris 1981, 1984; Kilburn and Klerman 1999). In addition to family exposure, Kleykamp (2006) finds that community presence also shapes enlistment decisions, with

youth from areas with military installations showing greater knowledge and interest in military service than their peers from communities with a low military presence. While Mexican American youth are less likely to have a parent who has served (a trend which is changing with their increasing social representation), over half of the Mexican American population lives in California and Texas, which have several major military installations. Thus, the decision to enlist may be connected to broad exposure to the military institution through community.

Enlistment behaviors also are shaped by interpersonal ties, often experienced in key social institutions such as family and education. Behavior, attitudes, and expectations are learned, malleable, and critically shaped during adolescence; they also can be changed through interactions and relationships. Parents, in particular, have a strong influence on their children's educational and occupational goals, with research suggesting that young adults are likely to seek out their parents for career advice over their peers or other adults (Sackett and Mavor 2003). Building on their unique position as guardians, cheerleaders, and justifiers of opinion, parents also influence decisions to serve in the military and to a lesser extent, service branch selection, especially since this decision may hinder or support other chances in the life course (Legree et al. 2000).

Past research demonstrates that parent's willingness to mention military service to their children, and the frequency with which they do so, are positively related to their child's own enlistment (Gibson, Griepentrong, and Marsh 2007). This is one reason why children of military parents are so receptive to military recruiting: they are exposed to it, hear about it, and already consider it to be a part of their lives. Although Mexican American parents may not have the military background to draw from, they still may be

likely to approve of military service and to advise their children to consider service as a pathway toward greater mobility. This influence may be especially pronounced in Mexican American families, which are known for their emphasis on family and parental authority.

Policy oriented research on the role of key influencers on enlistment into the Marine Corps suggests that recruiters have the greatest role in shaping this decision, at 51 percent for Hispanics and 59 percent for non-Hispanics, followed by parents, and siblings. The Marine Corps already has an awareness of the importance of recruiters and assigns its best Marines into recruiting duty. It also places Hispanic recruiters in Hispanic areas as a way of linking the two communities. Hispanic recruiters, for example, may be found at local events like Fiesta Patrias and Fiesta Cinco de Mayo, or at national conferences for organizations such as the National Council of La Raza, a Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization (Hattiangadi et al. 2004).

The Marine Corps also recognizes the importance of parental opinion, particularly for Hispanic recruits. In a policy-oriented report from the Center for Naval Analyses, one recruiter, for example, is quoted as saying, “no matter what the age, Hispanic children always consult their parents about important decisions” (Hattiangadi et al.2004:37).

Despite this viewpoint, only 31 percent of Hispanic recruits, compared to 39 percent of non-Hispanic recruits, cite their parents as strongly influencing their decision to join. However, family continues to be an important component, as Hispanic recruits are more likely (17 percent) to report that a sibling influenced their decision to join over non-Hispanic recruits (13 percent). This may be a trend unique to Hispanics who are less likely to have parents in the military because their parents are more likely to be

immigrants and therefore not as assimilated into the major institutions of the United States, including the military. Instead, Hispanics may consider service because of the experiences of and/or encouragement from their siblings; current Marines may also view themselves as role models for younger family members (Hattiangadi et al. 2004). This trend also may be unique to the Marine Corps because of its emphasis on youth and the continuous stream of Marines returning to their communities after completing their first and only enlistment. These individuals may serve as role models for youth who are not much younger than them and may influence them to join the Marine Corps.

*Selection into the Military: Service Branch Standards*

The enlistment of an individual also requires that the potential recruit meet the military's standards. The military does not accept everyone, but has a say in who can serve and in what capacity (Bachman et al. 2000). Regardless of race, ethnicity or gender, the majority of youth do not qualify for military enlistment. Key enlistment standards for all the services include: high school education, aptitude (measured by the Armed Forces Qualifying Test, or AFQT), height/weight, health, presence of spouse and/or children, past criminal convictions, financial status, and past drug use (Asch et al. 2009). Hispanics, in particular, are disqualified because of their disproportionately low high school graduation rates, lower AFQT scores, and increased tendency to be overweight. When considering key requirements for service, only 35 percent of Hispanic males and 24 percent of Hispanic females qualify for enlistment in the Marine Corps. In contrast, 46 percent of white males and 35 percent of white females qualify (Asch et al. 2009: xvii).

The Marine Corps is the service branch with the cumulatively least restrictive accession standards, yet it has higher standards than the Army in education and aptitude. Past studies on recruit quality classification suggest that personnel with higher AFQT scores tend to have greater productivity, higher performance, and less training requirements than those scoring below the median (Asch, Romley, and Totten 2005). There also is evidence that high-scoring personnel tend to perform better on military-related tasks, such as communications and tank gunner systems, aircraft maintenance and air defense systems (Scribner et al. 1986; Teachout and Pellum 1991; Orvis, Childress, and Polich 1992). Further, high school graduates have lower attrition rates (Orvis and Asch 2000).

Because of the direct link between quality, education, and effectiveness, the Office of the Secretary of Defense established a baseline of recruit quality, which each service may restrict further. Using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY97) as its baseline, the AFQT is normed against a nationally representative sample of youth, ages 18 to 23 years old, to compare scores between military applicants and the general population (Asch et al. 2009; Sackett and Mavor 2003). The Marine Corps requires all Tier 1 applicants (classified as high school graduates or above) to score at least in the 21st percentile on the AFQT to be considered for service in the Marine Corps. The score requirement for the AFQT increases as the educational level goes down and there are limits on the percentage of low scoring applicants who can be accessed. Although the Marine Corps prefers high school graduates, it will accept individuals who have a General Educational Development (GED) credential if they score sufficiently on the AFQT (31st percentile or higher). Only the Army has lower educational and aptitude

requirements, with the guideline that Tier 1 applicants score at least in the 16th percentile on the AFQT (Asch et al. 2009).

The underrepresentation of Mexican Americans in the military may partly be explained by their above average high school dropout rates, a major disqualifying factor for enlistment. The Army also has a lenient policy regarding education and aptitude, yet Hispanics are only 12% of all new Army recruits (OSD 2007). In fact, the Navy, which has higher standards than both the Marine Corps and the Army, is the service branch with the second highest proportion of Hispanics. It has been suggested that the military focus on high school graduation programs as a way of maintaining its recruiting pool.

However, past research from the Center for Naval Analyses shows that Hispanics who serve in the Marine Corps were less likely to consider dropping out of high school than their white peers (25 versus 30 percent). This finding suggests that highly motivated Hispanics, particularly those focused on education and advancement, already are electing to serve in the Marine Corps (Hattiangadi et al. 2004:26-27). Thus even though the Marine Corps is the service branch with the cumulatively least restrictive accession standards, it tends to have higher quality recruits than the Army, which also has less restrictive standards (Asch et al. 2009).

In addition to quality measures, all military applicants must be in good physical health and must meet service-specific height and weight standards. Although the Marine Corps applies age and height-specific standards to its current servicemembers, it applies only height specific weight standards for its male recruits. It also has different standards for male recruits who enlist into the Delayed Entry Program (DEP) from those who directly enter into basic training. Heavier recruits are allowed to enlist through DEP and

then are given time and direction to meet physical fitness requirements. Recruiters often will lead them in weekly physical training sessions in preparation for basic training.

Hispanics, who are more likely to be overweight than whites or African Americans, may benefit from this extra time and attention to meet standards; however, they may also elect not to serve in the Marine Corps because of its strict height and weight requirements.

The Marine Corps has the strictest guidelines concerning former drug and alcohol use, which must be disclosed and in many cases is not waiverable. Regarding English proficiency, only the Army and the Navy provide English language training for recruits. Marine recruits must be able to “read, write, and speak the English language sufficiently to complete recruit training” (HQMC 1997). Thus, Mexican American Marine recruits must have at least a basic working knowledge of English because they will not receive further language training. Regarding family members, Marine Corps recruits are limited to one dependent at time of enlistment, and this dependent must be a spouse. This requirement is more restrictive than the Army and the Air Force which allow up to two children for married recruits. Across the services all recruits must agree to a financial screening and may be disqualified due to a history of bad credit or bankruptcy.

If an individual is set on serving in the military, then the combination of standards may partially explain service branch selection; individuals will choose the branch for which they are qualified. In the case of Mexican Americans, the highest quality recruits may elect to serve in the Navy, which has higher educational and aptitude requirements. However, it is also possible that high quality recruits are selecting the Marine Corps due to the influence of other factors such as service branch culture.



### *Institutional/Occupational Model*

In addition to considering how we classify servicemembers and how these classifications influence different pathways in the life course, it also is important to discuss how the Marine Corps, as a military organization, fits into the broader military establishment and civilian society. This provides a more well-rounded view of how changes in military organization influence who serves in the Marine Corps and in what capacity, including how these changes may affect Mexican American servicemembers. In particular, Moskos' Institutional/Occupational Model, which was first introduced in 1977, provides an important theoretical base for considering the impact of the transition from conscription to the recruitment and retention of an all-volunteer wartime force. In this section, I summarize Moskos' theory and then provide counterpoints to his theoretical perspective, with a focus on the different levels of analysis implicit in his theory.

Moskos argues that the organization of the United States military and the way it interfaces with civilian society has transitioned from an institutional model to an occupational one, which he later characterized as the institutional/occupational [I/O] model (1977; 1988). He cites the 1973 replacement of conscription, which relied on the concept of citizenship obligation, with an all-volunteer military as the primary force behind this change. He also cites increases in military pay and benefits, to make the military more competitive with civilian employers, as another motivating force behind this change. Prior to this transition and before it was in competition with civilian organizations, the military, as an institution, focused on core values, such as service and sacrifice, and had norms and values that favored the higher good over individual

preferences. Military personnel, from the lowest-ranking conscript to senior officers, viewed their service as a calling, rather than an occupation, and the host civilian society viewed servicemembers as making a sacrifice for the greater good of the nation and as such, repaid them with status and prestige.

In contrast to an institutional calling, an occupation acquires legitimacy through the marketplace, which determines the value of service through monetary cost. The occupational model relies upon self-interest, for both the organization and the individual, who give and take work based on financial worth. From this perspective, military personnel view their service as a job, with careful consideration to how the benefits of service, including steady pay and generous benefits, compare to the costs of service, especially wartime service. In a purely occupational sense, servicemembers are no longer primarily motivated by higher values or the greater good, but are motivated to serve based off of a cost-benefit calculation.

Segal challenges Moskos' conceptualization of the I/O model as a single continuum by arguing for greater conceptual clarity, especially in regard to the level of analysis of the military and the servicemember (1986). He argues that Moskos' I/O model actually operates at two levels of analysis: at the organizational level, Moskos compares the military as an "institution" with the military as a "workplace" and at the individual level, Moskos compares the military as a "calling" with the military as a "job." This distinction in levels of analysis has both theoretical and methodological implications. First, Segal suggests that it is quite possible that "institution" and "occupation" are not poles of the same dimension, but rather independent dimensions of military service. One could be highly institutional in outlook and ethos while also highly

occupational in making career decisions, what Segal describes as “pragmatic professionalism” (1986:370). This means that servicemembers can be motivated by both practical concerns, such as pay and benefits, while also being moved to serve because of one’s values, such as service and sacrifice. Second, the distinction in levels of analysis has implications for how we conduct research regarding this issue. Segal’s reconceptualization provides space for research that focus on the individual, rather than the organization, as our unit of analysis.

Currently, the trend is toward a more dominant occupational model; however, both institutional and occupational characteristics still shape the military experience, potentially demonstrating “pragmatic professionalism.” This trend may be more pronounced when considering differences in individual motivations for service by branch selection. There are differences between the service branches (and even among the occupational specialties within them) regarding their placement in the I/O model and its dimensions. The Marine Corps with its cohesive culture; reverence for historically important symbols; and its focus on incorporating all servicemembers, without regard for rank or MOS, under the common title of Marine, is considered to be the most institutional of the service branches. Thus, individual preferences to serve in an organization rich in institutional legitimacy may play a role in the motivations and experiences of Mexican American servicemembers, in addition to practical concerns. In the next section, I describe the Marine Corps, with a focus on those values and symbols that contribute to its institutional characterization.

### *The United States Marine Corps: Mission and Culture*

Each of the service branches in the American military is known for having a unique culture, with the Marine Corps known as being the most expeditionary and the most ground combat oriented. It is the smallest service in the Department of Defense with approximately 198,415 personnel, or 13.9 percent of assigned strength of the active duty force (DMDC 2008). It also is known as being the service branch most reliant upon physical prowess and the least reliant upon complex technology or large machinery (Ricks 1997). This is demonstrated by its Physical Fitness Test, which is the most demanding in the military, and its requirement that all Marines pass an additional Combat Fitness Test that includes components such as an 800-yard run, 30-pound ammunition lifts, and a run-under-fire maneuver.

The Marine Corps is a service that prides itself on its own history and mythology and operates under the belief that “Every Marine a Rifleman” (Kaplan 2005). All Marines, regardless of occupation or rank, are trained to be riflemen first, even though most have more specialized training in areas such as aviation or support services. This doctrine, known as the “The Rifleman’s Creed,” is memorized and enforced at enlisted Recruit Training and Officer Candidate and Basic School and also applies to women. Despite its ground combat focus, only 15% of units in the Marine Corps are infantry. The majority of Marines work in aviation specialties and the current Commandant of the Marine Corps is an aviator (USMC 2011). The Marine Corps also refers to itself as the “tip of the spear” in national defense. Because it is focused on expeditionary missions, the Marines are viewed as the “first in” service branch, charged with clearing the enemy and preparing the warzone for the larger footprints of the Army and Navy.

In terms of the age of its servicemembers, the Marine Corps is the youngest of the service branches, with 49% of Marines in the bottom three enlisted ranks, which is approximately double that of the other services (Ricks 1997). This demographic trend is largely driven by the Marine Corps' emphasis on physical fitness and youth, and its preference for keeping Marines for one to two enlistments versus the career-retention model of the other services. The Marine Corps has the highest percentage of 18-21 year olds, who are approximately 39.6 percent of the active duty force. This is in contrast with the Army, which has the next highest concentration of 18-21 year olds at 18.3 percent. The Marine Corps also has the lowest percentage of 31-40 year olds, at 14 percent (DMDC 2008). Because of the high proportion of young personnel, the Marine Corps has the lowest proportion of married servicemembers. Only 42.6 percent of enlisted personnel and 67.8 percent of the officer corps are married, whereas in the Air Force, which also has the oldest population, 57.3 percent of enlisted personnel and 71.7 percent of the officer corps are married (DMDC 2008). Building on the youth of its population, the Marine Corps is known as the service that places the greatest amount of responsibility on the lowest ranks, with 8.8 enlisted personnel per one officer, compared to the Air Force high of 4.4 officers per enlisted member (Ricks 1997). It also is the service that puts lower ranking noncommissioned officers in charge of greater numbers of personnel. Whereas in the Army a master sergeant may be the enlisted leader of a team of twelve personnel, in the Marine Corps a lower ranking Corporal (E-4) or Sergeant (E-5) may be the enlisted leader of a platoon (Kaplan 2005).

Of the four service branches, the Marine Corps is the only service that solely uses gender segregated basic training. It has the longest basic training and dedicates the

largest share of resources to recruiting and training, including channeling its best leaders to these slots. The objectives of basic training are self-discipline and confidence; high moral standards in line with the Corps' core values of honor, courage, and commitment; pride, respect and love of country and the Corps; and indoctrination of the Warrior Spirit. The 13-week long basic training is held in two locations: at San Diego Recruit Depot, which is where all male recruits from west of the Mississippi River attend, and Parris Island, SC, which is open to men from east of the Mississippi River and all women recruits. Although both men and women complete basic training at Parris Island, they remain separated through the culminating event, known as the Crucible, which is a rigorous 54-hour field training exercise. For those Marines serving in positions open to women, partial gender integration begins through a 2-week long Marine Combat Training at Camp Lejeune, and is completed at Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) School. Newly-titled Marines in aviation or support specialties from San Diego Recruit Depot also complete Marine Combat Training; however, there are no women in the program. They do not experience gender integration until MOS School. Marines serving in the combat arms follow a different trajectory housed within the School of Infantry and do not train in gender-integrated units.

The Marine Corps has been very successful in transmitting its core values to its personnel, which is one reason it is considered to be institutional in nature. Military service in the Marine Corps is viewed as an elite honor, and the Marine Corps views itself as the most powerful, trustworthy fighting force in the world (Kaplan 2005; Ricks 1997). This focus on values also carries over to the Marine Corps' recruiting campaigns, which have been highly successful and which range from the past slogan of "We're

Looking for a Few Good Men” to the current campaigns of “The Few, the Proud, the Marines” and “We don’t Make Compromises. We make Marines.” Even during the mid-2000s, when the other services (and particularly the Army), were having difficulty filling the ranks, the Marine Corps managed to meet its quota every year. It has been argued that the recruiting successes are attributed partly to the Marines Corps’ focus on the intrinsic values of service and elitism in recruiting campaigns; however, the Marines also lowered their goals for recruiting during this time and increased their retention rates (De Angelis and Segal 2009; Ricks 1997). The Marine Corps also is effective in using symbols, such as the revered eagle, globe, and anchor emblem, in signifying accomplishment and membership; this is another marker of its institutional nature. This symbol is awarded to all recruits after they finish the Crucible; it marks them as Marines. Finally, although the Marine Corps is the service branch with the greatest proportion of young, non-career servicemembers, the identity of Marine, once earned, is a permanent one. Individuals who are no longer serving, but who served honorably, may still refer to themselves as Marines.

The Marine Corps maintains a strong, heritage-rich culture; it is an organization rich in institutional values (1977). Even though the Marine Corps must build and maintain its force through volunteer recruitment and must compete with the civilian labor market for recruits, it maintains a focus on the symbols and ideals of service and instills a diffuse identity centered on the roles of Marine and rifleman. This is in contrast to the other service branches where identity may be more closely linked with one’s occupational classification. This combination of practical and mission-oriented concerns

may draw individuals into the military and the Marine Corps specifically because it is a way of expressing their “pragmatic professionalism.”



## **Chapter IV: Trends in the Mexican American Population**

Although my dissertation focuses on Mexican Americans in the Marine Corps, it is important to frame my research within the demographic trends of the broader Hispanic population in the United States as well as representation trends in the United States military across service branches. The increased service of Mexican Americans in the military is important not only for building and maintaining a volunteer force, but also for macro level concerns regarding legitimacy and social representation (Janowitz 1960). In this section, I review the broader demographic trends of Hispanics in the United States, including critiques of these data, and then discuss Hispanic representation in the military within the last decade.

Although Hispanics, including Mexican Americans, are counted on surveys from the Census Bureau and the Defense Manpower Data Center, question wording, and as a consequence, counts of the Hispanic population, have changed over time. The Census attempted to count Hispanics during the early part of the twentieth century with little success. The big push came in 1970 with the Census long form, which because of a poorly worded question, underestimated the Hispanic population. The question was reworded and moved to the short form. It also went to all households, leading to increased accuracy. The 2000 census separated ethnicity (which was asked first) and race, and also gave respondents the option to self-identify as Latino. The 2010 Census had minor changes in wording in the hopes of increasing self-reporting and racial identification. It is expected that these changes will induce even more individuals to identify as Hispanic, with the option of further specifying their race and country of origin (Passel 2010). Changes in the measurement of this population demonstrate its diversity

by race and country of origin, and the difficulty of using rigid bureaucratic categories. These changes also demonstrate the potential fallacy of applying culture as an explanatory variable when looking at issues such as the decision to serve in the military.

Through a combination of high fertility, high immigration, and low mortality due to relatively young age distribution, and at four times the rate of population growth for the white population, Hispanics are one of the largest and fastest growing minority groups in the America population today (Saenz 2010). Between the years of 1980 through 2009, the Hispanic population in the United States increased by 37 percent from 281 million to 307 million, and accounts for more than 40 percent of population growth in the United States (Saenz 2010). Hispanic women average three births each, compared to other minority groups and whites who average two, although the birth rate is greatest for those women who are recent immigrants (Saenz 2010). There also is a large difference in rates of international migration, with a net increase of 4.8 million (or 13.5 percent) of Hispanics from 2000 to 2009 versus a net increase of 1.3 million non-Hispanic whites (or 0.7 percent) (Saenz 2010). Hispanic immigration has been declining in the last few years; however, the population will continue to rise through births, meaning that a greater proportion of the Hispanic population will be American-born (Saenz 2010). In fact, recent statistics from the Pew Hispanic Center show that births have surpassed immigration as the biggest driver of the Mexican American population, with the population growing by 7.2 million through births (2011). Because of this growth, Hispanics are having a significant impact on all major American institutions, including the military. They now account for about one in six people in the United

States. Hispanics also are a highly diverse group, with different countries of origin, races, religions, socioeconomic positions, and citizenship statuses.

In addition to their dramatic growth, Hispanics are also a very young population, making them an important source of the labor and taxable income needed to provide a social security net for the aging majority (Tienda and Mitchell 2006). Whereas the white population is almost evenly split between children and the elderly, there are five times as many people under the age of 15 than over the age of 65 in the Hispanic population (Saenz 2010). Demographic projections suggest that Hispanics will comprise approximately 20 percent of the American population by 2025, with even greater numbers among 15 to 19 year olds, who are a key military recruiting group. In 2010, the median age of the Hispanic population was 25, compared to a median age of 30 for non-Hispanics overall, including 32 for African Americans, 25 for Asians, and 41 for whites (Pew Hispanic Center 2011a). By the year 2030 approximately 25 percent of the non-Hispanic white population will be at retirement age or older compared to just ten percent of the Hispanic population (Tienda and Mitchell 2006:61). Mexican Americans are younger than the Hispanic population overall (Pew Hispanic Center 2009).

#### *Social Characteristics of Mexican American Population*

Although some of their trends reflect the integration experiences of previous waves of minority groups, there are several important distinctions which have implications for how Mexican Americans experience military service. Almost half of Mexican Americans are foreign born, and among those about 40 percent are undocumented (Tienda and Mitchell 2006:5). Illegal immigrants may not serve in the military until they update their status to legal permanent resident; however, this

requirement may change if immigration reforms, such as the once proposed DREAM Act, are passed (DREAM Act Portal 2011).

For Hispanics who are non-citizens, military service has become a viable employment option, particularly for those seeking American citizenship. In recognition of the service of non-citizens as well as a recruiting tactic, the United States government now expedites naturalization requests for non-citizen servicemembers, a group that includes multiple nationalities, but claims a sizeable proportion of Mexican immigrants (Hattiangadi, Quester, Lee, Lien, and MacLeod 2005). Despite being non-citizens, legal permanent residents are eligible to serve in the American military, although they are not permitted in occupational specialties that require a security clearance and cannot be commissioned.

Although it is unknown how many are of Mexican origin, it is estimated that 35,000 non-citizens currently serve in the Active Component of the military, and that 8,000 non-citizen recruits join the force each year (Hattiangadi et al. 2005). In recognition of the service of non-citizens, as well as the potential to motivate an important recruitment pool, in 2002 President George W. Bush issued an executive order shortening the service requirement for expedited naturalization from three years of service to one day of service during wartime; he also declared the post 9/11 period as a “period of hostilities” (Hattiangadi et al. 2005; Lee and Wasem 2003:1). This shortened timeline does not apply to service during peacetime, which requires non-citizens to serve in the military for at least one year (Lee and Wasem 2003). All expedited naturalization requests for military servicemembers are contingent upon successful completion of the initial enlistment contract under honorable conditions. Since the implementation of this

provision, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services has naturalized more than 39,835 servicemembers and has granted posthumous citizenship to 116 members (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services 2008).

In addition to a range of citizenship statuses, there also is a diversity of occupational prestige and socioeconomic status in the Mexican American population. Mexican American representation in highly skilled occupations is below average. Instead, they are concentrated in low skilled, low paid, highly unsecure jobs in the agriculture, service and production industries that allow for low education and lack of English proficiency. Like white women, Mexican American women have their greatest representation in office and administrative positions. However, they also have higher representation than white women in blue collar occupations, such as cleaning and grounds maintenance, food preparation and serving, and service work (Gonzales 2008). Hispanic men are concentrated in similar occupations, with their greatest numbers in manufacturing and construction jobs. They have fared poorly with structural economic changes that have increased the demand for high-skilled workers, especially those with higher education degrees and also have had to contend with a decline in jobs because of the current, ongoing recession (Kochhar 2008). This perspective also prioritizes the experiences of Mexican Americans who are recent immigrants (first or second generation). Although they may have the numerical majority, this demographic representation broadly represents the Mexican American population as only existing one way, whereas the population is much more diverse (Zambrana 2011).

Although there is socioeconomic diversity within ethnic groups, there also are large disparities among groups by country of origin within the broader Hispanic

community. South Americans and Cubans tend to fare the best economically, while Mexicans, Central Americans, and Puerto Ricans tend to experience greater economic disadvantage. There are also great discrepancies within the Mexican American population that fall along nativity lines. U.S.-born Mexican Americans have higher high school graduation rates (77 percent vs. 38.7 percent), higher median family incomes (\$40,590 vs. \$32,000) and lower poverty rates (24.2 percent vs. 26.2 percent) than foreign-born Mexicans. However, they also have higher unemployment rates at 13.1 percent versus 10.4 percent (Saenz 2010). This may reflect migration trends, as immigrants have the option of returning to their native country during the recession while U.S-born Mexican Americans are more limited in their ability to move for work.

These differences also extend to levels and rates of educational attainment. Over the last few decades, Hispanics (as well as Native Americans) consistently have been the minority group with the highest level of high school dropout rates. In 2005, 33 percent of Hispanic high school students dropped out compared to 10 percent of African Americans and 6 percent of whites. Among Hispanic subgroups, Central Americans (33 percent) and Mexican Americans (25 percent) had the highest dropout rates and native born had lower rates (13 percent) than their foreign-born counterparts (38 percent) (KewalRamani et al. 2007). The lack of a high school diploma is a major disqualifying factor for Hispanic youth interested in military service (Asch et al. 2009). Each of the service branches has different entrance standards, but overall there is a preference for high school graduates or for high quality youth who have completed the General Educational Development (GED) test and scored relatively high on the Armed Forces Qualifying Test.

While a greater percentage of Hispanics than the overall population view college education as necessary for social mobility, only 48 percent plan to get a degree compared to 60 percent of the population generally. These numbers are even lower for immigrants at 29 percent compared to 60 percent of native born Hispanics (Lopez 2009). However, these plans for degree attainment do not translate directly to college graduation, with only 11 percent of Hispanics ages 25 to 29 completing a bachelor's degree compared to 28 percent of young adults in the United States (KewalRamani et al. 2007). Mexican Americans have lower levels of educational attainment than the Hispanic population overall: only 9 percent of Mexican Americans over the age of 25 have obtained a bachelor's degree compared to 12.6 percent of the Hispanic population overall (Pew Hispanic Center 2009). Overall, Hispanic enrollment in higher education has increased, but they are mainly in two year rather than four year programs (Tienda and Mitchell 2006).

Mexican Americans are concentrated in the Southwest part of the country, with over half of the population living in California (37.6%) and Texas (25%), and with large proportions in major cities such as New York City (although Puerto Ricans and Dominicans are the dominant Hispanic populations there) and Chicago (Pew Hispanic Center 2009). They also are dispersing across the United States, and especially in the South, in pursuit of jobs and an affordable cost of living (Tienda and Mitchell 2006: 6). The fastest growth from 2000-2009 has occurred in Georgia, North Carolina, and Nevada (Saenz 2010).

The U.S. military has a large presence in several states with large Mexican American populations, especially California and Texas. California is home to three

Army posts, ten Navy and Marine Corps installations, and seven Air Force bases (DoD 2011). Although all of the services have a large presence in southern California, the Marine Corps' is particularly high, with Camp Pendleton, which is the Corps' largest West Coast training facility, and its Recruit Depot in San Diego, which is where all male recruits from states west of the Mississippi River attend basic training. Texas does not have the concentration of Navy and Marine Corps installations that California does; rather, it has a large Army and Air Force presence, with three large posts and seven bases, respectively (DoD 2011).

Kleykamp (2006) found that military presence in the local community influences individual decisions to join the military and concluded that as military installations become more concentrated in rural, Southern, and Western parts of the country, an increasing percentage of recruits will come from these areas. This conclusion is important for considering the overall enlistment behaviors of Mexican Americans, for they are concentrated in these same areas of the country. However, we do not know if those Mexican Americans living in California disproportionately are drawn to serving in the Navy and Marine Corps while those living in Texas disproportionately are drawn to serving in the Army and Air Force. In other words, we do not know if Mexican Americans, and recruits more broadly, are selecting their service branch based on exposure to the military overall, or are tailoring their selection to service branches in their communities. Because my study is exploratory, rather than explanatory, I do not consider a large-scale analysis of service branch selection by state of residence and ethnicity. Instead, I focus on individual interpretations of service branch selection, and aim to

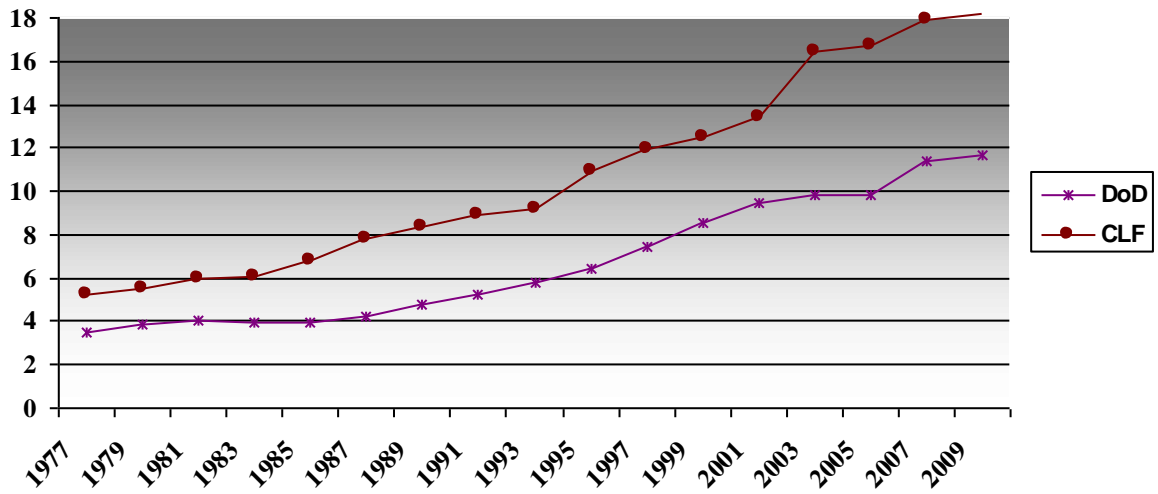


provide a baseline analysis that can be used to inform and enrich further quantitative study.

*Trends in Military Participation*

With their population growth, Hispanics are changing all American institutions, including the military. In all the service branches, including the Marine Corps, the majority of Hispanics are of Mexican origin and Mexican Americans are the largest

**Figure 1: Hispanics as a Percentage of Active Duty Enlisted Personnel with Civilian Labor Force Aged 18-44, FYs 1977-2009**



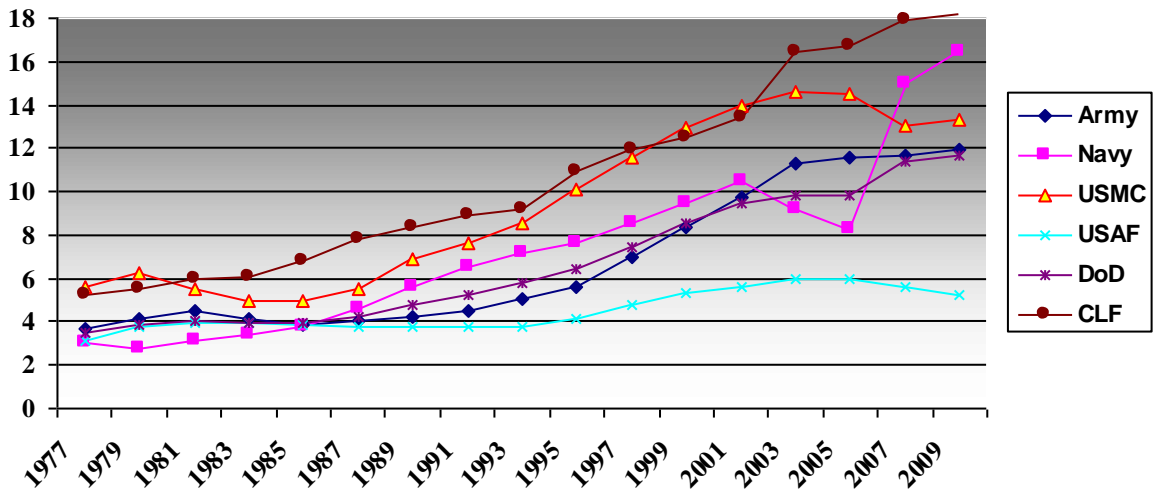
Source: Department of Defense, *Population Representation in the Military Services, Fiscal Year 2002-2009*

minority ethnic group in the Marine Corps (Asch et al. 2009; OSD 2008). Currently, when compared to their proportional presence within the civilian labor force of comparable age, Mexican Americans are underrepresented in the military, mainly because of their low high school graduation rates (Asch et al. 2009). The percentage of Hispanics as active duty enlisted personnel has steadily increased since 1977, yet their numbers are disproportionately low when compared to the non-institutionalized civilian labor force, aged 18-44 years (Figure 1, previous page). However, when compared to the

overall Mexican American population who meet enlistment standards, they actually are overrepresented in the American military (Segal, Thanner, and Segal 2007). Current trends suggest that their numbers will continue to increase as more Mexican Americans meet the requirements for service. To clarify their growth in the American military, I discuss current social representation trends by looking at Hispanic presence in the military overall and by service branch. I also discuss representation trends by ethnicity, gender, and service branch.

The percentage of Hispanic representation has increased in all service branches, with the exception of the Air Force, which experienced a steady increase until 2006,

**Figure 2: Percent of Hispanic Representation by Service Branch, FY1977-2009**



Source: Department of Defense, *Population Representation in the Military Services, Fiscal Year 2002-2009*

followed by a small decline (Figure 2; for exact numbers, see Appendix A). The sea services have experienced the greatest increase, with the Navy reporting a decline from 2003 to 2005 followed by a large jump from 8.3 percent in 2005 to 14.1 percent in 2006. The Marine Corps had a steady increase until 2005, when it reached its peak of 14.5

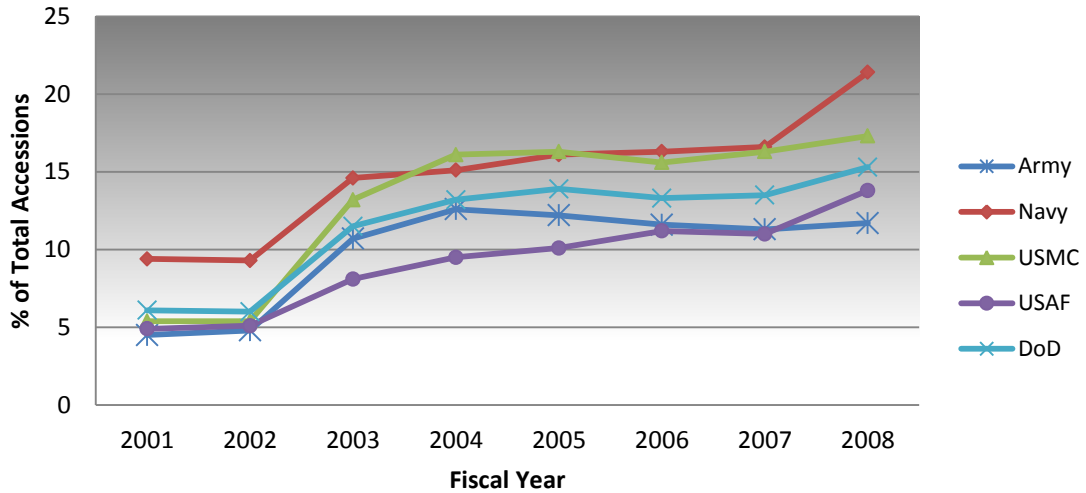
percent. Since then, Hispanic representation in the Marine Corps has dropped to 13.2 percent. In the Army, which has the greatest percentage of African American servicemembers and the second largest percentage of ground combat positions, 11.9 percent of the enlisted population self-identify as Hispanic (OSD 2009; see Appendices D and E for tables that compare Hispanic to African American representation by service branch). Hispanic men also are more likely than African American men (but less likely than non-Hispanic white men) to serve in combat specialties (Segal and Segal 2004). As of Fiscal Year 2009, 20.8 percent of Hispanic men in the Marine Corps were in the combat arms compared to 12 percent of African Americans and 28 percent of non-Hispanic white men (OSD 2010).

Since the military builds its volunteer force through recruiting and retention, it is important to consider not only total representation, but also accession numbers.

Accessions are the number of individuals who enter into military service. While it may take increased time for overall representation trends to show change, accession numbers show immediate changes in enlistment rates by service branch. All of the service branches report an increase in Hispanic accessions, with the Navy and the Marine Corps showing the greatest increase (Figure 3, next page). From Fiscal Year 2002 to Fiscal Year 2003, the percentage of accessions that were Hispanic increased by 6 percent (from 4.8 percent to 10.7 percent) in the Navy and 8 percent in the Marine Corps, more than doubling the 2002 percentage of 5 percent. Part of this increase may be due to a change in measurement that occurred between 2002 and 2003 when servicemembers were asked about Hispanic ethnicity separately from race. Another jump occurred from FY 2007 to

2008 when accessions of Hispanic personnel increased by 5 percent in the Navy and 1 percent in the Marine Corps.

**Figure 3: Percent of Enlisted Hispanic Accessions by Service Branch, FY 2001-2008**



SOURCE: Population Representation in the Armed Forces, FY 2001 through 2009

The increase in percent of accessions and overall representation of Hispanic personnel is happening across service branches for both men and women. Whereas in the past, Hispanics were a greater percentage of male enlisted accessions than female, Hispanic women are now surpassing Hispanic men in accession percentages by gender across all service branches with the greatest difference in the Marine Corps. For the Marine Corps in FY 2008 Hispanic women were 22.5 percent of female accessions while Hispanic men were 16.9 percent of male accessions (Table 1, next page). These enlistment behaviors are especially interesting because they differ from those of African Americans. Like Hispanic women, African American women are a greater percentage of enlisted accessions than African American men (Segal, Thanner, and Segal 2007). However, African American women have their highest representation in the Army and their highest accession numbers in the Navy, just like African American men. African

American women also have their lowest accession numbers in the Marine Corps, also like African American men. Thus, the enlistment and overall representation of Hispanic women in the Marine Corps is a unique social behavior for racial and ethnic minority groups in the military.

**Table 1: Percent Hispanic of Enlisted Accessions by Gender and Service Branch, FYs 2001-2009**

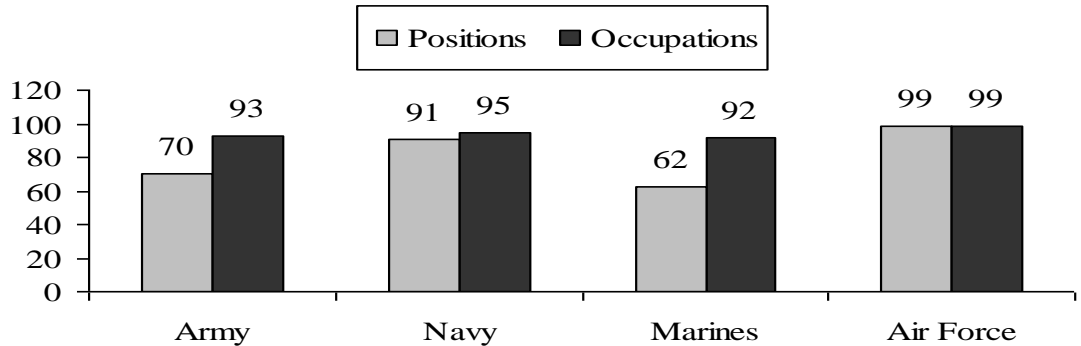
	Army		Navy		USMC		USAF		DoD	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
<b>2001</b>	11.1	10.9	12.5	13.3	14.4	16.9	6.8	7.4	11.4	11.1
<b>2002</b>	11.2	13.3	12.1	13.7	13.6	16	6.9	8.3	11.1	12.2
<b>2003</b>	10.3	12.7	12.8	15.4	14.4	17.6	7.8	9.2	11.2	12.7
<b>2004</b>	12.3	14.8	16.1	18	17.4	19.6	10.3	12.9	13.9	15.5
<b>2005</b>	11.7	14.4	15.7	18.4	16	19.2	10.6	12.2	13.6	15.5
<b>2006</b>	11.2	13.3	15.6	19.1	15.3	19.9	10.6	13	12.9	15.2
<b>2007</b>	11	13	16	19.1	15.9	21.6	10.5	12.7	13.1	15.3
<b>2008</b>	11.4	13.4	20.7	22.4	16.9	22.5	13.4	15.1	15	17
<b>2009</b>	11.5	12.2	22.2	23.7	16	21.7	15.6	17.2	15.4	17.6

SOURCE: Population Representation in the Armed Forces, FY 2001 through 2009

The entrance of Hispanic women into the Marine Corps is further complicated by the limited number and type of job opportunities for women in that service. Out of all the services, the Marine Corps has the lowest representation of women and the lowest percentage of occupations and positions open to women. Only 62 percent of Marine Corps positions and 92 percent of Marine Corps occupations are open to women (Figure 4). This is in sharpest contrast to the Air Force, where 99 percent of positions and occupations are open to women. Currently there is an expansion of women's roles in the military, with the Navy most recently announcing that it will allow women to serve as commissioned officers aboard submarines. However, women, as a group, are still

forbidden from serving as enlisted personnel on submarines and in any offensive ground combat positions.

**Figure 4: Proportion of Positions and Occupations Open to Women by Service Branch**

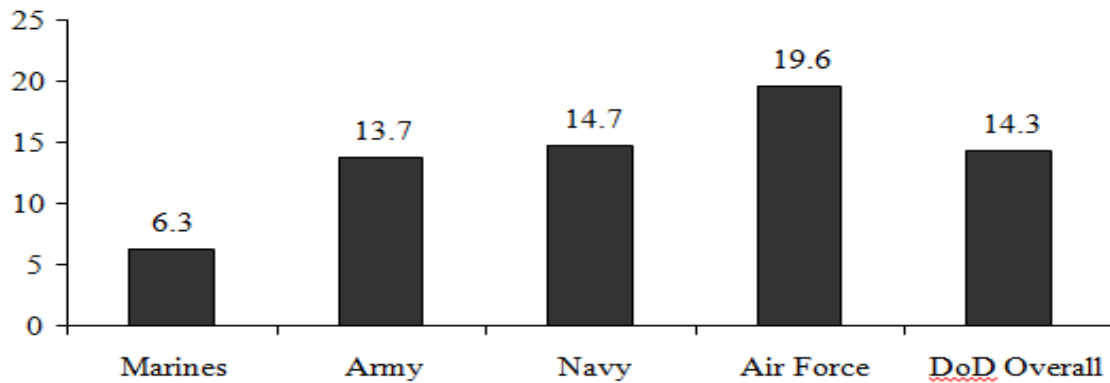


Source: Manning 2008:15

The Marine Corps also is unique in that many of the support and medical positions often held by military women, such as nursing, are filled by Navy personnel. The limited occupational opportunities for military women may be one reason why the Marine Corps has the lowest proportional presence of women. Women are only 6.3 percent of Marine Corps personnel (Figure 5). In contrast, the Air Force, which has the highest percentage of open occupations and positions, also has the highest representation of women, at 19.6 percent of personnel. Even though there are limited occupational opportunities for women and there are no medical positions, women are still serving in traditionally-feminine fields. At 37.3 percent, Marine Corps women have their greatest representation in administrative occupations, followed by supply at 15 percent (OSD 2009).

Overall, when looking at trends in military representation, it is clear that Hispanics are increasing their numbers throughout the military and their representation is highest in the sea services. It also is clear that Hispanic women are serving in the Marine Corps at relatively high rates, despite limited occupational opportunities. This behavior

**Figure 5: Percent Women by Service Branch, FY07**



Source: Manning 2008:14

may contradict theoretical perspectives grounded in a culture argument that frame them as domestic, rather than work oriented, or as women who merely follow the men into their chose occupation. In the next section, I discuss the culture of the U.S. Marine Corps and explore possible motivations shaping service branch selection for Mexican Americans today, including the need to move beyond culture to how the intersection of characteristics like ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic position may influence one's decision to serve.

## Chapter V: Research Design and Methodology

Research on the Hispanic population in the military and on Mexican Americans specifically is limited in military sociology. We have demographic research that analyzes population trends, such as accession and retention behaviors by race, ethnicity, and gender. We also have longitudinal studies, such as the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, the Monitoring the Future survey, and the Department of Defense sponsored Youth Attitude Tracking Survey, that track propensity to serve by race, ethnicity, and gender. Policy-oriented research has used qualitative methodology, such as focus groups and interviewing, to understand the efficacy of recruiting materials that target Hispanics (Hattiangadi, Lee, and Quester 2004). However, these research methods do not provide much context around individual decisions, meaning making, and experiences while in the Marine Corps and they do not use an intersectional lens.

Because my research questions cannot be answered simply or briefly and we do not know what the respondents are thinking or how they make sense of their decisions or experiences while in the Marine Corps, I use a qualitative interviewing approach to data collection (Warren 2001). Qualitative interviewing has a long history in military sociology and has been paired with quantitative research in the past. The methodologically groundbreaking American Soldier studies, for example, supplemented surveys with qualitative research. This gave researchers more insight into the emotions behind survey responses. Thus, not only was the research team able to argue that “ending the war and returning home” were the main motivations for combat troops, but it was able to provide examples, such as the frequency with which this topic arose in conversation, that enriched the quantitative data (Smith 1949; Williams 1984).



Past studies also do not focus on specific groups within the Hispanic population, such as Mexican Americans, and in the case of quantitative studies, they do not have sufficient sample sizes to analyze the attitudes and expectations of Hispanic, or Mexican American, service women. As an exploratory study wishing to establish a baseline for the Mexican American experience in the Marine Corps, I review the importance and contributions of qualitative research and qualitative interviewing as well as methodological issues. I then discuss how I recruited participants, my analytic process for synthesizing the data and reaching conclusions, and reflexivity and the role of the researcher. I conclude with a discussion on the limitations of these data.

### *Strengths of Qualitative Interviewing*

Qualitative interviewing emphasizes questioning, responding, and listening in a conversational form with the overall objective of revealing “meaningful patterns within thick description” (Warren 2001:87; see also Rubin and Rubin 2005). Because my research questions require personal knowledge and the reconstruction of social processes, I adopt a constructionist, rather than positivist, research paradigm. As a result, qualitative interviewing is an ideal research method, especially since it allows me to look for, rather than pre-establish, patterns and common themes among respondents (Warren 2001). It also is an ideal method of data collection when considering the diversity of experiences that comes with an intersectional perspective. Through qualitative interviewing, I am able to provide context and detail about the respondent’s trajectory and can consider the role of social characteristics on individual decisions and experiences.

Qualitative interviewing prioritizes the respondents’ perspectives and allows for the revelation of different, individualized understandings. These understandings are

influenced by the respondents' position and role in society and further shaped by hierarchies of gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic position and other characteristics that shape one's life (Campbell 1998; Warren 2001). Qualitative interviewing also allows for research to continue without relying on the tenuous assumption that the respondents share a common understanding of concepts like motivation and service branch culture. It allows me to gather interpretations without having to limit them to mutually exclusive classifications (Rubin and Rubin 2005). For example, I could ask servicemembers to rank their top motivations for service from a pre-organized list that included concepts such as "educational benefits" and "patriotism." However, by approaching research in this manner, I am presupposing motivations in a way that limits my overall research question. I cannot explore motivations for service by assuming that responses can be categorized by previous studies that did not distinguish respondents by ethnicity. Rather than being shaped by my own perceptions, I want the research to be shaped by the understandings and conclusions of the respondents (Rubin and Rubin 2005). Admittedly, certain pre-suppositions affect the questions that I ask, but the questions are sufficiently broad that the respondents can interpret and answer in an individualized way. Despite my intention of prioritizing the respondent's understandings, there are limitations to these data, such as my own influence as interviewer and interpreter, which shape which ideas become important and which ones are not addressed. I discuss these limitations later in this chapter.

Since all the respondents work in the same organization – the U.S. Marine Corps – they may share a common history and vocabulary that emerges in the interviews (Rubin and Rubin 2005). Qualitative interviewing allows me to probe them about special

concepts that they use and ask for further clarification. The military overall is known for having a unique vocabulary riddled with acronyms. Through interviewing, I can use the respondents' own words to clarify words and meanings. I also can look for patterns and locate whether the words have similar meaning across respondents. This is important because the respondents may not realize how unique their cultural understanding of service in the Marine Corps is, especially since it may seem so natural.

Not only does qualitative interviewing allow for an exploration of patterns, it also is an ideal method for collecting data rich in depth and detail. Rather than approach my respondents with a standardized, inflexible list of questions, I use main questions, and if necessary, probes and follow-ups. My main questions (see Appendix H for complete interview script and questions) are used to get the conversation started and to ensure that I cover all the main areas of interest. Probes are ways to get more information and to encourage the respondent to continue sharing. Finally, I use follow-up questions as a way of highlighting areas of interest that, because of their proximity to the research questions, merit further clarification (Rubin and Rubin 2005). This is a way of clarifying what has been said, as well as what has been omitted, and of gaining insight into what is important to the respondent.

### *Sample Selection*

Building a sample from the military population without direct Department of Defense sponsorship or assistance is a time consuming, difficult endeavor. Current active duty personnel work, and in many cases live, in communities that are closed to the civilian population, making technological or physical contact difficult. The security situation also makes initial contact difficult, as military servicemembers are trained not to

share any information that may compromise force security. Thus, whereas other scenarios may require the researcher to establish rapport by developing a physical presence in a community, that tactic would be considered suspect in a military community or with veterans who may be leery of sharing personal information with a stranger. To counter this tendency, I shared my own biography in the research announcement with attention to my veteran and Latina status and encouraged potential respondents to review my personal information on the Department of Sociology's webpage. I also opened my Facebook profile so potential respondents could access basic biographical information about me and see a few photos. My targeted generation (those born during the 1980s and early 1990s) is known as being very comfortable with communicating through technology and social networking sites. As such, I adapted my own presentation strategies to align with this trend toward openness and established a greater online presence.

My population of interest is Mexican American men and women who have served in the Marine Corps as enlisted personnel anytime since September 11, 2001 as well as those who are currently serving. Although the wartime and peacetime experiences of military service share several common stressors, service during wartime is unique in terms of commitment and dangers. Also, the decision-making processes regarding first term enlistment or reenlistment may differ since respondents must balance the decision to serve with the knowledge that wartime deployments are likely. Thus, I focus on Marines who have served during the current wartime period.

Although I am interested in the Mexican American military experience broadly, I focus on enlisted personnel, who are the majority of military servicemembers. However,

I do have one respondent who is now a company grade officer after completing an enlisted to officer education and training program through the Marine Corps. I also focus on those who have served on active duty, although I have several respondents who initially joined as reservists and then crossed over into the active duty component. The Marine Corps has a small Reserve Component, which it has mobilized for wartime service; however, the motivations as well as the experiences of Reserve Marines may be different from their active duty counterparts, making comparisons tenuous. I completed 34 interviews with 19 men and 15 female Marines, who hold a diversity of occupational specialties. Because the Marine Corps relies predominantly upon first term enlistees and values youth and physical fitness, most of my respondents completed or planned to complete only one term of service and were relatively young (under 26 years of age) at the time they served.

I built my sample through multiple approaches, all of which required me to engage in local, military, and Marine Corps specific networks. My most fruitful approach was the contact and use of student veteran organizations attached to colleges and universities. As a member of the Student Veterans of America organization, I was aware prior to beginning this project of the network potential of student veteran organizations. I used the national organization's website ([www.studentveterans.org](http://www.studentveterans.org)) to locate chapters around the country. Initially, I focused on chapters in California, Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico since these are the states with the highest concentration of Mexican Americans. Once I located a chapter, I sent a personalized email (see Appendix E for a copy of this email) to the leaders (President or Faculty Representative) of that organization. If I could not locate a student veterans group, I then sent a message to the

Veterans Affairs Certifying Official attached to each school and asked them to forward my information to the correct person. In most cases, I never heard back from the points of contact. However, in a few cases, the leaders responded and willingly forwarded my message to the student veteran population. This forwarding of information was invaluable and led to many of my respondents. In total, I contacted over 125 student veterans groups across the country.

Because I did not want a sample composed entirely of student veterans, I also posted my research announcement in online social networking sites that targeted Hispanic Marines. On Facebook, I posted in the groups, “Women Marines Association,” “Female Marines,” and “Marine Corps Association.” I also posted an online research announcement in the discussion forum on the Marine Corps website, Leatherneck ([www.leatherneck.com](http://www.leatherneck.com)). For those potential respondents who commented on the announcement, I sent them a personalized message explaining my research and my desire to interview Mexican American Marines (see Appendix F for a copy of this message). This was especially valuable for finding women Marines to interview, as I was having difficulty finding any through the student veterans groups. In most cases, I did not receive a follow-up response. However, I did gain 5 respondents through this strategy.

Once I had made contact with a respondent, I asked the individual to consider forwarding my research announcement and contact information to other potential respondents. For the male respondents, in almost all cases they knew of someone who fit the profile (Mexican American who served on active duty in the enlisted corps since 2001) and forwarded my information. After making initial contacts, I was able to build my sample of male respondents through a theoretical sampling strategy carried out

through a “snowball” process (Warren 2001). This strategy enabled me to grow the sample beyond veterans to include several active duty respondents. Thus, by finding one person who fit the overall respondent criteria, I was able to build on the respondent’s social networks to locate other individuals.

Building the sample for the female Marines was a much more difficult process mainly because I was not able to rely on snowball sampling. The majority of men did not know a Mexican American female Marine. For the female Marines I interviewed, almost all of the respondents were willing to forward my information, but they did not have connections to other female Marines who fit the profile. Many had assignments where they were the only woman in their work center. Others had worked with women, but they were either not Mexican American, or they were officers or noncommissioned officers with whom they had no ongoing personal contact. Although I knew the numbers of women, and of Mexican American women specifically, were small in the Marine Corps, I did not foresee how this would increase the workload of finding female Marines. Eventually I was able to locate 14 female Marines to interview through constant messaging of online groups and of student veteran organizations. For the final respondent, I met a helpful contact who works in the 12th Marine Corps District based in San Diego. This contact, after verifying my identity with the University of Maryland, linked me to an additional female Marine. It was through this point of contact that I was able to round out my sample. Based on this experience, I think it would be difficult to continue this study and to expect an equal number of male and female respondents. I could have continued to interview male Marines, but eventually I reached the point where I turned away potential male respondents. Finding women to interview, in contrast,

required much more initiative and monitoring. Future studies of this type should attempt to gain official sponsorship from the Department of Defense to facilitate locating such a small minority group.

Initially, although I forwarded my information across networks, I was dependent on the motivation and desire of potential respondents to contact me. I advertised my e-mail and phone number as the two preferred sources of contact. Everybody contacted me through email; however, I did have one respondent who moved the conversation to cell phone texting. Once I heard from potential respondents, I explained the purpose of the study and procedures for protecting their identity. In addition to stressing their anonymity, I also highlighted my identity as a Mexican American and a veteran. Because I may have limited opportunity to connect in fact-to-face interaction, this additional material is critical for creating familiarity and reliability (Rubin and Rubin 2005).

I lost approximately five respondents at this stage, including three women. For these individuals, I sent them a follow-up message, but if I did not hear anything after two messages, then I stopped making contact. There are several reasons why potential respondents would end contact including: being uncomfortable with the subject matter, not having time to participate, or being unsure of my identity or association with the University of Maryland. For those who were still interested, I sent them additional material, including the consent form, either via email or through regular mail. I gave potential respondents the option of thinking about their participation and offered to contact them at a later time to discuss any concerns and, if appropriate, schedule the interview.



### *Data Collection: Interviews*

The interviews were semi-structured with three types of questions: main, follow-up, and probe. The questions were open-ended by design. The main questions are critical for providing structure to the interview and for ensuring that I broach the main research problems. Although respondents had the option of skipping any question, I was able to ask each respondent all of the main questions. Thus, the interviews were somewhat standardized across respondents. The overall goal with these questions is to encourage a conversation that leads to individually-conceived motivations, perceptions, and understandings rather than predetermined or normative responses (Rubin and Rubin 2005).

The follow-up questions were used to further explore concepts or themes introduced by the respondents, and also to facilitate comparison among interviews. Although they are specific to the conversation, I did include several possible follow-up questions within the interview script. I also included possible probes to keep the respondent talking and to have them provide greater detail. Probes are short and routine and include questions such as, “What happened next?” or “Can you give me an example?” (Mitman n.d.; Rubin and Rubin 2005).

Initially, I did not think that I would need to script my interviews in such detail; I naively thought that each interview would flow like an easy conversation. However, based on my committee’s recommendation, I rewrote the interview script to include specific follow-on questions and probes, and I quickly learned this was a critical recommendation. The majority of my interviews were free-flowing conversations with the respondents volunteering information. However, two interviews were especially

difficult in that I received single sentence answers with little elaboration. The scripted follow-ons and probes allowed me to respond quickly to the situation and keep the conversation moving. I also had one interview where the respondent was long-winded; the respondent kept discussing issues and people that were only tangentially connected to my research questions. The follow-ons and probes allowed me to steer the conversation back on topic.

Because my respondents were geographically dispersed across the country and I had financial and time constraints, all interviews, with the exception of one, were completed over the telephone. One interview was completed in person because the individual lived in the same area as I. This same respondent asked to meet again because she wanted to clarify points from our first meeting. There are downsides to the telephone interview approach. Conversations via telephone make it difficult to gauge when questions are stressful or confusing for the respondent. They also may require additional verbalization or probing, as comments or feelings normally communicated through nonverbal cues have to be shared. However, telephone interviewing also allowed me to expand my search area beyond the Washington, D.C. metro area and to focus on those areas with a large Mexican American population. Further, past research on the comparability of telephone and in-person interviews suggests no significant differences in interview transcripts. Thus, I believe that the use of telephone interviewing does not detract from the quality of the data collected, although it did limit my ability to build rapport with the respondents (Novick 2008; Sturges and Hanrahan 2004).

All interviews began with a review of my research purpose and of their rights as research participants. I also sought their permission to digitally record the interview. All

respondents consented to having their interview recorded. By emphasizing that no distinguishing characteristics or combination of characteristics would be published, I explained how anonymity would be maintained in an effort to secure trust and openness. I also was forthright about my own role as a graduate student and researcher as well as my Mexican American and veteran status. I did not expect my experience to translate easily to the respondent's own understandings, but I hope it demonstrated commitment to both the Hispanic and military community in an effort to facilitate rapport and dialogue.

Each interview lasted approximately 1 to 1.5 hours, under the agreement that respondents could stop the process at any time. I had two interviews that were divided into two sessions because of time constraints on the part of the respondent. I also asked at the end of the interview if they would willing to have further contact with me, in case I needed to clarify any concepts or themes that arose during my analysis. I did not make follow-on contact with any of the respondents regarding the interview questions. I did, however, send all of them a thank you message the day following the interview that included several ways to contact me in case they changed their mind about participating in the study. Several have since contacted me, eager to see the results of this study. Interviews were arranged at a time that was convenient for them. The majority of interviews occurred in the evening or on the weekend. Timing was the most challenging when respondents lived on the West Coast. Because of the three hour time difference between the East and West Coasts, I began several interviews around 11 PM and 12 AM EST. Several of the respondents were students and had time during the day to talk. These interviews were easier to schedule, but were also more time constrained since respondents often scheduled interviews in between classes and/or work.

After receiving permission, I recorded all interviews with a digital recorder. I also completed a detailed reflection of the interview immediately after its conclusion. I included information such as the ease or difficulty of the interview and my overall impressions of the respondent. As each interview was completed, I followed-up with transcription within the week.

#### *Data Collection: Pilot Testing*

Prior to officially using my interview protocol, I completed a pilot test on two graduate students enrolled in the University of Maryland's Leadership Education and Development program. One student is a Mexican American Navy officer and one is a Marine Corps officer. Through these interviews, I was able to test the flow of questions as well as the respondent's interpretation of key questions and concepts. Although the questions did not apply perfectly to the test respondents, the interviews provided a valuable opportunity to check the wording of my questions and to see if respondent expectations corresponded with the interview's flow, timing, and areas of concentration. These practice interviews also allowed me to practice using my probe and follow-up questions – an invaluable skill for qualitative researchers that is best learned through experience. I made no major changes to my interview procedures after these practice sessions and I was able to avoid instrument change through the study's duration.

#### *Data Analysis*

As discussed in Chapters Three and Four, there are several key themes to which I already was attuned regarding motivations for service, service branch selection, and minority experiences while in the military; thus, I initially looked at the data in the context of existing literature. However, I did not rely solely on established theories or

concepts for my conclusion. I also searched for original insights as a way of contributing or building to a new theory of military service through an intersectional lens. To do this, I completed a thorough analysis of the data to move from the raw interviews to evidence-based interpretations (Rubin and Rubin 2005). This process involves “classifying, comparing, weighing, and combining material” as a way of finding meaning, revealing patterns and bringing together descriptions into a complete narrative (Rubin and Rubin 2005:201). In the end, the analysis is based on my interpretation of the data presented by the respondents, shaped by my social position and sociological training (Rubin and Rubin 2005).

Although I had a sample of 34 respondents, I had almost fifty hours of recorded interviews. To facilitate in the sorting, classifying, and managing of these data, I used nVivo 9, a software program that provides computer-assisted analysis of qualitative data. My analysis was completed in two phases, beyond the interview itself which is a critical period of reflection. First and while still engaged with the interviewing process, I prepared all transcripts and then searched for concepts, themes, and events. I built my initial coding list by considering the key themes that emerged from the relevant literature and from the major topics that emerged during my first reading of each interview. Once this was complete, I coded all interviews into data units, or blocks of information, making it possible to retrieve transcribed interviews via these commonalities. Second, once coded, I compared concepts, themes, and events across interviews to see if there were broader conclusions, in light of my research questions, that could be addressed. I also reconsidered the relevancy of my initial coding list and used this second period of reflection to fine-tune my sorting of data through codes. This involved a systematic

examination of all interviews with a focus on clarifying key concepts and synthesizing different versions of events. Analysis then moved from individual coding to the sorting of data by code into a single file, which I analyzed in terms of my research questions.

### *Limitations of Data*

Although qualitative interviewing is well suited for an exploratory analysis of this nature, it does carry some drawbacks. Since qualitative interviewing is fundamentally a social process involving the interaction of two people, it is susceptible to interviewer bias and undue influence (Rubin and Rubin 2005). As such, it is my responsibility as researcher to analyze my own biases and reactions to the research topic. This means I must review interviews for signs of leading or for signs that I avoid uncomfortable, or undesirable, responses and that I must be aware of the possibility of becoming too empathetic or too responsive to conversation topics. Thus, qualitative interviewing's strength – its focus on self-interpretation and relationship building – also is its weakness and therefore, I must be self-aware of my emotions and role during each interview and throughout the entire process. This is where the reflection memos after each interview became critical. I used these memos as an opportunity to record exciting or difficult interviews and to record my own biases that emerged. This made me aware of how my opinions and interpretations shaped the interaction and could potentially shape my analysis and allowed me to revisit the interviews with more clarity.

In addition to the challenges inherent in interviewing as a social process, there are other limitations to this analysis, especially with a sample of this size. My sample, as is often the case with qualitative interviewing, is not representative or random. Rather, it consists of individuals who were connected to the social groups that I solicited for

respondents and who were motivated enough to follow-up with me. Thus, it may disproportionately include student veterans and individuals who are technologically savvy. These individuals may also have strong opinions about the Marine Corps, either positive or negative, which may be another reason why they opted to talk to me while some of their peers did not. Therefore, the conclusions drawn from this analysis are not representative of all Mexican Americans in the Marine Corps; they represent only those respondents that I interviewed and provide a baseline experience from which to grow further sociological research.

This research design is strengthened by using the words and interpretations of the respondents to shape my conclusions; however, this design also is limited because of its reliance on these memories. Retrospective bias is a well-documented occurrence in studies that ask respondents about previous actions or feelings. Because the action of remembering is difficult, respondents often reconstruct the past by relying on their current feelings and situation, leading to somewhat inaccurate memory (Rubin and Rubin 2005). In this research, I asked all of the respondents, including the ones who are still on active duty, to reflect on past motivations and experiences. Although I cannot know the difference between what I was told and what actually occurred, it is important to remember that the results and conclusion may be influenced by the respondents' current situation. Further, although this research design allows me to find commonalities among respondent experiences and to build a multi-dimensional portrait of Marine Corps culture, this depiction is not drawn from the interpretations of an unbiased observer. Rather, it comes from a group of people who have been united by a common, assimilating

experience: recruit training. They have been socialized to think, act, and respond like Marines, and their responses to my questions may reflect this bias.

Despite these limitations, however, this research is valuable as an exploratory, baseline analysis. The growing presence of Mexican Americans in the military, and in the Marine Corps specifically, is of growing interest to policy-oriented researchers and sociologists alike because of their growing influence on major American social institutions. By talking to past and current Marines, this research recognizes core issues and trends that merit more representative analyses.



## Chapter VI: Respondent Profiles

As discussed, the sample for this study is small and unrepresentative. However, it does provide a solid portrait of the Mexican American population in the Marine Corps because of the diversity of communities, MOS's, ranks, family structures, and citizenship statuses included. In this chapter, I begin with a discussion of the term "Mexican American" and how it affected the recruiting of potential respondents. I also focus on how the respondents themselves describe their ethnicity. I then provide a demographic snapshot of the respondents, whom are divided by sex since this is my main point of comparison. I use this information to frame the presentation and analysis of data in subsequent chapters.

### *Mexican Americans: A Label with Many Interpretations*

Although it is the largest numerically, the Mexican American community is only one part of the broader Hispanic population in the United States. Because of the need to target a specific ethnic group, I opted to use the term Mexican American over Hispanic or Latino in my research announcement. Despite my intention of creating greater specificity, the term Mexican American became problematic because of the social meanings attached to the label and how these meanings varied by perspective (Oboler 1995). Using the words of the respondents themselves, I will explain how the issues of generational status, family roots, and ethnic lineage all combine to create a multitude of self-identifications that are difficult to corral under one label. Thus, the act of trying to create a homogenous group under the term "Mexican American" had implications for

how my respondents categorized their role in my research and how they viewed me as an outsider looking into their world.

First, several of the respondents have roots in California and Texas that extend multiple generations. Although their ancestors were once residents of Mexico, they became citizens of the United States when these territories became part of the union. Thus, their families have long ties to the United States and the respondents consider themselves to be solely Americans, not Mexican Americans. Ethnically they identified as Hispanics or Tejanos, but they took issue with the term “Mexican American” because it appeared to communicate less connection to the United States. One female respondent (F2) noted, “I’m Hispanic and I claim Hispanic as a whole generally, because most of my family is from Texas. And I’m talking generations and generations back to when the border was drawn my family was on the Texas side and yes, that’s why we claim Hispanic.” A male respondent (M1), who was raised in California, but whose father was from Texas, described his family’s lineage as:

... [describing his father] he was a Texan before anything else. And we were raised that we were and it’s more of, and I see this a lot with Tejanos, not so much with the Mexicans that are from here in California and stuff like that but we were raised that we’re very much American. I don’t like being referred to as a Hispanic or a Mexican American, anything like that because I’ve never, I’m not from Mexico. I don’t speak Spanish. The hardest Spanish word I have to say is my last name.

However, these individuals responded to my research announcement because they traced their lineage to Mexico, despite their disassociation with the term, “Mexican American.”

This term also created confusion in regard to generational status. For some respondents, this term communicated Mexicans who were newly arrived to the United States. From their perspective, it did not include individuals who had been in country for

multiple generations. For example, one male respondent (M7) preferred to characterize his lineage as “American of Mexican descent,” rather than Mexican American; he wanted to prioritize his American citizenship. Although I have several respondents who became naturalized citizens during their childhood, another who earned his citizenship while in the military, and one who currently is seeking citizenship, the majority of respondents were not newly arrived Mexicans, but were products of the United States. I provide greater discussion of the generational statuses of the respondents, but it is important to consider that terminology not only categorizes individuals by ethnicity, but also has the potential to divide them by citizenship.

Second, several of the respondents were of mixed ethnicity and did not solely consider themselves to be Mexican American, but a combination of ethnic identities. Several of these individuals had mixed ethnicities that still fell under the larger umbrella term of Hispanic. Thus, for example, I had respondents who were Mexican Peruvian, Mexican Guatemalan, Mexican Honduran, and Mexican Nicaraguan. These individuals self-identified with the broader label Hispanic, rather than Mexican American, and were confused as to whether they initially fit into my projected sample. My defining criterion was whether they had ethnic roots to Mexico and if they self-identified with this connection. In this study, those respondents of mixed ethnicity did self-identify as Mexican, although they also identified with their other ethnicity. Thus, for example, the male respondent (M18) who was Peruvian and Mexican explained it like this, “Well usually like I’ve always introduced myself as half Mexican, half Peruvian. But when it’s always like when somebody generalizes, I usually identify myself as a Mexican.”

In addition to respondents who had a solidly Hispanic background, there are several respondents who identified as being both ethnically Mexican and of European lineage. One respondent self-identified as half Mexican-half Greek; another as half Mexican-half Irish. Several were unaware of the ethnic lineage of their white parent and just described themselves as half-Mexican and half white. Interestingly, the identification with one ethnic tradition over another became a process of discovery and reflection. Several identified more with their Mexican ethnicity because that was the family and tradition they grew up with. Thus, one male respondent (M6) who was Mexican and Greek strongly identified with his Mexican side to the point where he suggested, “We say that we have the cactus on our forehead, the *nopal*. That’s how Mexican and Hispanic I am, I have a *nopal* on my forehead.” This individual lived in a predominantly Mexican community and stated, “I fit in just fine, I mean my look is, I’m Mexican. The only thing is, if you started speaking Greek to me I’d understand it.” This individual also had a very dark skin tone, to the point where he claimed that his Greek grandmother would not let him play outside during the summer to keep him from getting too dark. Thus, racially, he appeared to be completely Mexican, which allowed him to further identify with this side of his ethnic makeup.

Other respondents described a racial and ethnic identity that allowed them to straddle both the Mexican and European/white communities. One male respondent (M17) stated, “I think I have that ability to relate to both sides.” Others expressed an ability to connect with both ethnic communities, but felt constrained by the perceptions of others. One male respondent (M3) described this experience as:

Well I mean, it's kind of a strange thing identity-wise, but I don't necessarily consider myself like white I guess or I guess even completely Mexican, kind of like I really do identify with both sides ... So it's not like I'm necessarily either one. The thing is that people tend to perceive me one way or the other in any situation so it's kind of confusing to me and it has been confusing for a long time since I was a little kid. Occasionally, and this is interesting too, most, it seems like most white people wouldn't notice unless they know my name. Sometimes maybe they have their hunches that, yea, I could be mixed or typically it's like if they see my name and they don't see me then they make assumptions or if I encounter, the other thing is if I'm around Spanish speakers usually they'll speak Spanish to me.

Others did not discover their "Mexicanness" until later in life, either because of a change in family structure or because they moved to a new community where they were either surrounded by other Mexican Americans or because they became a recognizable minority. Thus, one male respondent (M1), who was born in a predominantly Hispanic community, before moving to a racially white town during his adolescence, suggested that this move, "kind of helped me solidify my Hispanic culture because in [small California town] there was no Hispanics besides us. We were about it. And so we were kind of stuck in our own group and as other Hispanic families moved into the area to work in the oil fields and stuff like that we hung out with them." Another male respondent (M12) noted how his ethnic categorization changed depending on his residence:

When I was living in Virginia I was, I was considered Mexican. Everybody was white there, and I was always considered Mexican. I was always you know, all the names that comes with that you know? That's what I was called and that's how I was labeled. And then when I moved to Texas, Southern Texas, everybody is Hispanic and I'm, I don't look as Hispanic as them, so everybody calls me white. So I've had mixed experiences.

This demonstrates fluidity in personal ethnic identification and the dangers of superficially creating homogeneity with a label such as “Hispanic” or “Mexican American.” Although individuals have a much harder time choosing a racial or gender category, ethnicity in many cases is a personal characteristic open to negotiation. In some cases, it may be a conscious decision whether to claim one’s ethnicity or not, especially if one’s race allows one to pass for a different ethnic group; it may also be an annoyance if one strongly identifies as being Mexican, yet does not fit the racial stereotype. One female respondent, who was completely Mexican, recognized that she did not fit the stereotypical idea of what a Mexican looks like. She described her race as, “I’m not very -- no, I’m not very dark. I think somewhere in my line, there’s Spanish because I have light -- not light brown, but brown hair and I have a light complexion. You know, I can get dark when it’s summer, but in the winter, like I’m light.” A male respondent (M12), who also was completely Mexican, expressed frustration about how others read his ethnicity, going as far as to call them “ignorant people” because:

I mean I look Hispanic but at the same time, I have some white features as well because actually my Hispanic side of my family is mostly Spanish. So I have a lot of white features because my, you know Spanish people are white. You know they’re not Mexican. And a lot of the darker Mexicans are from you know, have more Indian blood in them than they do Hispanic blood. So I have more Spanish blood from my Mexican side of my family. And actually I have blue eyes and that’s where I get my blue eyes from, it’s from the Spanish side of my family, the Mexican side of my family.

Finally, I also had two respondents who were half-Filipino and half-Mexican. These individuals identified with both cultures, but had a stronger attachment to the Mexican side of their family. One female respondent (F10) described it as:

I don't really know too much about my dad's family. Unfortunately like I said they live in another state and we always lived in other states and even in the Philippines I'd never really got to know that side of the family. But like my Mexican side of the family I know everybody and I know everything about them, like family history. Like I even know more, I don't fully understand Spanish, but I know Spanish. And I know nothing of the Filipino language.

As discussed before, the term Hispanic is a completely bureaucratic term that encompasses approximately 20 ethnic groups. Because of the diversity found in this label, I opted to use the term Mexican American in hopes of creating greater specificity in my recruiting of respondents. However, I found this term to be unsatisfactory because individuals often did not know if their ethnic lineage fell within the category. If they self-identified with having a Mexican ethnic background, then I included them in the study. In the future, I plan on using the term Hispanic, which the majority of respondents in this study identified with, for initial recruiting. Then, once I am in contact with someone, to ask screening questions to further parse their ethnicity. I would not recommend using the term Latino since none of my respondents self-identified with that term. In fact, one male respondent (M5) told me, "I'm Hispanic. To me Latinos are Puerto Rican." By relying on the term "Mexican American," many of the respondents felt I was communicating a requirement of ethnic purity or of relative newness to the country when my aim was to find Hispanic men and women who traced their ethnic lineage, regardless of its form or combination, to Mexico and its former lands.

### *The Men*

For this study, I interviewed 19 men who have served on active duty in the Marine Corps since 2001. These men represent a diversity of communities, MOS's,

years of service, family structures, and generational statuses. Although I relied upon a snowball sampling technique for recruiting respondents, the majority of the men were found individually; that is, they did not refer me to each other. There are two who worked together and share a common MOS. I was put in contact with one after I interviewed his friend. There are also three individuals from the same extended family in Brownsville, TX who all agreed to participate after one individual learned of the study through the local university's student veterans group.

About half of the men have returned to their home of record, although of those who have returned, several are looking for opportunities elsewhere. The majority of respondents are from California or Texas, with individual respondents also from Illinois, Oregon, and South Carolina (Table 2). Of those from California, two are from the San Francisco metro area, another two are from the Los Angeles metro area, one is from San Diego, one is from the Fresno metro area, and one is from Bakersfield. Bakersfield and the area surrounding Fresno are largely agricultural areas, while the other areas are predominantly urban/suburban. For the Texas residents, six are from the Rio Grande Valley/Brownsville, TX metro area. Brownsville is at the southernmost point of Texas and borders Matamoros, Mexico, which currently is under siege by drug cartels. One other respondent is from Laredo, TX which is further north than Brownsville, but also borders Mexico. The final Texas resident is from the Houston metro area. The Illinois resident is from Chicago, the Oregon resident is from an agricultural community near Portland, and the South Carolina resident is from the capital city, Columbia.



**Table 2: Home of Record, Men**

<b>Home of Record</b>	<b># of Men in Sample</b>
Brownsville, TX	6
Houston, TX	1
Laredo, TX	1
Los Angeles County, CA	2
San Diego, CA	2
San Francisco, CA	2
Bakersfield, CA	1
Fresno, CA	1
Chicago, IL	1
Columbia, SC	1
Portland, OR	1

Regarding their military careers, the respondents represent a variety of career paths. Twelve of the respondents served only one term in Marine Corps. A typical enlistment is 8 years of service; however, this time may be divided into active and reserve service. The one-term Marines in this study served on active duty for either four years, or if their MOS required particularly long schooling, for five years. Thus, for example, all of the Marines who worked in avionics maintenance were on active duty for five years. Once they finish their active duty commitment, these individuals transitioned into reserve duty, such as the Individual Ready Reserve. Of these one-termers, one Marine planned on serving for a career, but was 100% disabled after being wounded by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) while deployed in Iraq. He was medically retired from the Marine Corps after two years of active duty service.

Five of the respondents are still on active duty and are in their second term. Of these five Marines, three plan on staying for a career and two plan on separating after this term (one because of family reasons and one who links his decision to the repeal of Don't

Ask, Don't Tell and his belief that the Corps has become too "soft"). Another respondent served for two terms, but separated under High Year Tenure rules (These rules mandate that a servicemember must be promoted to a certain rank by a specified time or face separation) because of crippling back problems that arose partly in response to the physical demands of his MOS. Finally, one respondent retired from the Marine Corps after serving for 20 years on active duty. Because of injuries sustained while on deployment in Iraq, he retired 100 percent disabled.

The ranks of these respondents reflect their time in service (Table 3). Typically,

**Table 3: Paygrades/Ranks of Male Respondents**

<b>Paygrade/Rank</b>	<b># of Men in Sample</b>
E-1/Private	0
E-2/PFC	0
E-3/Lance Corporal	0
E-4/Corporal (NCO)	7
E-5/Sergeant	11
E-6/Staff Sergeant	0
E-7/Gunnery Sergeant	1

an enlisted Marine who serves for four years will be a Corporal (E-4) upon separation. Being promoted to Corporal marks the transition to the noncommissioned officer corps and brings increased leadership responsibilities. In certain cases, those with only four years of active duty service were meritoriously promoted to Sergeant (E-5), but this promotion normally does not occur until the four to five year mark.

The men interviewed for this study represent a diversity of MOS's both as a group and for some, over the course of their career (Table 4). Several individuals changed their

career field, or worked in special duties, as was the case for one Marine who worked as an embassy guard and another who worked as a recruiter. Four of the men were in infantry; of these four, three were basic riflemen and one was a machine gunner. Infantry is an occupational specialty that recruits must select prior to entering recruit training; individuals are not placed into this occupation unwillingly. At a broader level, the possibility exists that recruits are steered into this occupational specialty by recruiters because of their ASVAB scores, especially since infantry does not require as high of scores as some of the more technical occupations. The issue of who serves in the combat arms remains a controversial one, especially as these MOS's currently experience the highest casualty rates (Buzzell and Preston 2007). However, the infantrymen

**Table 4: Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) of Male Respondents**

MOS	# of Men in Sample
Infantry	4
Avionics Maintenance	3
Motor Transport	3
Supply	2
Communications	2
Personnel & Administration	2
Embassy Guard	1
Aircraft Maintenance	1
Musician	1
Recruiter	1

who participated in this research deliberately choose this occupation and had decided this is how they wanted to serve before talking to a recruiter.

Three of the respondents worked in avionics maintenance, an occupational area that requires above average ASVAB scores. Two of these individuals were friends and I

found one through the other. The other was not part of this social circle. Of the remaining men, three worked in motor transport, two were in supply, two were in communications, two were in personnel and administration, one was an aircraft mechanic, and one was a musician. Even though these occupational specialties are not considered to be part of the combat arms, several of these individuals were attached to infantry units and deployed with them in theater. Thus, just because someone works in a job like personnel – which certainly could be a safe office job – this person could also experience combat while working alongside infantrymen.

In addition to their history in the Corps, these men represent a diversity of family structures. Twelve of the men are married and of these, only one is married to another servicemember. She was not a Marine, but had served in the Army National Guard. Five of the men are single and two are divorced, which they largely attribute to the marital stresses caused by deployment. Eight of the men have children, with none having more than two.

These men also come from a combination of family types, with the majority growing up with divorced parents. Of these, some lived with their mothers, while others were raised by their fathers. Among those with divorced parents, no clear pattern emerged on which parent raised the children. All of the men came from poor to lower middle class families, with migrant work being the most common occupation for their parents. Two had fathers who had served in the military; one father served a one-term enlistment in the Army while the other was a career Marine. Three of the men had mothers who did not work for pay; they solely were stay-at-home moms. Fifteen had mothers who worked throughout their childhood, either in steady blue-collar jobs or by

performing odd jobs for extra pay. One respondent, who was raised by his dad, had no contact with his mother and had no clue if she worked.

*The Women*

In addition to the men, I interviewed 15 women for this study, who also represent a diversity of communities, MOS's, years of service, family structures, and generational statuses. As discussed in the previous chapter, these women were not located through a snowball sampling technique. I did find one woman through one of the male respondents, but none of the women could refer me to another Mexican American woman who had served in the Marine Corps.

Like the men, several of the women in the sample no longer live in the community where they were born and/or raised. However, despite their current dispersion across the United States, the women are largely from either California or Texas. From this sample, nine women are from California, five are from Texas, and one is from Illinois (Table 5). Of those from California, six are from Los Angeles or from towns in Los Angeles County, two are from Bakersfield, and one

**Table 5: Home of Record, Women**

Home of Record	# of Women in Sample
Los Angeles County, CA	6
Bakersfield, CA	2
San Diego, CA	1
Houston, TX	2
San Antonio, TX	2
Dallas, TX	1
Chicago, IL	1

is from San Diego. For the Texas residents, two are from Houston, two are from San Antonio, and one is from a suburb of Dallas. The Illinois resident is from Chicago.

The women in this study also represent a variety of career paths, some intentional and some of which are the result of either misconduct or the experience of sexual assault while in the Marine Corps. Eight of the women served only one term, either for four or five years. Of these women, one transitioned into the Reserve Component, which she only separated from a few months ago because it was incompatible with her husband's career trajectory, and one was forced to separate because of non-judicial punishment. Another woman chose to separate after she was diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder due to Military Sexual Trauma. This woman was raped by a higher ranking Marine and then was threatened physically if she ever reported it, which she never did.

Three of the women served multiple terms, ranging from eight to ten years of service. All had different reasons for separation. One transitioned to civilian life because she reached high year tenure as a Corporal. This woman had lost rank twice during her career because of two separate acts of non-judicial punishment. Another woman separated because of her desire to achieve greater work-life balance and the third opted to leave, despite a very successful career, because she felt limited by her gender. Of the remaining three, one, who made it to the rank of Gunnery Sergeant, earned her warrant and retired as a Chief Warrant Officer. The final three women plan on retiring in the next few years and currently are on active duty.

The majority of the ranks for these women reflect their time in service (Table 6). However, two of the women experienced reductions in rank because of non-judicial

punishment. Of these two, one was promoted to Staff Sergeant, but was reduced in rank to Sergeant. The

**Table 6: Paygrades/Ranks of Female Respondents**

<b>Paygrade/Rank</b>	<b># of Women in Sample</b>
E-1/Private	0
E-2/PFC	0
E-3/Lance Corporal	3
E-4/Corporal	3
E-5/Sergeant	4
E-6/Staff Sergeant	3
W-2/Chief Warrant Officer	1 (Left enlisted corps as Gunnery Sergeant)
O-3/Captain	1 (Left enlisted corps as Staff Sergeant)

other was promoted to Sergeant, but was reduced to a Corporal (which is reflected in the table). However, she was able to join the Reserves and was once again promoted to Sergeant. There are also two women who left the enlisted corps to earn either their warrant or their commission: one who retired as Chief Warrant Officer and one who currently is a Captain and will soon be eligible for retirement.

The women represent a diversity of military occupational specialties, some of which they accepted prior to enlistment and some which they did not place into until after they graduated from recruit training (Table 7). Three of the respondents, who were not located through snowball sampling, were food service/cooks. One of the women selected this MOS because of her love of cooking; the other two enlisted into the Marine Corps under an open contract and were later placed into this MOS, begrudgingly. It is not surprising that there are several cooks in the sample since women account for 6.9 percent

**Table 7: Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) of Female Respondents**

<b>MOS</b>	<b># of Women in Sample</b>
Cook	3
Logistics/Embarkation Specialist	2
Supply	3
Public Affairs	2
Aircraft Maintenance	2
Drill Instructor	1
Communications	1
Personnel & Administration	1
Avionics Maintenance	1
Recruiter	1
Motor Transport	1
Ground Ordnance Maintenance	1
Postal Clerk	1

of this career field, which is a higher proportion than their presence in other support career fields such as personnel (4.3%) or public affairs (3.9%) (USMC 2011). Three of the women worked in supply, which at 5 percent, is another MOS with a sizeable proportion of women. The rest of the women were spread out in different MOS's, all of which have proportions of women that are less than 5 percent. There were also several women who changed MOS's during their careers (which is also why the sum total of MOS's in the table is 20 rather than 15). This was either because they entered into special duty such as recruiting or drill instructor, because they transitioned into the Reserve Component and were required to change career fields, or because they completed enlisted-to-officer commissioning programs. I also had one woman who trained in the Marine Corps' Lioness Program, which is a special program where female



Marines interview and search local women and children in Iraq and Afghanistan. The individuals who serve in this program keep their prior MOS even though they serve in a billet that is a combination of civil affairs and security (Coolman 2008).

Like the men, the women represent a mix of family structures; however, they differ in one key aspect: all of their marital relationships were with other Marines, although none were married to Mexican American Marines. Military men, regardless of rank, are still more likely to be married than military women. Military women, if they are married, are more likely to be married to another service member (OSD 2006). The Marine Corps has the greatest difference among the service branches with only 6 percent of men versus 65 percent of women married to another service member. The relationships in this sample reflect this trend. Of the fifteen women, six currently were married to Marines and four were divorced from Marines. Compared to the men, more of the women in the sample had children, with ten having kids, including one who had five children and one who had four.

The women also come from a combination of family types, with the majority coming from an intact home. They also share a common socioeconomic status. All of the women, like the men, came from poor to lower middle class families. Their parents held either blue collar jobs, such as factory work, or service work, such as housekeeping. Only one woman in the sample grew up with a mother who worked as a stay-at-home mom; everybody else grew up with a working mother, even if she only did odd jobs.

#### *Generational and Citizenship Statuses of all Respondents*

Mexicans currently account for the largest proportion of immigrants, both legal and illegal, in the United States. As a recruitment incentive and as a way of thanking

servicemembers, legal permanent residents, including Mexicans, who choose to serve in the military may apply for expedited citizenship. Because of this incentive, I expected to have several respondents who choose military service as a pathway toward citizenship; however, this is not what I found. The majority of respondents came from a complicated background of generational statuses, making it difficult to reduce each one's family history to a simple label of "first or second generation." Only one respondent (M5) became a naturalized citizen while in the service. He was born in Mexico to a Mexican father and a Nicaraguan mother. His family moved to the United States when he was a young child for work, but they did not finish the naturalization processes, which includes legal residence for at least seven years, until he was 18 years old and no longer covered by their naturalization paperwork. This process happened while he was in recruit training so according to the respondent, "I was technically illegal at the time I left for training." Although he was a legal resident when he enlisted, his status changed when he turned 18, but the Marine Corps did not catch the change. He reflects that, "I just thought that was kind of an interesting thing that I was in and I wasn't legal, but I was fighting for the country."

While in Iraq on his first deployment, this Marine was severely wounded from a roadside bomb which left shrapnel throughout his body. The explosion left him blind in one eye, unable to stand or walk for extended periods of time, diagnoses of PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injury, and seizure disorder. He spent one year and eight months at Bethesda Naval Medical Center in Maryland. He had begun the citizenship paperwork while in the military, but was so busy that he never got a chance to finish it. His paperwork was expedited once he was in the hospital because:

A senator came by my room and asked if there's anything that they could ever do for me. And I said, "Well, yeah, I'm not a citizen." And they were surprised to hear that there was somebody who wasn't a citizen of the country and who was fighting for the country and who was injured. And wasn't even a citizen. And I said, "Well, don't be surprised. There's plenty of us." So that's something...and he went...got all the paperwork. Got everything expedited. And I swore in...I don't remember the date. I think it was 2006.

Despite the end result which allowed this Marine to become a naturalized citizen, he does not consider the possibility of expedited citizenship to be the main reason why he enlisted. I will discuss motivations for service in the next chapter; however, based on this sample, it appears as though expedited citizenship is not a primary reason.

In addition to this individual, there were four other respondents born to foreign parents in Mexico. However, they became citizens while they were children and still under the legal guardianship of their parents; the paperwork covered them. I also had one respondent (F15) who was a permanent resident of the United States, but still was not an American citizen. This female respondent, who was of Mexican-Salvadoran ethnicity, was born in El Salvador and moved to the United States, illegally, at the age of two. Her parents completed the paperwork for her to become a permanent resident when she was 14 years old. Because of immigration laws, her family had to wait four years before they could apply for citizenship. By this point she was 18 years old which meant she no longer fell under her parent's application, but would have to do her own. She did not know that expedited citizenship was an option while in the Marine Corps and did not complete an application at that time. She separated from active duty after four years. Currently, she is in the process of applying for citizenship, which she describes as, "it's still quite a

waiting game.” However, she feels confident she will eventually become an American citizen which she explains as:

...but I mean because of my history, because I did deploy to Iraq and because of all that and like with everybody and just me going to school here and actually going to college and paying my taxes, you know make me – I guess like an eligible person to be a citizen because I’ve done everything by the book so I’m not trying to mooch off the United States.

There were also several respondents who were born in the United States, automatically making them citizens, even though their parents were not. Some had siblings with different birthplaces and citizenships as well. Others had a parent who was a citizen of the United States and another who was not. These individuals do not easily fall into the “first” or “second generation” label because their status changed depending on which parent was under consideration. As demonstrated by these different combinations of legality, residency, and generational statuses, several different citizenship statuses can be within one family. Rather than find a large number of respondents who joined the military to expedite their citizenship, I instead found men and women with diverse generational and citizenship statuses difficult to compartmentalize into mutually exclusive categories. These individuals reflect the complexity involved with immigration, citizenship, and blended families found within American society today and the need to consider, at an individual level, how citizenship status combine with other social characteristics to shape one’s lived experience.

## **Chapter VII: Motivations for Service & Service Branch Selection - Transition Points and Practical Considerations**

As discussed in previous chapters, Mexican Americans are the largest ethnic minority group in the U.S. Marine Corps, a trend which applies to Mexican American men and women. Using the words of the respondents themselves, the next two chapters address my first research question of: **What personal characteristics or experiences are associated with the decision to enlist in the Marine Corps for Mexican Americans?** I also consider the sub-question of: **Do these characteristics and experiences differ by social characteristics, such as gender?**

There are several common motivations for service that shaped the decisions of the respondents in this sample. These commonalities are largely rooted in a shared social class location. In this chapter I focus on the practical considerations, such as college assistance, the appeal of a steady paycheck, and the perception that one must leave his/her community for occupational success, which shaped the respondent's decision-making. I also discuss the influence of recruiters. Although many of the respondents knew that the Marine Corps was the appropriate branch for them after exploring their options, others "fell" into the Marine Corps because of recruiter willingness to help bring them in compliance with Marine Corps standards, especially in regard to weight and/or physical fitness. This assistance certainly had an emotional effect on the respondents, especially as they became socialized into the Marine Corps, but I include it in this chapter because these initial encounters and decisions were largely calculative: the respondents wanted to serve in the military for the occupational benefits and were drawn to the service that was willing to work with them.

With the exception of the approach of the recruiters, the practical considerations seem to have drawn the respondents to the military generally in their search for opportunity and financial security. In line with Moskos' conceptualization of the All-Volunteer Force as occupational in its focus, the respondents turned to military service as a way of improving their social location through decent pay and benefits, such as assistance with college tuition. In many cases, college, although desired, was not financially feasible outside of military service, and in other cases, the respondents experienced difficulty finding a job in the civilian labor market that would increase or even maintain their quality of life. Thus, the initial decision to serve often was a strategic one and was made without regard for service branch. There are some differences between the male and female respondents regarding the importance of these practical considerations. The men, for example, tend to be more motivated by the GI Bill than the women, many of whom were already on a path toward college before joining the Marine Corps. Both groups, however, share common stories regarding the need to escape their community and restructure their lives.

Past research on military recruits from all demographic groups suggests that military service often is viewed as a "bridging environment" by interested youth and it appears as though the respondents in this sample are no exception. These individuals, the majority of whom came from disadvantaged backgrounds, turned to military service largely because of practical considerations, as they were forced to become financially independent at a young age. Thus, similarities in motivations for service across respondents may be rooted in their common socioeconomic position rather than a cultural tendency unique to the Mexican American community. In many cases the respondents,

once they had decided upon military service as a key transition point in their lives, were welcomed by persuasive recruiters ready to prepare them for life as a Marine.

### *The Appeal of Occupational Benefits*

Overall the respondents approached military service as a way to redirect and/or improve their social location. However, despite this commonality, there was a distinction between the men and women regarding the role of financial support for college in their decision to enlist in the military. Interestingly, this was an important motivator for the men, several of whom listed it as their main consideration. However, it was only a prime consideration for one female respondent (F2) who, through the Marine Corps, completed a college preparatory school, a commissioning education program, and her bachelor's degree at a university in Texas. She also earned her commission through this sequence because, as she puts it, "everything was a stepping stone for something else."

Four of the women entered into college immediately after high school through their own means; the Marine Corps was not part of the decision to enroll in higher education. Despite their intention of staying through graduation, all dropped out within their first year and immediately sought out the military as a professional opportunity. For example, one woman (F1) initially wanted to join the Marine Corps after high school and had signed up for the Delayed Entry Program at sixteen years of age, but she was sidelined by a car accident that left her with a serious back injury and unable to pass the physical and medical requirements for entry. As a back-up plan she attended a private Catholic university in California on a scholarship, but decided to leave after being frustrated with the academic track she was on and by the lack of preparation she had received from her family. She also framed her college experience as failing to provide

the fullness of experience she craved and expected to have in the military. In describing her college experience, she said:

I did go there [college] and I hated it. It was not where I wanted to be. You know my mom didn't know anything about college. She never even finished high school so everything was a learning experience that I was learning on my own. She didn't know to go there. I mean we didn't have the funds to go and stay for a whole week and check everything out first, so it was the first day of freshman year that we were allowed to come on that my mom took me. We moved in and she was gone that night. So it was hard because I didn't know anybody around there. I didn't know anybody from my school that had gone there because it was a little bit further from home. And it really wasn't where I wanted to be. I really wanted to be in the military.

This individual has since separated from the Marine Corps and is about to graduate from college. Another woman (F5), when prompted to reflect on her motivations for service, admits that she knew very little about the educational benefits available to servicemembers prior to joining. She acknowledges now that the Marines were able to enlist her without advertising these benefits which she explains as:

...because actually once the recruiter did start talking to me, then it's funny. All of a sudden then the Army tried to contact me because, probably because he took a look at my ASVAB. I had a really high score on the ASVAB, I think ninety-six. So my recruiter was talking to me and Army started calling me like we'll give you all this, we'll give you all this money, we'll give you these. They kept calling me and upping it. And I was dumb. I didn't know. And my recruiter didn't offer me anything. I mean I could have gotten the college fund at least and I didn't know till after I joined there was this fifty thousand dollar college fund that you can base on your score and your schooling. I was like, ah, you know I could have had all these things but I didn't know. And like I said there wasn't, that's not why I was joining so I think the Marine Corps got me for a pretty big bargain I felt after all. I was like wow.

Not only were the women less likely to be motivated by educational opportunities than the men, but they also were less aware of the employment benefits in the military, especially as they compared to the civilian sector. The majority came from families



where the women worked, and they were expected to do so as well; they had a common class location. However, they also came from communities and families where women worked in civilian occupations. Thus, the women did not view the military as their only way to work or as their ticket to occupational benefits, like college tuition assistance. Rather, they selected the military as their occupation because of an alignment of personal and institutional values. Representative of the general sentiment of the female respondents is this quote from an individual (F11) who currently is serving on active duty and plans to do so through retirement:

A lot of people were just joining for the college money and stuff like that. I actually was interested in the whole -- what the Marine Corps stands for. And so -- but it was just kind of like a stepping stone for me. I didn't really know what I wanted and I figured 4 years, I have enough time to figure out. And I just fell in love and have stayed in.

The women were drawn largely by intangible factors, such as the desire to serve, and wanted to emulate images, feelings, and values that they connected to the service.

The men, in contrast, were largely motivated by the occupational benefits of service, including the possibility of educational assistance. Several listed the educational benefits as a deal-clincher, as demonstrated by this quote, "...what got me was the education benefits like when they told me they could pay for schooling while you're in, that you don't have to dip into your GI Bill. So that was really a moving point. I knew I wanted to do college." This individual (M17) is still on active duty, but plans on separating after this term. By the time he separates, he will have completed his bachelor's degree and plans on using his Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to pursue graduate school.

Other men knew they wanted to go to school, but also knew that their families could not or would not afford the expense. The educational benefits became an important motivation, as military service became the most economical and realistic way for these respondents to pay for higher education. For example, one male respondent (M2) who understood that his father would not be able to afford college tuition in addition to living expenses, explains his motivation as:

So education was a huge thing, a huge selling point and that's probably the main reason I did it. They told me, oh, you get over \$50,000 in college money so that was huge and I didn't want to burden my dad anymore if I did go straight to college so he would have to send money for rent if I wasn't working so he was already having money problems as it is so.

The issue of paying for college was reoccurring, especially since all of the respondents came from families where the parents worked in blue-collar jobs, many of which offered little financial security and few benefits. They shared a common class location and a common desire to improve their socioeconomic position. Similarly, another respondent (M5) demonstrated enough savviness to research colleges and gain acceptance into several. Despite these successes, the respondent felt that:

I mean it's not that I didn't want to go to school. It's just that I knew that after high school, I knew that my parents couldn't afford it. They didn't go to American schools. So they didn't really know how the system worked, how to apply for scholarships and stuff like that. But they never talked to me about it. I never really talked to my friends about it. So I should never...I never really thought about going to school. I applied to several schools and I got into a lot of the schools but when it came time to actually pay for it, I knew my parents weren't gonna have the money for it.

Another respondent (M12) acknowledged that he wanted to go to college, but that he did not know about any of the avenues for financial aid. His father, a career Marine, also did not tell him about the possibilities for aid, an action which the respondent thought was

intentionally done as a way of inducing him to serve. He said, “I wanted to go to college. I guess my dad kinda tricked me by not telling me about financial aid. I guess now that I think about it, I could have gotten financial aid and went to college. But I didn’t know about that at the time, and I needed money for college.”

Other male respondents were attracted to the military less because of educational assistance, which remained a secondary motivating factor, but more for the relatively generous job benefits, especially for an entry level worker with little to no college education. Some explicitly stated that they wanted to use their military service as a way of increasing their socioeconomic status; they wanted to move into a solidly middle class existence. One male respondent describes the motivations of the men in his community as, “I feel that’s the big thing like once they’re done with high school they’re pretty much stuck. And the Marine Corps was a good option for them to better themselves. And they see that as an opportunity to raise their status...” Others joined as a way of gaining financial independence, whether by choice or by necessity, but without explicit regard for raising their social class. One respondent (M4) when asked about why he joined the Marine Corps, replied, “pay benefits, getting a paycheck every two weeks, having medical and dental care, I wanted to buy my own car, and I, it was just, I just wanted to do it.”

Later in this chapter, I discuss the influence of community when considering military service, but I also want to discuss here the calculation of costs versus benefits that many of the men completed. The majority of respondents in the sample enlisted in the Marine Corps after 9/11 so they understood the likelihood of experiencing at least one wartime deployment. Despite this possibility, these men considered the benefits of

military service to outweigh the costs, a calculative decision cited by other minority groups, especially African American men (Buzzell and Preston 2007; Rothberg et al. 1990). For example, one male respondent (M8) said:

I knew there were a lot of benefits coming with serving. So I was like weighing the benefits when there were a possibility of something happening to me but I felt like if I served and I did everything else when I came back alright, then I would have the benefits. I kind of did my little research you know.

As demonstrated by the quotes, these individuals considered the military to be a reasonable option, even against the backdrop of wartime. Some even go as far as to recommend military service to the youth in their community, a trend which also is demonstrated in survey data from the Pew Research Center which states that 82 percent of post 9/11 veterans would recommend military service to a young person close to them (2011). One individual from Texas stated that if he was still in the service, he would like to recruit from his home of record as a way of showing young men and women the opportunity for tangible benefits in the military such as sufficient pay and base housing. He explains his perspective like this:

I believe it's the opportunity. ... if I would have signed up again, I wanted to be a recruiter, and I wanted to recruit here in my local area because I've seen the amount of males. I mean the recruiters here never have a hard time getting their quotas. We have so many recruiters. I mean it's always full. And I just believe with the economic situation, the gains they can get economically, the opportunities that we had here is better. The economy is not too good but the recruiters over here they give you free room and board and meals and money and it's just for four years. I mean it's pretty good. And that's why I see a lot of people do it.

Thus, the men routinely cited the educational benefits and the pay as primary motivators for their decision to enlist. Their priority was to find an occupation suitable for entry-level workers that would provide them the opportunity to maintain and even increase

their class standing. In contrast, the women also were motivated to work, but their decisions to serve in the military were framed as a desire to connect to values such as service and strength. This may be because the men felt different pressures, as minorities with low socioeconomic position, and considered different avenues for financial success than the women. The women, who grew up in households where the women worked, saw labor as part of their life course, but framed military service as more than just an opportunity to go to college and earn a decent living. It also may be because the women attracted to serving in the Marine Corps are motivated to serve precisely because they carry unique values, such as the desire to prove themselves physically.

### *Restructuring Lives*

In addition to the occupational benefits of military service – the steady paycheck, the medical coverage, and the educational assistance – several of the women and men also sought out military service as a way of adding structure to their lives. Unlike most other occupations, the military is unique in that it takes only entry level workers and molds them through intensive and expensive training. Ideally, these individuals would come to the military with the required aptitude, the utmost moral judgment, and clean criminal records; however, this is not always the case, especially in tough recruiting environments. For those individuals who have made mistakes in their youth or who need additional impetus to change course, the military provides a valuable opportunity to learn new skills in a regulated organizational structure. Similarly, for those who find themselves approaching high school with little guidance on what to do next, the Marine Corps provides structure, opportunity, and occupational development. Military service is a real pivot point for servicemembers. The decision to serve often is accompanied by the

impression that service will add positive redirection and structure to one's life. However, the realities of service may not match these early perceptions. (Again, see MacLean and Elder 2007 and Modell and Haggerty 1991 for a review of the implications of wartime service for past generations).

Although not the majority of respondents, several individuals realized they were either on a destructive or an aimless path and that the military might potentially provide an opportunity for them to begin their professional lives. All of these individuals were successful while in the military, with several planning to serve through retirement. There were no significant differences between the men and the women; just determination to reset their path in life and an admission that they struggled to look beyond the immediate during their youth. One woman (F11), who currently works as a recruiter, describes her decision to serve in the Marine Corps as a way of "buying time" to figure out her future. She said, "...and I kind of think back to the point where I was going to college and I was like I don't know what to major in. I really don't know what I want to do. So I kind of saw it as like okay, I'm buying time to decide what career path I'm going to take." Although initially her decision to join the Marine Corps was about figuring out her next move, she has served over ten years and plans to continue through retirement. This one move to "buy" time has led to a very promising career.

Another woman (F13) was several years out of high school when she decided to enlist in the Marine Corps. She admits to hanging out with the "wrong crowd" and to using drugs in her youth before deciding to choose a different path. As a high school student, she considered the military, but decided against it once she realized that her dream of being a fighter pilot in the Air Force required a college degree, an unattainable

proposition. Several years later while upset with her friends and her own decision-making, she reconsidered the military as a way of leaving her environment and growing professionally. She said:

It took me, let's see I was 22 -- probably 21, 22 when I decided that I needed to make a change in my life because, you know, I dropped out of school and I wasn't going anywhere. I was at a dead-end job, you know. I just wasn't accomplishing anything and I just felt like I had more potential than that. I think it just took my own realization for me to understand the change that I had to go through. And so I was the one that sought out the military because I needed to get away from the environment I was in, and I needed to find some structure and discipline.

This woman also felt trapped, not just because of her poor choices, but because of the life courses of several of her peers who were also poor, Mexican American, and female.

Growing up in a very Mexican community in Texas, she reflects, "So I realized that, you know, I didn't want to end up that way. You know, it's like the typical little Hispanic girl. You're pregnant by 15 and you have 3 kids by 21. You know, so I didn't want to end up that way." She is proud to share now that she is in school and although married, does not have any children.

Others, like another female respondent (F2), were not on a destructive path, but did not receive any guidance from family members or teachers on what they should do as their next step. As children living in poor communities and often with parents who were first-generation immigrants, they did not have an adult advising them on how to apply for college or how to pay for it, especially since the majority of respondents had parents with little to no college experience themselves. These individuals were hard-working and determined to succeed, yet they did not know what activities or organizations to pursue once they officially entered adulthood. This respondent explains:

I recall this and I tell my parents this sometimes, they kind of, I don't know if they had realized what was happening, but no one ever sat me down and discussed, "what are your plans when you graduate high school?" It just didn't happen. I don't know if it was because my parents were focused on my brother and sister. I don't know if they just figured I was going to make things happen on my own. But it just never happened. So I'm halfway through my senior year of high school and it's like November of my senior high school and I really didn't know what I was going to do. And I was sitting down at the lunch table in the cafeteria one day and I looked over and I saw a Marine recruiter with the table set up over there. And I just stood up and walked over there. And I said you know I want to join the Marine Corps. It was that quick.

This woman's experience is not unusual. Most of the respondents came from families where college education was still viewed as unattainable, especially because of the financial demands. Most of the respondents had parents who did not expect their children to attend college and even if they did, they often did not have the cultural knowledge to navigate the college application and financial aid process with them. The Marine Corps provided direction and a solution for these respondents to enter adulthood with a structured path that included clear benefits and occupational training.

Likewise, a few of the men had similar sentiments of frustration and felt a desire to change course through military service. One individual (M19), who is still serving on active duty, considers the military to be a unique opportunity for people to regroup and grow during their youth. Part of his motivation for joining include, "it gives you lots of stability, it gives you a lot of different options as far as the future goes and you can accomplish a lot in a short amount of time and it definitely matures people much faster than them just doing their own thing from like, 18 to 22." He regularly returns to the community where he was raised and encourages other young family members and friends to consider military service as a way of growing up quickly and with guidance.



Another individual (M3) who was newly married with a child on the way was concerned about the direction of his life which he expresses as, “I can’t describe how irritated I was with the way things were going for me.” He was working a low wage service job which did not provide enough for his new family, had no benefits, and had little opportunity for advancement. He saw the military as a way of restructuring his life in a more favorable direction, although he admits that he was also looking for a quick solution. He says:

I guess my mindset at the time was really that I wasn’t going anywhere and that I wasn’t like really maybe challenging myself. And the way they kind of presented it was like “if you can do this, you can do anything” so it kind of seemed like really a fit for me at the time considering the mood I was in I guess. I don’t honestly think I was at the like maturity level probably in my life to really be thinking that far into the future. You know what I mean? I didn’t necessarily think that there was anything necessarily bad that could happen from it all.

Although not the majority, several respondents shared a motivation to serve that focused on restructuring their lives through military service. They were frustrated with their current direction and opted for a severe, yet potentially very effective, solution. In most cases this frustration was connected to the class standing of the respondents and their inability to access occupations or social networks that would provide a suitable quality of life for someone with only a high school education. They also did not have parents versed in the major educational institutions of American society ready to provide guidance and connections. Thus, the motivation to restructure one’s life through military service is not specific to Mexican Americans or to Marines, but it remains a very relevant motivation for recruits overall, and especially for those from poor, immigrant families looking for a major pivot point in their life course.

### *Influence of Community*

In addition to the influence of occupational factors – such as steady pay – and socio-emotional factors, which I discuss in the next chapter, a large number of respondents also joined the Marine Corps because of a desire to leave the community where they were raised. These individuals considered the community of their youth to be either dangerous or a professional dead-end. Overall, they did not see much opportunity in their communities, even if they loved the people and memories associated with the place. As a result, they turned to the Marine Corps as a way of escaping and creating a new path. This motivation is similar to the desire to restructure one's life discussed in the previous section. These respondents felt stuck in their current social location and were looking for an effective way to change course. However, it also is unique because these sentiments were only expressed by the respondents, both male and female, from Texas and California. All of the respondents who mentioned this motivation grew up in lower class households in predominantly Hispanic communities; thus, the need to escape one's hometown may partly stem from a desire to leave a place where residents lack access to resources and power and/or where safety is an ongoing, prevalent concern.

The starkest rationale came from those respondents, all men, from the border areas of Texas near Brownsville and Laredo. These respondents recall a severe change in the security of their environs from what they had experienced even several years ago. All had family and/or friends who lived across the border in Mexico, and during their childhood they would frequently cross the border to visit them. The area was not violence-free during this time, as prison gangs had moved into the area, and they made money by trafficking undocumented workers. One respondent (M6) recalls:

Well, when I was growing up there was a lot of drug use. There was a lot of incidents...well, there used to be, I lived right in front of a railroad depot. So they used to park the rails here so there were a lot of illegal aliens trying to cross. It used to be a lot more, but now you don't even see them like it used to be. And there were robberies there. Some people would go and rob the Mexicans as they passed. And some of them, you know, it was always something, they were finding people dead, here on the rail or in the back, because behind us is Mexico.

Despite these safety issues, this respondent, as well as the others, still felt safe enough to cross the border into Mexico on a regular basis. They would go to visit family, for shopping, and to receive affordable medical care. However, they stopped going over the border once the drug cartels moved into the area, and brought with them extreme, indiscriminate violence. Although susceptible to less violence than in Mexico, the presence of the drug cartels has changed the economic and professional opportunities in the American border towns. They also have shaped the perspective of the respondents from this area who consider service in the Marine Corps to be a safer option than staying home in Brownsville or Laredo. In the words of the previous respondent, "Look where I'm from Hispanics die every day." They felt it was safer to serve in the Marine Corps, even if deployments were involved, than to stay home.

Likewise, they also felt there were few job opportunities in their hometowns, making it difficult for them to achieve financial independence. Another respondent (M7), who returned to Texas to work as a recruiter, reasons that it is beneficial for the community to send its sons and daughters into the military. He believes that military service positions these young people favorably and gives them an advantage over those who choose to stay in their community. Although he worked to convince parents that military service was the right course for their children, he provides the following

rationale for his service as a recruiter: “There’s still some resistance nowadays, with these wars going on. But they are wars, and I tell kids now and their family members whose kids you know, my own cousins that want to join, I tell them the war is going on right here, right now. You know? At least your son will have a fighting chance when he’s in the service.” He argues that the wars are temporary, but that the benefits of military service will carry these young men and women through their professional lives. He believes that the community has become more accepting because, “...the community sees the benefits in the long run because when they come back, they’re not a statistic. They come back, they come back changed.” This sentiment is similar to the beliefs expressed by African American men from isolated, urban communities who felt that military service was safer than living in their hometowns (Buzzell and Preston 2007; Rothberg et al. 1990). Thus, there may be a connection between living in segregated, poor communities that offer limited professional opportunities and are marred by dangerous underground organizations, and the use of military service as a means of escape.

Whereas the Texas residents often referred to the negative impact of the drug cartels and the lack of opportunity, the California residents focused on the presence of street gangs in their community and their desire to escape that life. A male respondent (M4), who admits to getting into trouble in his youth, describes the appeal of military service for Mexican Americans in a large California city as:

I’ve seen a lot of Hispanics, the Latinos, Chicanos, want to escape the neighborhood environment and this is an opportunity for them to do that because they may not want to go to college or can’t go to college and they don’t want to join a gang and go to prison. So there’s not a whole lot of options here. The Marine Corps is definitely, it’s really appealing and welcoming to the people in those circumstances I think.

He applies this dichotomous standard to himself: either stay in his hometown and get in trouble with gangs or join the Marine Corps and possibly have a future. He continues with:

I wanted to get away from this town. Yea, it definitely had to do with that. I wanted to get away and I wanted my independence. And my, at the time I was working at McDonald's and my situation was not really that much of a good one. And I just wanted to get away and do something new.

Another male respondent (M1) from an agricultural area also described the options for Mexican American men as an either/or choice: "It's either you go and join a gang which we did for a while to show our toughness and that we're warriors, or you go and you join the military." This individual was deeply involved with gang life before he decided to join the Marine Corps. His decision to enlist was based on his need to escape his environment and to provide financially for himself because his mother, "had already said that she was going to get me out of the house at eighteen." Married and with a child, he decided to separate after one tour to spare his family the ongoing stress of deployments. Unfortunately, this individual, who was an infantryman, is unemployed and, in his words, "I spend my days waiting for a job." He currently is using the Post 9/11 GI Bill as an income source for his family.

Since I did not interview any women from the border towns in Texas, it is not possible to compare the experiences and motivations of men and women faced with the violence caused by the drug cartels. However, several of the women from California and central Texas had similar challenges regarding the perceived temptations and adverse effects of their home environment; these challenges often were related to the presence of gangs and/or the use of drugs within their circle of friends. One woman (F13), who had a

successful enlistment and is now completing her undergraduate degree, believes she would have been stuck in a cycle of partying and low wage jobs if she had stayed home.

She says:

I would say that I think the biggest reason was to get out of San Antonio because I was -- my friends were a bad influence. Well, you know, I'm not gonna blame my friends. I made my own decision so I'm not trying to blame them. But I knew that me staying in San Antonio, I probably wouldn't have done anything better with my life. Or, you know, I wouldn't have had the help 'cause the military was gonna help me pay for college. You know, things like that is gonna set me up and I knew I needed the structure that I was lacking.

Now married and out of the Marine Corps, this respondent and her husband chose not to return to San Antonio, nor to return to his home. Instead, they settled in a new state away from family, but very much content with the stability and opportunities they are experiencing. She credits her decision to enlist in the Marine Corps and leave San Antonio as the main force behind her current success.

Likewise, another woman (F7), who was involved in gangs near her Los Angeles County home, was desperately looking for a way to escape the violent tradition that had overtaken her family. In describing her community, she says, "I grew up in kind of like a gangster neighborhood I guess, where there was a few gang members down the street, my family members." Her older brother and sister were gang members, and this individual did not see any other options. When asked why she became involved with a gang, she says:

It was in my face. It was there like you know I walk down the street and there they are and then I'll go to school and that's kind of like the life I grew up into. Like everybody's always asking where are you from and you know what gang do you claim? What colors? It's always stuff like that. I didn't see no other lifestyle. If you were Hispanic and not in a gang, then you were like considered I guess a nerd.

Because of her troublesome behavior, this individual moved in with her uncle, an Army veteran, who was supposed to keep a close watch on her. She was working at a fast food restaurant at the time and by the time she turned 18 years of age, her family was pressuring to move out on her own and become self-sufficient, even though she was only earning minimum wage. Based on her uncle's background, she filled out information cards with the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps. She remembers her family telling her to get out and find a job because a "job's not going to come knocking on the door." Within days, the Marine Corps recruiter called her at home and she gleefully, told her family, "ha, ha, they didn't come knocking on the door but they called me. And so then that's when they came to pick me up a couple of days later and took me to the office." In her case, she did not actively seek out a military recruiter, but once she was exposed to the Marine Corps and the potential opportunities she decided to enlist immediately. She frames her main motivation to serve as, "To get away from my -- not my family but my -- I guess my area. I knew if I stayed in that area I would be either pregnant, on drugs or dead. So I had to go do something else and be productive with my life." She served eleven years in the Marine Corps and was promoted to Staff Sergeant. However, she was reduced in rank and given a bad conduct discharge because of fraternization and a violent altercation that occurred within the relationship. This woman, who has four children with four different men, all of whom are Marines, is a single mother. She purposefully moved her family to Northern California to keep her children away from the gang life which had penetrated the community of her youth.

Like the previous respondents, another woman also framed her decision to join the Marine Corps as a way of escaping the destructive environments that were overwhelming her. She (F9) reported an especially tumultuous youth that involved getting pregnant during her first semester of college, losing the child's father after birth, and then being coerced by family members to give the child up for adoption because of her financial insecurity. She could not bear to stay in her hometown because of all the negative emotions associated with the area so she began looking for a way to escape. She frames her decision to enlist as:

...a lot of the reasons why I joined was to get out of [Southern California city] because in '97, I wasn't doing very good. I was working at the dry cleaners, I didn't have my son, I was going through like just not a depression phase but just hating myself, partying, I was barely making it you know, I mean I just had to take care of myself so it's not like I have to worry about taking care of my kids or anything.

This respondent served in the Marine Corps for six years. She wanted to stay in longer, but she was forced to separate after receiving two non-judicial punishments (NJPs) during her two enlistments. After separating from active duty, she was able to reenlist in the Reserve Component, where she served for several years. She has since returned to her hometown and is raising her children (minus the son that was given up for adoption) in the community. In her case, joining the Marine Corps provided her with the means to leave the community of her youth and, although she had some misconduct issues while serving and ultimately returned home, she believes that serving in the Marine Corps redirected her life course in a more positive direction.

For many respondents, military service is a respectable, affordable way to change one's life course. One way it does this is by moving people, by military order, out of



their hometowns and into military installations as employed servicemembers. Oftentimes the respondents had fond memories of their hometown and felt an allegiance to the area. However, they also portrayed the communities of their youth as dangerous, either because of drug or gang violence, and as professional dead ends. All of the respondents came from working-class families that lacked the resources to move out of the area on their own; they were “stuck” in their hometowns. They also were expected to become self-sufficient and to contribute to the family’s expenses, despite the limited opportunities in their hometown. As a result, military service became an attractive way to escape the hazards and impasses of their hometowns and to do so in a financially feasible, dramatic, and in most cases, permanent, way.

#### *Recruiter Approach & Enlistment Process*

Although not unique to the Mexican American population, many of the respondents cited practical considerations as their primary motivation to join the military. The focus on occupational benefits and available transition points, however, does not explain what personal characteristics or experiences led the respondents to the Marine Corps specifically. Institutional motivations play a large role, which I discuss in the next chapter, but many of the respondents also were persuaded to join the Marine Corps because of approachable, efficient recruiters. In many cases, once the respondents decided that they were going to serve in the military, the process of contacting a recruiter and signing an enlistment contract was quick. The respondents, both male and female, wanted immediate action, as well as job security; they wanted to know they had a military career in their future. Many of the respondents approached the Marine Corps recruiter first because they already were convinced this was the best service branch for

them. For these individuals, the focus on the Marine Corps stemmed from other institutional motivations, such as the appeal of the Marine Corps uniform and the desire to become a part of Marine Corps tradition. However, others “fell” into the Marine Corps because of enlistment issues or troubles experienced with other services that ultimately led them to a willing and helpful Marine Corps recruiter. Overall, these motivations initially appear to be grounded in practical considerations, which is why I include them here. However, they also are supported by a shift in opinion after the respondents’ initial encounters with Marine Corps recruiters, as many came to view the Marine Corps as the best, and in many cases only acceptable, service branch. Thus, the respondents’ interactions with Marine Corps recruiters emerge as a motivation with both practical and institutional facets.

Service branch selection often was influenced by the speed with which one could gain entry. One woman (F4) remembers looking for employment immediately after high school and choosing the Marine Corps based on the quickness with which the recruiter could get her into basic training. She says, “So when I was in high school, I went to the recruiters and most of them told me I couldn’t go. There was a waiting list and I couldn’t go right away out of high school and the Marine Corps said yeah, we’ll take you now. And then 5 days later after high school I went into the Marine Corps...” Her story is the most dramatic example of the influence of timing on service branch selection. Due to financial pressures, she needed a job immediately after high school and the Marine Corps was the only service branch that could accommodate her. Although unclear about her career path upon her initial enlistment, this woman ended up serving in the Marine Corps

for twenty years, or through retirement. Despite her initial hasty judgment based mainly on quick accommodation, she believes that the “Marine Corps gave me everything.”

In addition to the accelerated timelines with which Marine Corps recruiters were able to incorporate recruits into the pipeline, several respondents also suggested that they joined the Marine Corps because the recruiters were willing to work with their less than stellar records. Admittedly, some of the pull towards the Marine Corps was self-selection; a few respondents gravitated to the Corps because they saw it as the service where they had the greatest chance of entry. Although unfamiliar with the entrance requirements, these respondents believed that they were not smart enough for the more technical service branches, such as the Air Force. They ruled out these service branches because of advice such as, (M13) “...my buddy told me, ‘You know you’ve got to be a brainiac to be in the Air Force and you’re not the brightest guy in the world’” and (M8) “I kind of knew the Air Force was for smart people so I was like no, I don’t think I’ll be able to do that.”

However, some of the pull to the Marine Corps was also because the recruiters, as organizational representatives, were willing to work with less than ideal candidates, an accommodation respondents did not find from recruiters representing the other service branches. For example, one female respondent (F7) characterized the Marine Corps’ willingness to accept individuals with blemished records as:

I hate to say this but the Marine Corps will take anybody. They have the look standards, you know the weight, the height, the appearance but you know, I’m not sure about the other recruiters but I know for sure that this - the Marine Corps recruiters will work wonders to get somebody in if they were -- they’ll do a drug waiver, they’ll do a -- you know even if you got a criminal history yeah okay, there’s a lot of old timers in the Marine Corps that I knew who said that was their choice. They went to court and

they said okay, either you go to jail or you go to the Marine Corps. So the Marine Corps has high standards to a point and maybe they feel that if they take somebody broken you know or bad or you know whatever criminal history or drug addict or whatever and they put him in boot camp, they break you down and they build you a new Marine.

Part of the way the Marine Corps grooms recruits is through its Delayed Entry Program (DEP). Although all of services have some form of DEP, the Marine Corps is the service that uses it most intensively for both high and low quality recruits. Recruiters are expected to plan events for their recruits (known as “poolees”) throughout their DEP period, which can last up to a year. Often, this means regular weekly workouts as well as informational sessions where poolees learn about Marine Corps history and tradition. The ultimate goal is for poolees to enter recruit training physically qualified and within Marine Corps standards, especially regarding weight, and capable of finishing training. Unlike the other services, Marine Corps recruiters do not receive credit for their poolees as part of their recruitment quota until after they graduate from recruit training. This makes the recruiters highly invested in each poolee’s development and ensures they only send prepared individuals to recruit training. This system appears to achieve its desired effects, as the Marine Corps has the highest rate of attrition across the services from its DEP, while it also has the lowest attrition rate across the services from entry level training.

All but two of the respondents in this study participated in DEP; however, I do not know how many of the respondents entered the Marine Corps with blemished records. Although several of the male respondents and two of the female respondents alluded to a history of gang life and juvenile delinquency, none wanted to provide more detail about this segment of their life. I respected this decision and cannot make any further

suggestions about their past and whether they needed moral waivers to join the Corps. However, the perception of the Marine Corps' willingness to work with troubled youth was cited as a known characteristic, although it was never explicitly framed as a primary motivation for selecting the Marine Corps as one's branch of service.

Moral waivers may not have been cited as a main consideration, but the Corps' willingness to work with overweight and/or unfit individuals through its DEP program was mentioned by both the men and the women. In some cases, the respondents did not need assistance with weight loss because they were already within standards. However, they were impressed with the Marines' ability to transform people physically. For example, one male respondent (M18) who was in shape prior to enlisting recalls his impression of peers who went to recruit training before him:

I saw normal guys like me come back from boot camp and that motivated me even more. Being in that whole year in the Delayed Entry Program before shipping out to boot camp I saw guys who were huge like close to 200 pounds come back. They take a little longer in boot camp, they take -- some of them took up to 6 months but they came back thin, lean and motivated. And what I saw made me think I can do it cause I wasn't overweight, I didn't have no extra pounds or anything, nothing to hold me back.

Others were overweight, but they realized after watching their peers that the Marine Corps would work with them to improve their physical fitness and meet weight standards. One male respondent (M14), who was overweight, recalls thinking, "it was fat kids that joined...and when I saw that they were thin I'm like wow they lost a lot of weight." Originally, 220 pounds prior to recruit training, this individual lost about 40 pounds through DEP, and was 145 pounds by the time he graduated from recruit training.

There were women who also had similar struggles regarding their weight. One woman (M14), who was a multi-sport athlete in high school, gained a lot of weight after her high school graduation because she no longer had her sport schedule to keep her in shape. Several years later when she wanted to join the Marine Corps she was between 190 to 200 pounds, making her about 40 pounds overweight. She was attracted to the Marine Corps because they were willing to work with her. She describes it as:

We did weights and stuff so I was used to that, like team environment with the coach and stuff. You know, when I started working individually with the Marines, you know, it wasn't bad. It was like having a personal trainer and you know, I just do what they said or, you know, what they had heard to do, you know, to drop weight. And I was passing the physical fitness test, the Marines' physical fitness tests already before I ever went to boot camp so I wasn't worried about that part, you know. Don't get me wrong. It was hard. I still got, you know, as they say broke off in Marine Corps I still got you know, out of breath and challenged physically the most while I was there but I'm glad that I prepared as well as I did.

Overall, she lost 40 pounds in six weeks due to extreme exercising and dieting. She recalls going through multiple fad diets, such as the cabbage soup and Mayo Clinic diet, as she attempted to lose a large amount of weight in a short period of time. She pulled it off with the assistance of two other Hispanic poolers also attempting to make weight. She describes the reaction of the recruiting staff as, "And then they -- all the entire station was surprised 'cause they had never had a woman, you know, lose that much weight like that before ever. You know, they had people try and they've had 10 [lbs.] or something but, you know, I know it was funny 'cause I was in the DEP program with another girl and another boy -- I mean, another guy. The three of us worked out every single day together till we all got in..."

In addition to recruiter willingness to mold possible recruits, the respondents also noted differences among the service branches regarding the “sales pitch” of the recruiters; these also had a large influence on where respondents eventually landed. In some cases, respondents attempted to talk to recruiters from each service branch, but they had difficulty making contact with some. In particular, the Air Force recruiters seemed to be difficult to contact, and in many cases, the Air Force fell out of consideration simply because the recruiters could never be reached. None of the respondents for this study seriously considered the Air Force, and there was never a time when the Marine Corps was competing with this service branch for recruits. However, memories regarding service branch selection and the Air Force stressed the absence of its recruiters. For example, one female respondent (F2) says, “The Air Force person you could never get a hold of. They weren’t trying then and they don’t try now.” Other women (F8) had similar experiences such as, “...the Air Force recruiter was actually hardly ever there. I could never catch her. I mean, every time I went to the office she was never there. I mean she was never available. So I just gave up.” Similarly, several of the men mentioned trying to contact the Air Force, but never were successful in contacting a recruiter. One (M17) says, “I called, but they didn’t return my call.” while another (M2) shares, “The only other one I was interested in was Air Force, but they didn’t contact me.”

Similarly, there was little mention of the Navy, with almost all of the respondents having little contact with Navy recruiters. For those who did talk to them, they often were turned off by the Navy uniform and reported impressions such as (F1), “They [Navy] were sloppy. Their, just their presen- ...their thing was more like, it was kind of

like well, you want to join or not? This is what we have and you'll be all- ...it wasn't as if they were enthusiastic about what they were in themselves and I didn't see that in them. They weren't really convincing me that they loved it so why do I want to join?"

Often the decision about which service branch to join came down to the Marine Corps and the Army. This may be because these service branches have common aptitude and physical standards, which are lower than those for the Air Force and Navy. The Army and the Marine Corps also have the greatest concentration of ground combat positions and have been the services most heavily involved with the current wars. In many cases, the respondents initially leaned toward the Army; however, they either experienced a slowdown in the recruiting process which pushed them toward the Marine Corps or they were turned off by the approach of the Army recruiters. Several of the male and female respondents initially began the accession process with Army recruiters. However, at some point their enlistment was delayed, as described by one woman (F15) who wanted to enter the Army National Guard immediately after high school graduation, but was not able to do so. She recalls her experience with the Guard recruiters as:

... and when I was in the office I was waiting for one of the officers to come out and talk to me and I was sitting there for at least 3 hours and I was bored out of my mind and I was mad because they were taking forever and they kept telling me you have to have this medical exam, you have to have that done, you have to go here and then there and they weren't going to let me even go in for another several months. And I started to get irritated with them and one of the Marine recruiters came and told me and started talking to me and I know they're special – they're like extra nice for me cause they're recruiters, that's what they're supposed to do. So he asked me to come to the office, I went in the office and I just felt more comfortable in that office I guess. And they actually were more honest about it and straight forward so I really appreciated that and I respected that. So that's when I changed my mind to go in the Marine Corps. And that was in November, so when I started talking to the Marine Corps it was in November of 2006 and I had left by December of



2006. So well they actually worked fast and got me to what I wanted to do.

Similarly, a male respondent (M3) states that he initially planned on serving in the Army; however, to his surprise and confusion even now, the enlistment process was curbed due to concerns about his physical fitness and weight. He recalls the scenario as:

So I signed up with the Marines after looking into the Army so I was looking at the Army first but they were kind of giving me the run-around and so I kind of got disinterested with the whole idea altogether for a while but then I still worked at the grocery store that I work at now. Basically what I mean is like I went down to take the ASVAB with them and all that and then like it seemed like everything kind of hit a dead halt like when it came to doing the paperwork, like to sign me up. For some reason, I think maybe it was kind of like some of their requirements for physical fitness, like they were trying to tell me I needed to do certain things. Like I think I needed to be a certain weight or something. I don't know. It was just like a bunch of kind of, didn't really make any sense to me at the time. Like I still don't understand it to be honest with you because like they could've probably worked with me if there was any problems but they didn't seem willing to. I just, they kept telling me that we'll have to wait to do this or whatever and I was like, okay, never mind. I'll just do something else I guess.

The issue of standards came up with other respondents as well. One male respondent (M6) met with the Army recruiter with his high school coach present. He believes that the coach scared off the Army recruiter by painting him as a delinquent teenager. He explains it as:

No I actually looked into other services, when I...one of the Army recruiters came to my high school I actually took a moment to go talk to them because one of my uncles was in the 82nd Airborne and I had listened to his stories too, so I went and talked to a recruiter and it was the...one of my coaches was there and this is kind of, I don't know kind of cut-throattish but as I was talking to him the coach told the recruiter, kind of signaled to him that I was not the...not good for any kind of military because I was, I was a little bit of a troubled kid I guess, or a little bit too aggressive. I was getting into fights all the time... the Army guy was like "You know what, the Army's not for everybody" and he just ran me out the door like that. So I got mad and I went to the Marine recruiter, and the

Marine Corps they were ready, they were like “Come on, take the test” and they sent me to MEPS [Military Entrance Processing Station].

A female respondent (F6) had a similar experience to this individual. Initially, she planned on joining the Army, but the accession process stopped midway. She is still unclear about why, but thinks it was her failure to meet one of the standards, of which she cannot pinpoint. She explains, “First I had asked about the Army cause that’s the only -- I didn’t know there were any other branches really. I mean, I just knew about the Army. So I had asked about it and I even met a recruiter but never really -- I couldn’t join. I guess something happened with the process and I just -- I don’t know. I just had been forgotten. I couldn’t join and I never tried to follow-up.” In her case, she began the accession process with Army recruiters, but ended up joining the Marine Corps several years later after her first enlistment never progressed. In contrast to her Army experience, when she met with the Marine Corps recruiter she was able begin basic training relatively quickly alongside her brother. The willingness of the Marine Corps to work with her in an expeditious, open, and flexible manner is ultimately what attracted her.

The majority of respondents approached Marine Corps recruiters knowing this was the service branch they wanted to join. Others were interested in military service broadly, but took the time to talk to recruiters from other service branches. The Air Force was almost uniformly written off because of the difficulty respondents had in contacting recruiters. Others self-selected out of the Air Force because of its perceived technical nature, which is a similar to what occurred with the Navy. The Army, in contrast, offered serious competition to the Marine Corps. Many respondents entered the accession

process with the Army and the Marine Corps under consideration. However, they turned away from the Army because of its reluctance to work with less than ideal candidates, its pushy approach, and/or because the respondents did not like how the recruiters communicated with them. The practical consideration of going where one was accepted became an important motivation for many of the respondents.

Although not unique to the Mexican American population, many of the respondents cited occupational considerations regarding their motivation to join the military. As cited in Moskos I/O model and his linkage of occupational motivations with the All-Volunteer Force, they focused on benefits such as the desire for college assistance and the need for a steady-paying job that provided benefits and a living wage as a major reason for choosing military service. Many also cited the need to change their life course, and viewed the military as the most abrupt and serious way to do so. Finally, the majority of respondents from California and Texas discussed a need to escape the community of their youth because they saw little opportunity there and wanted a chance to experience something different, and potentially more positive, than their peers and family members who stayed behind. Overall, these occupational motivations are rooted largely in the socioeconomic position of the respondents and their residence in predominantly segregated Hispanic communities. As discussed in the previous chapter, all of the respondents came from poor to lower middle class families, where both parents worked in physically-demanding occupations, such as migrant work and housekeeping. Although the majority of respondents recall families where emotional support was plentiful, they knew they were expected to support themselves financially once they became legal adults. Faced with the decision to stay in place and suffer financial and

professional penalties, the military, in contrast, promised the opportunity to learn new skills and gain experiences that would move them beyond the back-breaking work of their parents. Critical transition points, such as college attendance and moving at will to job-rich areas, became viable options with military service and the occupational benefits it provided. Thus, the military became an opportunity to grow beyond the socioeconomic status of the respondents' families and communities, a trend which has been well-documented with other racial and ethnic groups that share a similar class location.

As discussed in the next chapter, some of the respondents knew that the Marine Corps was the correct fit for them because of institutional motivations, such as the appeal of the Marine Corps uniform, which spurred them to select the Marine Corps as their service branch. Other respondents "fell" into the Marine Corps because of recruiter willingness to train and mold them into capable recruits ready to enter and finish entry level training. The Marine Corps is unique in its willingness to take individuals with blemished pasts or with overweight, physically unfit bodies and rebuild them to Corps standards. Whereas other services may want a recruit who is ready immediately for basic training, the Marine Corps invests additional personnel and resources into selecting and grooming current poolees into future Marines. From the point of view of the respondents in this study, this approach paid off and is a major reason why the Marine Corps became their branch of service. They found an organization that was willing to take a less than perfect product and turn it into a polished, respected Marine, and to do it in a relatively expeditious manner.

## **Chapter VIII: Motivations for Service & Service Branch Selection – Individual and Institutional Values**

As discussed, many of the respondents cited occupational considerations as one of their main motivations to serve. When considered through the lens of their socioeconomic position and their residence in predominantly Hispanic communities, their focus on financial and professional needs matches up with the behaviors of other minority groups, such as African Americans, who have turned to military service as a way to improve their class position (Binkin and Eitelberg 1982; Lundquist 2008; Moore 1996; Moskos and Butler 1996). However, this focus on occupational considerations does not mean that these were the only or even most important motivations, and they also do not explain fully why the respondents chose the Marine Corps over the other services. In this chapter, I discuss the other characteristics, impressions, and influences that drew the respondents to the Marine Corps specifically, including the perceived common values between Mexican Americans and the Marine Corps, family influence, and the appeal of the Marine Corps uniform. While the majority of respondents were drawn to the military because of practical considerations, they all chose the Marine Corps because of more emotional, subjective reasons. They felt a connection to the service because of its more institutional nature, which intermeshed well with their own individual values.

In almost all cases, the men and the women were similar in the experiences that shaped their decision to join the Marine Corps. They were motivated by the practical benefits of military service, but the majority also believed that these benefits should be earned through hard work. They found honor in working hard, and considered the Marine Corps to be the service most in line with this perspective. Many of these respondents

also were the first person, or part of the first generation, of family members to serve in the military. Although three respondents had fathers who had been in the military, the majority of family influence, if there was any, came from siblings. In this sample, family influence appears to be more horizontal than vertical, yet still quite powerful. All respondents were impressed by the uniforms and demeanor of Marines they met and came to believe that the Marine Corps was the most prestigious service branch in the American military. Finally, many saw parallels in the values of the Marine Corps and the Mexican American community, with the men highlighting the warrior ethos and *machismo* of both. Although this does not align perfectly with Moskos' argument regarding the role of institutional values in building and maintaining a military, it does show how certain cultural values can motivate people to choose one service branch over the other (1977). However, rather than rely on a blanket explanation of cultural similarities between Mexican Americans and the Marine Corps, these motivations also show the importance of race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic position, and citizenship status in shaping one's perspective of what values are ideal, welcoming, and best suited for development in one's professional life.

#### *Finding Self-Worth in Work*

The majority of respondents understood that the military provided them a pathway toward employment, so they approached military service through a practical lens – it was a way of securing and maintaining financial stability. However, the issue of working was not just about receiving a paycheck, but also about earning it through hard work. Almost all of the respondents came from families where physical labor was the norm; their parents were migrant workers or service providers. They did not provide for

their families through white collar work, but through hard labor that required use of their bodies and hands. Building on their childhood impressions, the importance of hard work, and the respect and dignity found in doing so, was a major theme for most of the respondents, regardless of gender. They saw these values as common to the Mexican American community, which one male respondent (M16) explains as, “that’s also how we are, how we operate. As Mexican Americans, we don’t grow rich and powerful and all that, we grow from the bottom up.” This perspective seems to emerge from the common socioeconomic position of the respondents, especially in regard to the occupations of their parents.

It was this focus on labor and earning your keep that emerged as an often cited reason for joining the Marine Corps over the other service branches. To the respondents, the Marine Corps was the most physically demanding of the service branches; it also was the one which most embodied hard labor and the belief that everything was earned, not given. By joining the Marine Corps, the respondents often considered themselves as continuing the work tradition inherent in their families and within the Mexican American community. They certainly cared about pay and benefits; however, they also sought out an organization that aligned with their own personal values of work and sacrifice based on what they grew up observing as a normal and respected work life. From the perspective of many of the respondents, the Marine Corps provided a way to continue their family’s work tradition in an honorable way. It also provided a way to counteract negative stereotypes about Mexican Americans as lazy or noncontributing residents.

Prior to explaining why they joined the Marine Corps, most respondents reflected on their childhood, their community, and their family structure. It was in this space

where the tradition of work within their families emerged, including the lasting impression made by their parents' work efforts. One male respondent (M13) whose parents labored as migrant workers has this memory of his dad:

Well, my dad was a, you know, migrant worker. He worked in the fields. Because of the fact that he was bilingual or he thought he was, he did supervisory work and he also was just a very, very good mechanic with heavy equipment. So they moved him to that and he was making decent money at the time he was making around \$15 an hour, which was pretty decent. And he was an extremely hard worker. I mean I would watch my dad leave at five in the morning and come back home sometimes at eight, nine o'clock at night, his boots covered with mud and his hands...I've never actually seen it until he got them was blisters on top of blisters. And to me it was like the greatest thing watching my dad walk in the door and, like, let him relax. I had actually stopped being such a mischievous kid for about three minutes. And I would take his boots off...that was my job. No one else could do it except me.

This respondent originally began his professional life working in a local police department. However, he found the work unsatisfying and listened to the encouragement of a friend to join the Marine Corps. Although he looked at the other services, he was drawn to the Corps after the recruiter told him, "You're gonna earn everything. You're gonna work hard and earn everything..." He saw himself, and his brother who served in Army infantry, as continuing his family's tradition of hard work which he describes as:

I mean some of his traits [father], of course, passed onto me. I feel that, you know, he's a very hard worker. I don't mind long hours. I don't...I tend not to complain about things. We, you know, I used to hate when my younger Marines would complain about working past eight hours. I actually went up twelve after that. I'd tell them, "Hey, you're still getting paid," you know. "There's a Marine in Iraq that's been over there for two days now getting shot at. You're sitting here in an air conditioned office and you're complaining about working eight hours," you know. I just...things don't bother me as much as other things bother people. And all my brothers are the same because we've talked about this. My brother in the Army tells me how hard it is for him to be in college listening to people complain about homework and listening to, you know, stuff, like, you know, petty little things that aren't really complaints, you know. My



brother spent three months living in a barn with barnyard animals getting shot at and, you know, had to, you know, just actually lived through a war. You know he actually saw combat and, you know, he has an experience which has, I guess, I wouldn't say hardened him but has made him appreciate what the real challenge is, you know. So what if your iPod doesn't work. It's not a big deal, you know.

Other respondents had similar experiences and viewpoints on the value of work.

Another male respondent (M1), whose father worked in the grape fields before becoming a factory worker, described the family's approach to paid labor as, "Where I come from, what we believe in is that you work. And there was no real time to go to school, study and everything like that... I chose that I was going to be working like my father did, like his father did, like our people do. We're going to go work and work hard, do that for the rest of our life." This individual saw honor in transitioning from high school directly to paid labor; he did not see value in entering college immediately. He was drawn to the Marine Corps because he saw it as being the service that most embodied physical labor, which he experienced as an infantryman with multiple deployments. Eventually, faced with the demands of a new family, he separated from the service, but has had difficulty in finding work. When asked how he currently spends his days, he says:

..... this is the longest I've been unemployed, since I got out of high school. I was out of high school for like two months before I was in the Marines. And then out of the Marines I was out six days before I got a job as a plumber and I was working as a plumber for almost five years and then I got laid off. And the only source of income I could find was going to school on the GI bill.

This individual currently is a full time student. Although he had no interest in going to college prior to joining the Marine Corps, he has not been able to find work and is supporting his family through the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which provides tuition assistance as

well as a housing allowance. However, he is eager to find work because that is how he defines personal success for himself as a husband and father.

The focus on the value of hard work was expressed not only by many of the male respondents, but also was a common theme for the female respondents, who came from families with similar working class backgrounds. One woman (F14), whose father worked as a taxi cab driver and whose mother subsidized the income with odd jobs, describes the influence of her family's values on her own choices as, "I think just because if you're gonna join the military and you were raised by, you know, the same honest, hardworking parents, you know, that most of the life they teach you that you don't -- nothing is given to you. Everything you have to do is earned or paid for by someone somehow." Just like for the men, this belief in the value of work was a frequently cited reason as to why the female respondents chose the Marine Corps over the other service branches. To them, the Marine Corps represented values most in line with the work tradition of their families and communities. One female respondent (F5), for example, whose father works as a handyman and whose mother works two jobs as a nurse's aide and as a housekeeper describes her rationale for joining the Marine Corps as:

I mean I think it goes back as far as our Aztec or our native times. It's honor. We're bred with that I think so we're drawn to that. My dad and my family, all the hard work, just work hard and that's what it's about and you work hard, you do this, you're honorable. And that's all that really matters. That's why I wasn't drawn by the money. You know it never caught my attention. It was the few, the proud. And I was like honor, courage, commitment. When I heard those words I believed that.

Likewise, another respondent (F4) provided a similar viewpoint, while also focusing on the common values shared by the Mexican American community and the Marine Corps.

I think the Hispanic culture is a very proud culture. It's very proud you know, we've -- even though I don't know how to speak Spanish, it is a very *machismo*. And there is a lot of similarity with the Marine Corps which is the smallest service. They get the least of the resources, they get the least of the money but you know what, they're pretty proud of that. They're pretty proud that they are lean and they're lean in the sense that they don't have any excess. They don't have the huge bases and all the money and the golf courses and these wonderful exotic places. And the Hispanics feel traditionally are -- they're a poor culture so there's again I think there's a lot of similarities. We're not used to excess. We see a lot of Hispanics grow up in very dire situations and with violence and yet -- and so we're not used to opulence, we're used to not having a whole lot of money. And so you kind of gravitate towards things that are similar to you in many cases but at the same time that pride is close to the heart. They're lean and they're tough and growing up poor and I mean, I picked grapes when I was little and so did a lot, we worked in the fields and you got to be tough. And it's back breaking work to work in the fields. And so we know that's tough work and it becomes part of your psyche. That's what you do, you work hard.

She found common values rooted in her perception that Mexican Americans, especially those from the lower socioeconomic classes, and the Marine Corps, which relies more on manpower than technology for mission fulfillment, are both grounded in their focus on hard work, rather than money and easy success.

Service in the Marine Corps also provided an opportunity to counteract negative stereotypes about Mexican Americans as workers and neighbors, which many of the respondents were aware of and wanted to disprove. One woman (F3), who was a first generation Mexican American, came from a traditional family where her mother stayed at home and her father worked as an agricultural foreman. She describes the central values guiding her decision as:

My father - he taught me nothing but hard work ethic. Oh God how can I say it? All the negative perceptions there is about Mexicans or Hispanics, my family wanted us to work, not against them, but work to prove that they weren't, they were just perceptions pretty much. That's your opinion, but not all Hispanics are like that. Work hard, your family comes first,

first and foremost and just work hard pretty much, and everything else will fall in.

Similarly, another female respondent (F15), whose family immigrated to the United States, expressed a desire to counter negative stereotypes about Hispanics with her own hard labor. She says:

I'm doing everything that I can now to pretty much I guess just show people that Hispanics aren't lazy, they're not. They're not immigrants, they're not terrible people, we're not bad or anything and that we're actually smart and intelligent, we work, we're hard workers, we're strong people and I really didn't enjoy that part because a lot of people don't have a good spot at least of them.

Both the men and the women in this sample believed in hard work and saw a fundamental value in contributing to the family financially through honest labor, even if it meant getting your hands dirty. Sometimes this view was linked to the hard financial times that their families had experienced with the transition from Mexico to the United States as recent immigrants. One female respondent (F4) explains the focus on hard labor as:

My family is very -- was certainly a hardworking Mexican family. And my grandparents, I think they came from Mexico. I can't really tell you although I heard they were born in Mexico and I know they're from San Antonio, Texas. It was definitely poor, a very poor family so everyone was expected to work very hard.

Part of the viewpoint of the men and women also was shaped by the work histories of their mothers. This tradition of work often extended to their mothers who straddled raising the kids with paid labor. The same male respondent (M13) who commented on his father's work ethic also focused on his mother's work abilities. Although he respected his father for the work he did, he had a tumultuous relationship with him, especially since he left the family in Texas for a previously unknown family in Mexico. The respondent did not hear from his father for decades and only recently has

reconnected with him, although very cautiously. Even though he admired parts of his father, he loved and respected his mother unconditionally. When asked to describe his mother's daily life, he says:

As a matter of fact the day I was born my mom was in the field working. Tiny little lady. But, I always tell people, you know, I go through a point to tell people I consider myself a tough guy. I can take a lot of pain. I broke most of my fingers. I've, you know, dislocated my shoulder. Stuff like that. And I still work the next day or I, you know, I kind of go through it. Pain is temporary, you know, I always think that, you know, you can work through it. Now the toughest person I know is my mom because she had to wake up every day wondering, "How am I gonna feed my boys?" That's the type of pain, that's the type of stuff that will kill you. That's a huge responsibility. And I admire her greatly for it. Which is why I always tell myself no matter what kind of pain in, my back is killing me or, you know, I've broken an ankle or something, it doesn't compare to the years and years that she struggled with.

Although a few of the respondents had mothers who stayed home, the overall viewpoint of all of respondents is summed by one woman (F4) who describes work and family life in Mexican American families as, "the women carried more of the load and the men were very pampered." One female respondent (F8), who currently has custody of her two younger siblings, describes her willingness to take on this unplanned family duty as payback for all the sacrifices her mother has made for her over the years. With her mother newly divorced and unable to support her children alone, this respondent stepped in so her mother could return to school and save money. Currently, she balances serving as an active duty Marine with being a single mother, albeit temporarily. When asked why she was so committed her family, she responded with:

My mom and my step-dad went through like a lot of hardships. Like they actually had a very troubled relationship; the only reason they stuck together was so they could you know -- it was just basically for the family, just for the kids. So then I feel like my mom kind of went through a lot and she sacrificed a lot you know. She was pretty unhappy for a really

long time. Just for the sake of making sure that us kids had a mom and a dad and we always had food and you know like a roof over our heads. And I feel like you know what? Three years of me having the kids is not going to be -- it's not really you know a long time that -- I'm okay with sacrificing a little bit of time so she can catch up and you know and kind of get her education and regain her financial stability.

Hard work was valued across respondents, with their mothers most often cited as the embodiment of arduous, honorable labor.

Perceptive of the sacrifices of their parents, many respondents came to believe that they should seek out a similar work experience, grounded in tough labor, to find personal honor. The Marine Corps, with its reputation of being able to do the most with less, emerged as the service most in line with hard work, earning your keep, and doing so in a meaningful way. Finding commonalities between the work lives of their parents and their own chosen path to serve as Marines, the respondents cite parallel cultures and values between themselves, as working class Mexican Americans, and the Marine Corps, as the workhouse of the Department of Defense, and cite these as important motivations for service.

#### *Following in Footsteps: Fathers & Brothers as Key Influencers*

Currently, the personnel of the armed forces are volunteers brought into the military through a recruitment and retention model. Although multiple intervening institutions, people, and experiences turn an individual into a recruit and then servicemember, one of the more influential variables has been the whether the individual comes from a military family (Segal and Segal 2004). Youth from families where one or both parents served in the military are one of the most fertile sources of new recruits. My research, although small scale and exploratory in nature, suggests that the current

generation of Mexican Americans are often the first in their families to serve. When asked about other family members in the military, common responses were (F10), “I’m the only one in the military.” or (F13), “I have no family in the military. I think I have like third or fourth distant cousins that, you know, I don’t know, ten generations ago or something like that, that I’ve heard about, but I’ve never met him or know details. But I had no family in the military so I didn’t know what branch, but I knew I wanted to join.” For those influenced by family members, this influence often comes from siblings and extended family, and less from parents. The direction of exposure appears to be more horizontal than vertical, although that trend may change as more Mexican Americans serve and, in turn, have their own children whom they expose to military service.

This trend was especially apparent for those respondents who were born in Mexico or who had parents who were immigrants. Simply because of their family’s newcomer status, they were not relying on a long tradition of service in the United States military, but were pursuing a new path in their new country. Interestingly, none of these individuals came from a tradition of military service in their countries of origin. One respondent (F11) explained this trend by noting a distinction between the United States’ military and Mexico’s military as:

Because if you look at like Latin countries, the military is really like – it’s kind of like if you think about Mexico you know, the corruption and then all -- like the police... There’s so much crime that they kind of take part of, it’s all corrupted and that’s how the military is. And so like the only thing they [her parents] know is kind of like our Hispanic cultures where all the -- the military is a bad thing in our countries, pretty much.

Further, several of the respondents, especially those from the Rio Grande Valley area of Texas and those from the agricultural towns of California, had parents with little to no

education. Even if their parents had the physical and mental aptitude and the motivation to serve in the military, they would not have been considered for enlistment because of their low educational levels, which often stopped around the middle school level in Mexico.

Despite the overall trend that the majority of respondents were the first in their families to serve, I also interviewed those who were joining a family tradition of service. Only one of the female respondents had a parent who was in the Marines. In this case, it was her father, and he served for two terms, or eight years, which included a tour in Vietnam. Her father's experiences and expectations were a key motivation for her to join the Marine Corps, which she explains as, "...I wanted to know how. I wanted to know my dad. I wanted to earn his acceptance." She thought that by joining the Marine Corps she would gain a better understanding of her father's characteristics which she describes as. "Military that's all he knows how to do..." She's proud of the tradition of service in her family, even though it only includes herself and her father, and has not been continued by any siblings. She describes herself as, "I tell everybody that I was born on a Marine Corps base, I was raised by a Marine, I earned the title of Marine. I'm as Marine as you get." Despite her self-characterization as a pure and true Marine, this respondent separated from the Marine Corps after one term because of military sexual trauma, which eventually left her diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. I will describe her experience further in Chapter Ten.

Two other respondents (one male and one female) had fathers who served briefly in the Army, but they had different interpretations of their fathers' experiences and what it meant for them. The male respondent (M12) felt pressured by his father to serve in any



branch of the military after high school; this pressure applied to his brothers who also joined the military after high school. The respondent and his brothers were raised by their father who was a single parent. Their parents divorced when the children were young, and their mother had minimal influence and little work experience that extended beyond work at fast food restaurants. In describing his father's attitude, he says, "And he highly you know, almost to the point to where he required me to go to the military. But he didn't really require me. But he highly encouraged me, to go into the military...So kind of basically pushed me into the military. And he didn't really care what service I went to..." Although he realizes now that he could have received financial aid for college, he also felt at the time that military service was the only option he had to attend college. He frames the lack of choice and information as, "...see my dad used college to get us [respondent and his brothers] to join the military. When I was, when I was young I didn't know about that stuff. And I had, even if I did have money I'm willing to bet that my dad would have found some way to convince me to join the military." This individual served one term in the Marine Corps, including a deployment to Iraq, and characterizes his experience as, "I hated the Marine Corps to be honest with you. I hated being in the military." Although he does not have children yet, he does not plan on pushing them into the same path.

Like this man, one of the women (F2) had a father who served in the Army during Vietnam, but unlike the previous respondent, he did not push her into the military and was angry when he found out about her enlistment decision. She frames her decision to enlist as not being guided to other opportunities by her family, and in a quick decision, deciding that military service was the ideal way to achieve financial independence after

high school. Although her father was a veteran, she did not approach him initially about her decision. However, she eventually needed his permission to join because she was only seventeen years of age and could not enlist without her parent's permission. His reaction was memorable, which she describes as:

I told them I was going to join the Marine Corps and of course they were initially taken aback because it was never, had never been brought up or discussed ever. And my mom, I can't remember her reaction if she even had one but I remember my father started yelling at me. And he doesn't yell. He's not a yeller. He wasn't back then. And he was just yelling and getting upset at me and I don't remember anything he told me. I just remember just sitting there listening or tuning him out actually as he's talking to me and yelling at me about joining the Marine Corps. And it felt like an hour. It must have seemed like at least an hour of his doing this. And at the end I just pushed over the paperwork to him and I said I'm joining anyway. I'll just wait till I turn eighteen and I got up and left the table.

Despite his initial reaction, her father signed the paperwork the next day. He told her that he supported her decision and that he was impressed that she did not back down, even though he had an unusually negative response. Although surprised at the time, the respondent now understands how her father's own experiences in the service shaped his reaction. Her father had a very negative experience in the Army because of his ethnicity and the socioeconomic status of his family. She explains it as:

He got out of the Army because the Army was very racist and he was having a very difficult time when he was in the Army. And he even talks about that nowadays, about his commanders that were racist and that they were not very family friendly either and they didn't like people that were outspoken, which includes my mother, who is very outspoken because she came up in an impoverished background. And you just have to be that way in order to crawl out of that, I guess that set of life that you could stay down until you just become content. And so he did get out. He said it was in the best interest of his family for him to get out.

Like her father, this woman has experienced racism while in the military. However, she has not let it shape her career path. Currently, she is a Captain in the Marine Corps, very

close to fulfilling the twenty years of service required for retirement. She also is a mother to two young children and is married to another Marine. She has no plans of steering them either toward or away from the Marine Corps, but she is most concerned that they find some avenue of success as they enter young adulthood.

These individuals are the exceptions from the small respondent pool of this study. The majority of respondents were the first, and in many cases, the only one to serve in the military in their families. However, although only three respondents had a father who had served in the military, a larger number entered the service either with a sibling or because of an older sibling's influence. This trend also carried over to extended family members who in many cases fulfilled "sibling-like" roles. In some cases, respondents joined in tandem with their siblings; this was a decision and experience they wanted to have together. Sometimes this decision paid off and led to successes for both.

One female respondent, who describes herself as very connected to her family, followed in the footsteps of an older brother who joined the Marine Corps one year before her. She did not join alone, but joined alongside another brother; in fact, they went to recruit training and Marine Combat Training together. When working with the recruiter, they made it a condition that they go through training together, even though this meant switching her brother from San Diego to Parris Island for boot camp. The recruiter obliged with the request. This respondent admits that the idea to join the Marine Corps came from her older brother, and that she did not consider any of the other service branches because she trusted her older brother's judgment completely. It was not difficult for her to bring up the topic with the brother with whom she went to training because, "He was always talking about it and how he wanted to do it, what kind of job he

wanted and what he's going to do and where he's going to go. And so you know I started thinking, I mean that's something that I've always wanted to do. So you know, why not try it?" His reaction to her suggestion was positive which she describes as, "he was just really happy and he was enthusiastic. He took me immediately to meet the recruiter and we talked about it and that's when we made the choice to go to training together and stay together throughout our training." With three siblings joining around the same time, a tradition of serving in the Marine Corps has become a part of this family's identity, with the parent's home becoming, "like a Marine museum."

Similar to this family's history, another respondent, who was male, describes a similar pathway into the Marine Corps, although in this case he was the leader. This man came from a family of five boys, of whom he was the oldest. Of this group of siblings, four have served in the military, with two (including the respondent) going into the Marine Corps and two going into the Army. The middle child, characterized as the sweetest, stayed home to care for their mother, who raised the boys as a single parent. This respondent describes the social order of his household as, "I was pretty much the top dog in the pecking order. Being the oldest had its benefits, as I was the alpha male in the house and my brothers had to listen to everything I said." In this role, he encouraged his brothers to serve in the military, although he did not have a preference for which branch of service they chose. He describes the brothers who chose the Army as being more laid back, while he says he had much different, more influential relationship with his "baby" brother. He introduced this brother to the Marine Corps early as he sent home military gear throughout his career. He says:

And my youngest brother I could tell was pretty amazed by the stuff. I was closest to my baby brother because I raised him since he was three years old. So I was the oldest one, you know, I was more of a father figure for him. And I would give him all the Marine Corps stuff. I'd give him, like, t-shirts and I remember, you know, giving him kbar [a knife] and all other kinds of cool stuff, you know, and I would get him, you know, wherever I was at events. Pick up a poster here or there, you know. Constantly emailing them or sending him picture of where I was and what I was doing. He thought that was the coolest thing.

Eventually, this brother chose to serve in the Marine Corps, which the respondent characterizes as “just following my footsteps.” All of the brothers had successful careers in the military, whether they served for one term or multiple. The respondent eventually separated because of medical issues, but he misses the Marine Corps deeply. He also mentions that his mother’s home has become “a military shrine.”

In some cases, the sibling influence did not lead to positive results. For example, one of the male respondents (M14) joined the Marine Corps in tandem with his younger brother, who was not able to finish recruit training. As the oldest child, the respondent had a lot of influence on his siblings which he exerted when he told his brother, “hey, let’s go talk to a recruiter and he’s like why? And I’m like let’s just go talk to him, it’s not going to hurt.” The respondent convinced his brother to join the Marine Corps with him; he now frames his brother’s willingness as “trying to please” him. When asked to clarify his brother’s perspective, he says, “Like oh, my older brother’s doing it, I might as well do it too, so I don’t get tagged a fool and if I get tagged a fool well, I’ll always have my brother’s approval.” These two brothers left for recruit training together, but were split up about a week into the training. Early in the training, the younger brother complained about having medical issues with his back; as a result, he was transferred into the Medical Recruit Platoon (MRP).

Rather than ease him back into civilian life, the experience in the MRP led to greater misery and severe depression for the younger brother, as he was kept in the platoon for two additional months. Both brothers entered recruit training slightly overweight; however, the brother in the MRP experienced severe weight loss due to his depression and his treatment while in training. The older brother, the respondent, recalls seeing his brother toward the end of training:

The only time that I saw him was on Sunday when they let you go to church and the reason I went to church was always...well, the first time was in hopes to find him and then I did see him there. And then you know I sit next to him and we will talk and but for me I didn't really pay attention to the service I was just busy talking. The whole time I saw him I just felt so bad for him cause he was so stressed and he was so depressed. I mean, the guy couldn't even sleep or anything. I just saw him and he just got thinner and thinner and every time I saw him, he just made me cry.

When asked to explain his own emotional state and reaction to his brother, he says:

I just know how bad he wanted to leave that place and me being his older brother I always, I mean, I always did everything for my -- I fought his fights, I did everything for him. So this is one fight I couldn't do anything about. So I felt you know helpless. So the only thing I could do was just cry and just say I'm sorry man, I'm sorry I brought you to this. I felt so guilty the whole time and that guilt took a while to go away.

As the older brother, the respondent felt responsible for leading his brother into the Marine Corps, and when the experience did not occur as planned, he also felt responsible for leading him out. He assumed almost a fatherly like role with his sibling, as demonstrated by his decision-making authority and the respect he was accorded because he was the eldest. His experience, as well as the experiences of the other respondents who served with their siblings, demonstrates the importance given to the actions and opinions of the eldest brother. Based on these respondents, Mexican American families seem to embody a type of stratification among siblings that shapes important life

decisions like military enlistment. Whereas parental influence remains supreme, it appears as though the trust and respect between siblings also has a large impact on an individual's life course. This is not necessarily unique to Mexican Americans because of a common culture, but because of common social locations and the desire to improve one's socioeconomic position.

*First Impressions: Uniforms and Demeanor*

The decision to serve in the Marine Corps was in many cases based on the lasting impact of first impressions, either from a recruiter or from a casual encounter with a Marine in uniform. These first impressions created an emotional response in many of the respondents who saw a way of being that resonated with them. In particular, the biggest motivator and most often stated reason behind selecting the Marine Corps for both the men and women was, in the words of one female respondent, "...their beautiful uniforms." The uniqueness and perceived aesthetics of the Marine Corps uniform manifested itself in several ways for the respondents. First, recruits often saw the uniform adorning a physical form that, to them, demonstrated confidence and athleticism; they recall the first Marines they saw as projecting a controlled, unparalleled strength.

For example, one female respondent (F13), who was born in Texas before moving to Mexico when she was six years old and then returned to the United States when she was 17 years old, struggled with finishing high school during her junior year. Although she understood that her parents returned to the United States to provide greater opportunity for their children, she had a difficult time adjusting to the linguistic and cultural differences in an American high school. Describing her excuse as her inability to

handle the change, she dropped out of high school and began working at a fast food restaurant, which she did for several years before returning to school to earn her General Educational Development (GED). She remembers seeing an advertisement for the Marine Corps during her high school years which made a lasting impression on her, but she did not seriously consider enlisting until an older brother talked to a Marine Corps recruiter. She remembers her first impression of the Corps distinctly and recalls it as:

He looked so powerful, so strong, so confident. So it was just great. And I guess because I at that time we had just moved from Mexico. So you know I was feeling completely the opposite of all of that and I see this face and I was just like wow that's, I don't know, I want to feel like that. And I had that feeling ever since I saw that picture. I just thought he looked very, very powerful, very strong and that's something I wanted to feel too.

After this image of strength and confidence became her standard of what military service can do for an individual, this woman did not even consider any of the other service branches.

Another woman (F13), who was looking for direction and structure to change her current course of life, considered the other branches, but narrowed her focus after seeing the uniforms and overall appearance of the Marine Corps recruiters. Her decision was set before she even heard about the occupational and educational opportunities specific to each service. She describes her initial walk-in into the multi-branch recruiting office as:

So I went to other branches and that's how I -- I don't know. There's something about the Marine Corps that impressed me. When I walked into that office, I was just impressed by the way -- the appearance of these gentlemen, you know. They had fresh haircuts. Their uniforms looked pristine. Their shoes were shined. They were impressive. They looked sharp. Their uniforms looked great.



Like the previous respondent, this individual did not talk to any other recruiters after forming this strong first impression of how a military servicemember should appear. She saw a presentation of self that was crisp, alert, and respected and wanted to find a way to situate it onto her own persona.

The distinction associated with the Marine Corps uniform and demeanor became even more pronounced when the respondents compared their first impressions of the Marine Corps' appearance to the uniforms of the other service branches. This comparison happened among the men and the women, with little to no distinction between the sexes. For the women, the majority formed such a positive opinion of the Marine Corps' uniforms that none of the other service branches could compare appearance wise. This female respondent's (F11) view summarizes the broader opinion among the women:

I never looked into any other services and a lot of it had to do with the uniform. I could never picture myself wearing another uniform. I didn't like the other ones. The image they [Marine Corps] put out there and the uniform, it was just the nicest of all the services. At the time the Army had a dark green suit, and I thought, "oh no, I'm not wearing that." And the Navy, I don't know that white sailor suit, I was like "yeah, I'm not wearing that either."

The views on the superiority of the Marine Corps uniform also extended to the physical fitness of the recruiters, all of whom appeared trim and healthy, especially when compared to recruiters from the other service branches. Many women made comments about the physical appearance of recruiters from other services, many of whom were overweight. Common reactions include (F14), "You know, I go to the other branches and, you know, these guys are kind of a little overweight, they have these bellies." as well as (F2):

And then of course when I went into the recruiting office for the Army everybody was very overweight. And it wasn't a good first impression for me and especially coming from a family whose background is very prone to being around obesity. So I'd already seen that throughout most of my life, my aunts, they're all overweight.

Whereas the respondents did not see a convincing reflection of what they wanted to emulate from the other services, they did see confidence and strength projected from the Marine Corps recruiters. They saw a presentation of self that was crisp, alert, and respected and wanted to find a way to situate it onto their own persona.

The men also cite the uniforms and appearance of Marines, whether through the media, through the recruiter, or through a family or neighborhood acquaintance, as a primary reason for selecting the Marine Corps as their branch of service. Although, in the words of one respondent (M4), "It's kind of like a vanity kind of thing," the majority of men cited the Marine Corps uniform and overall demeanor as important to them, both in how it shaped their first impression of the service and in what it communicated to them regarding the transformative powers of military service.

One male respondent, for example, remembers his first encounter with Marine Corps recruiters while in high school. Initially, he says they would not talk to him because he was too young, but as he entered his junior year in high school, he would talk to them frequently and they took his interest seriously. He (M15) remembers his first impression as:

I learned about the Marine Corps and it really grabbed my attention, I mean pretty much it was a clean cut look and just the pride. Like every time you see a poster of a Marine, it's always... you always...you can also see the pride in his face and all that roughness...and I think that's what really what set it apart from the other ones for me.

Despite his immediate captivation with the Marine Corps, this man did not enlist right away, but waited a year after high school to join, a decision which he still does not understand. In between graduation and his enlistment, he worked two jobs: as a packer at a major retail store and as a night time manager at a fast food restaurant. He quickly realized that this was not the life he wanted so he returned to his initial favorable impressions of the Marine Corps and linked up with a recruiter. Two months later he was on his way to recruit training. His initial impression of the Marine Corps reflects what I heard from the majority of male respondents.

Like the women, the men communicated a similar positive first impression of the Marine Corps and a desire to form a new identity that reflected strength and unflappability. As stated by one respondent (M11), “You could tell there was something different about them [the Marines].” This difference communicated the possibility of change and overcoming barriers, whether of community, weight, or financial status, and of becoming part of a highly respected organization. Some men found hope in the physical change of peers and family members who entered the Marine Corps before them and returned home after recruit training as changed individuals. One individual (M14), who is currently on active duty and plans to serve through retirement, initially went straight to college after high school because of his parents’ insistence. However, he admits that his primary goal was to join the Marine Corps, partly because he was so impressed with their appearance, which he describes as, “The way the uniform looked it was awesome. I know it sounds so stupid but it, it's true.” His decision also was influenced by the change he witnessed among his peers that joined. He says:

First thing when I saw the kids I was just like wow! I remember these kids were you know big guys and I see them thin, nice haircut, shaved and then you know the uniforms are clean, pressed. I'm like, you know what? These guys are clean and -- cause I used to hang out with the wrong crowd in high school and I saw these kids and just I was like wow, you know, he's changed. He's no longer the fat kid. Now he's doing something better with his life. So I said, you know, if they did that to him, I wonder what they can do to me.

This individual eventually balanced his parents' requirement that he complete college and his own desire of serving in the Marine Corps by going into the Reserve Component. He served in the Reserves for one year, before crossing over onto active duty, where he still is today. The compromise with his parents worked: he entered into the Marine Corps, which has been a very successful career for him, and he graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Engineering.

Whereas this respondent noticed the physical change in a peer, others were captivated by the uniform and appearance of Marines who were at best acquaintances, but whom they noticed precisely because of their uniform and features. These individuals sensed a transformative power to the Marine Corps and, after these initial impressions, quickly decided they wanted to develop in a similar manner. For example, one respondent (M16) cites the random sighting of a neighbor, whom he did not know particularly well, as his first exposure to the Marine Corps. Regarding his neighbor, he says, "So later he came back and then he was an NCO [Noncommissioned officer] and I saw him in his blues one day and it just came to my head. It was just the uniform. It is the most distinguished of the different services..."

Further, the men in this study, like the women, also cite the Marine Corps uniform as a major factor in their service branch selection. Once they saw the uniform on a well-

defined form, they were convinced that the Marine Corps was the superior branch and the only one that fit with their conceptions of what service can do for an individual. One example (M15) is a male respondent who served for one term in avionics before separating to pursue school and work. He recalls his initial impression of the recruiters from the different service branches as:

I learned about the Marine Corps and it really grabbed my attention with the clean cut look and just the pride. Like, I don't know, every time you see a poster of the Marine it's always, you always tell, you know, you can also see the pride in his face and all that roughness... It was just that the whole clean cut appearance thing, well with the navy that's what it was. It just came down to the appearance and like the way they carried themselves because when I went -- when I would go to the recruiting offices I would see some of the sailors that were there as recruiters and they were kind of big and with the army it was just most of the guys in there had moustaches. So, I don't know but like when I went to the Marine Corps recruiting office I could just like sense the pride, the discipline and the professionalism -- you could tell that those guys were -- they weren't joking around. They were serious the whole time.

When asked about the physical appearance of the Marine Corps recruiters, he says:

It's very rare that you'll see a recruiter out there that's a little chubby or out of shape, period. And then they always -- all the recruiters they're always selected and they're always these lean, just lean professional looking guys or women and I think that's what -- that's what grabs most of the -- everybody's attention is that wow like these guys really know what they're doing.

These data represent the opinions voiced by the majority of respondents, both male and female, regarding the importance of the Marine Corps uniform and the demeanor of its representatives in their decision to become Marines themselves. For those respondents considering military service generally, the Marine Corps uniform became a major deciding factor in their service branch selection. They also were impressed with the physical presence of the Marines they encountered who projected strength and

confidence. As discussed in the previous chapter, many respondents turned to the military as an abrupt, effective way to change their life course. In this search for change and meaning, many found the presentation of Marines to speak to the direction they wanted for themselves. As recent immigrants feeling confused about their new homeland, or as young men seeking to transform physically, the Marine Corps provided convincing role models and a road map for respondents seeking change.

### *The Marine Corps' Reputation and Common Values*

In addition to the focus on the Marine Corps' uniforms, the Marine Corps also appealed to respondents because of its claim as the most prestigious service branch in the military. Initially, as new prospective recruits, many respondents were not aware of the tradition and lore surrounding the Marine Corps, but as they became exposed to the culture, they came to believe that they were joining the most elite group in the military and that this group was aligned with values common to the Mexican American community. As the smallest of the service branches, the Marine Corps prides itself as being able to do the most with the least amount of resources. It also frames its mission as being the first line of defense for the United States; it is designed to be an expeditionary force ready to deploy in a self-sufficient manner. This sentiment was repeated by one of the male respondents (M13) who states, "Everybody talks about the Marines how they're first to do this, first to do that and everything and they always want to go there and do something big so that they can be remembered."

Building on its culture and mission, the decision to serve in the Marine Corps often is framed as a decision to serve in the most elite, prestigious branch; by joining the Marine Corps, these individuals believe they were demonstrating their own value and

self-worth. Many of them considered serving in other branches, but once they internalized the beliefs and culture surrounding the Marine Corps, they could not justify serving in a branch which, in their eyes, was less esteemed. This rationale was communicated by all respondents, regardless of gender, and was stated as a primary reason for joining the Marines. When asked why they thought the Marine Corps was such an esteemed branch, a representative response is from one male respondent who countered my question with, ““I mean, who doesn’t think the Marine Corps is prestigious?” Some of the respondents explicitly communicated a desire to become part of this prestige. One woman (F1), for example, explains, “...the tradition and history of the Marine Corps, that’s what I wanted.”

Part of this distinction also stems from the Marine Corps’ boot camp, which is the longest of all the services and is perceived as being the most difficult. Several respondents cited the appeal of completing the most arduous recruit training because it opened more opportunities for them across the military generally. An oft-cited motivation was that because Marine Corps recruit training is the most intense of all the boot camps that Marines are able to cross over into other services without having to complete the new services’ training. In contrast, it was explained that if an Air Force Airmen wanted to join the Marine Corps, then that individual would have to complete the Marine Corps’ recruit training first. Marines could cross over easily, while others could not. Further, respondents noted the importance of earning their Eagle, Globe, and Anchor uniform insignia and the official title of “Marine.” At no point did they feel this title was given; rather, they all felt they had earned it.

In addition to the cross-over appeal of the Marine Corps, many of the respondents focused on the challenge of recruit training and of their desire to prove something to themselves and to others. Recruit training represented an opportunity to demonstrate one's commitment and physical prowess, while also challenging one's ability to handle severe adversity in a public way. One woman (F11), for example, presents her decision to serve in the Marine Corps as, "...they always say that the Marine Corps was really hard, but for me it never scared me off. It was more like a challenge that I wanted to do. I wanted to prove to everybody that I could do anything I wanted." This sentiment was echoed by others, such as another woman (F4) who says, "They're [the recruiters] very enticing. I mean, they really presented the challenge. And the recruiter that I talked to, he really became a friend during that time. So it was just -- it just seemed like the right place and of course you know, I told my friends I was going to join the Marine Corps and they were -- it had such a good reputation, I think, as one of the leading fighting forces."

Despite the challenges these women experienced, their small numbers coupled with the elite reputation of the Marine Corps influenced their own characterization of self in a positive manner. These women saw themselves as being different from their peers who chose another route in life, whether it be college, a job, or service in another military branch. One respondent claims she was attracted to the Marine Corps because of the small proportion of women. She says, "...so the Marine Corps was pretty cool and the fact that they only had such a small number of women I thought, well you know what, this is pretty neat to belong to such a small club like that." Some characterized themselves as being independent and strong-minded; they considered themselves to be uniquely suited to handle the environment of the Marine Corps because of their own



traits. One respondent (F2), for example, characterized herself as, “It could be because I am a female and I don’t know if I should use the word empowered with that. I’m a very bold person and I stand up and I’m outspoken. And some people are taken back by that even in the military.”

Others sought out the Marine Corps because it had been presented to them as an organization that was “off-limits” to women. One respondent (F3), for example, took this characterization, which she heard from her recruiter, as a challenge to overcome. She explains it as:

When he kept saying you know females aren't really wanted in the Marine Corps, it's more of a men's society, and the Army is more accepting of females, and at that point that even pushed me more like well I'm going to show them that even if they don't want women over there we're here so....

Another woman was told by her traditional father that the Marine Corps was not an appropriate place for her to be. He wanted her to get married and start a family.

However, her reaction was the opposite, which she explains as:

...my dad's pretty old school and he was like you are a woman, you do not need to be in the military. You need to be at home, you need to find yourself a husband that's going to work and you need to stay at home and raise the family. Which is -- that just made me want to be like a part of it even more.

Their observations were supported by the actions of outsiders who framed them as being different after learning about their military identity. One woman (F10) remarked that people would treat her differently once they found out she was a Marine. Whereas before she may have been perceived as somewhat docile and compliant, her identification with the Marine Corps made her tougher and more resilient in their eyes. She became a force

to be reckoned with. She provides her own characterization of Hispanic women here and also identifies the change in others with:

Like I feel like that -- because like all the -- most of the Hispanic women that I know in the Marine Corps they're really like very I can handle my own, I don't need somebody to help me out to handle my business and things like that. And so like I kind of see that I guess they'd be like with me at least, it's funny because like I feel like that a lot sometime like I feel like I can deal with my own problems, I can deal -- I can handle things on my own. And then it's just I would say you kind of almost use it as a threat, I guess. I don't know, it's kind of weird where like people would be like oh, you know you can't do anything wherever and I'll be like I'm in the Marine Corps and they go like oh, okay well, maybe you can do something.

The idea of defining oneself through challenge also was expressed by several of the male respondents, who tended to focus on the physical aspects of serving in the Marine Corps. One male respondent (M19), who represents several of the men who came to the Marine Corps as athletes, focused exclusively on the physical challenges of the Marine Corps. As someone who values physical fitness, he found little about the other services that he thought would push him physically. He explains his perspective as:

Well, they have different types of physical tests. And the Marine Corps had the hardest one. And so I was like, well, that kind of speaks kind of for itself and then so I just was kind of talking and I tried every single one and I blew them all out of the water 'cause at that time I was -- it was very in shape and the Marine Corps was the one that challenged me the hardest. At the time it's still fairly simple but just the difference that the Marine Corps does as far as doing pull-ups as opposed to push-ups. I think it challenges somebody else more physically as well as mentally. And that was the challenge that I wanted as well as needed.

Other men also focused on the physical aspect, but they saw the Marine Corps as challenging other aspects of their personality, such as their introversion. One male respondent (M18) remembers the recruiter's presence and effective message as:

I saw this video and the video was and I said wow! That's pretty cool but I don't think I can do that. At the time I weighed like maybe like 115, I wasn't a strong guy, super strong guy, not the guy that's really outgoing, I'm pretty shy and quiet, not the guy that you would think was going to sign up for the Marines at all. So he got me in there and he got me interested. I thought it would be a great challenge since I had never really challenged myself ever and I thought this is going to be a pretty big challenge. So I was like, well, if I'm ever going to prove to myself that I can do anything, it would be this.

This man served only five years in the Corps before separating to earn his bachelor's degree. The challenge and later success that he encountered in the Marines has followed him to his new path. He has done very well and just secured a federal government job that provides decent pay, benefits, and job security. He believes that it was the original challenge of the Marine Corps which taught him about personal initiative and demonstrated to him that he could be successful.

Finally, some of the men approached Marine Corps training as an opportunity to demonstrate their commitment and toughness to others, especially friends and family members who believed that Marines were distinct from others in terms of their skills and characteristics.

Several of the respondents not only used the prestige and traditions of the Marine Corps to frame their own decision to become Marines, but presented a broader perspective on why Mexican Americans may be more attracted to the Marine Corps over the other services. They found common ties between the values of the Mexican American community and the values of the Marine Corps. In particular (and as discussed earlier) they focused on the work ethic of Mexican Americans and the community's willingness to work around difficulties concerning work conditions, physical labor, or time demands. For many, being Mexican Americans from a lower socioeconomic

position involved building money, careers, and families from the ground up; it also involved making sacrifices for their family and community. This common value of hard work and personal growth translated well to the recruiting policy of the Marine Corps. The respondents saw the Corps as the branch that unilaterally reduced its people to the bottom before building them back up through hard work.

The respondents also spoke about pride and how this value translated across the Mexican American and Marine Corps community. Many of the respondents characterized Mexican Americans as being very proud people. Although they may not have the most prestigious jobs or earn a lot of money, they take pride in all the work they do. One male respondent (M15) explained the connection between Mexican Americans and the Marine Corps as:

...the Marine Corps, it's in their slogan - they're The Few and the Proud. So I think that from Hispanics, at least the Mexican Americans, our point of view speaking to others or just growing up around them, it's our sense of pride. Everything that we do we always want to do we always want to be the best and I think that has a big impact. I mean, it's just the sense of pride among the Mexican Americans, the Hispanic-Americans.

The sense of pride cited by many of the respondents also was connected to the sense of history the respondents felt both as Mexican Americans and as Marines. Many of the respondents were aware of their cultural history as Mexicans. They also, as all Marines are, were well aware of the sense of pride and tradition residing within the Corps. Thus, in addition to their values of hard work and pride, they also found a link in the common value of tradition. A female respondent (F4), who served a career in the Marines, describes the common ground between the two communities as:

It's a very proud you know, I think more prouder than any other service. We rely very much on we're proud of our tradition. Every single Marine

can cite this you know, the history and the traditions of the Marine Corps. Who was the Marine Corps' first recruiter, we all know that. And Hispanics are very proud of their tradition as well. They have very traditional roots and culture. So again there's this very I'd say close similarities.

Finally, several of the male respondents made a connection between the Aztec fighting tradition of Mexicans and the warrior tradition of the Marine Corps; they saw a common linkage in the warrior ethos of both. By entering the Marine Corps, they saw themselves as reclaiming a tradition of fighting for, "...the warrior class in us is in our blood." One man (M1), who served as an infantryman, was especially outspoken about this connection. He saw himself as coming from an ethnic lineage that valued hard work and from a community that was willing to fight for its honor. He joined the Marine Corps, not for any type of tangible benefit, but because of a "love for country" and "the willingness to fight" for it. He originally tapped into this fighting instinct by joining a Hispanic gang in California. However, once he realized that the gang lifestyle was leading him down a destructive path, he decided to channel his fighting energy into the Marine Corps. He explains both the draw to gangs and the Marines as:

they're a warrior people and in the Mexican culture we do the same thing. It's either you go and join a gang which we did for a while to show our toughness and that we're warriors, or you go and you join the military. And that was our way of saying, hey, we're warriors, too. This is our proof ever since the Aztecs and stuff like that. We, this is our proof that we're fighters.

Once this man decided to pursue military service, he immediately knew that he wanted to serve in infantry, which is only MOS that recruits must specifically choose. They cannot be placed into it against their will, even if there are manpower shortages. This respondent explains his decision as:

And actually this is what I wanted to do. I had already, we'd been raised as fighters, that's part of our, it was brought up to us like it was our cultural thing to do that we were warriors. We go out and we fight ever since the Aztecs. Pancho Villa was supposedly related to me. We're fighters. That's what we've been born, bred, corn fed to do.

The connection this man felt between his ethnic lineage and his chosen occupation extended beyond feelings of a common tradition to actual historical occurrences that linked Mexicans and the Marine Corps. In the Marine Corps, one of the major transitions for an enlisted servicemember is promotion to the Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) ranks. Marines mark this transition by adding a "blood stripe" to the blue pants of their dress uniform. According to Marine Corps lore, this stripe symbolizes a bloody battle that occurred during the Mexican-American War. This respondent explains the history as:

Only the NCO's have that. Everybody else wears the plain blue, no stripe. Officers and NCO's get that. And the reason, what that symbolizes is that's the blood that was shed from the NCO's during the Mexican American War on the assault at Chapultepec. And this NCO came up and he was giving a ration of shit to some boots [slang for new Marine or recruit] that were white and he was pointing at it. And he was saying you know why we got this? This is because the blood that was shed at Chapultepec. And we all knew this. Anybody who goes through Marine Corps boot camp knows that. And he's like but you know what they won't tell you is that Chapultepec was defended by people from the military academy for Mexico City and these guys were like twelve to fifteen years old. He's like these Marines were killed by twelve and fifteen year olds, but that's who we beat back to get Chapultepec. And so even though we're in the Marines and we look at Marines and a lot of my friends die for the Marines, the Hispanics who still have that pride in us are still like well, yes, the Marines are great but as little kids we still held up a division of Marines at Chapultepec.

This individual saw a connection in the warrior tradition of Mexico – beginning with the Aztecs and continuing to the Mexican American War – with the traditions and culture of the Marine Corps. Although, out of all respondents, he presented the most thorough

knowledge of both histories, others shared similar interpretations and/or applications of the warrior ethos. Another male respondent (M10), who did not serve in infantry, shared a similar perspective, when he declared, “that warrior ethos was inside of me, in my blood.” When asked why he chose the Marine Corps, he replied with, “I wanted to be considered, you know, one of the deadliest things, you know, this country has ever had.” These respondents differed in their overall knowledge of Mexican history, but they both made sense of their decision to serve in the Marine Corps by linking the two cultures. Thus, some respondents chose the Marine Corps because, among other things, they found a warrior ethos familiar to them in the Corps.

Although the connection between the fighting tradition of Mexico and of the Marine Corps was only expressed by a few men, all of the respondents, including those who had negative experiences in the Marine Corps, expressed a universal pride in their accomplishments and in their membership into such an elite community. Many cited the desire to earn the title “Marine” as a primary motivation behind their decision to enlist in the Marine Corps over the other service branches. They were seduced by the history, traditions, and institutional nature of the Corps and many saw overlap between their values as Mexican Americans and the values of the Marines. Although many were drawn to the military because of practical considerations, all cited an emotional, intangible attraction to the Marine Corps because of the history, vision, and values it projected. Whereas other services may have offered occupational opportunity, the Marine Corps offered stability and benefits, but it did with a focus on its core values and identity. These respondents were not just joining for the money, but because of a desire to earn the title of Marine; they were prioritizing institutional values over occupational ones.

Because each of the respondents had been socialized into the Marine Corps – they all had completed recruit training – it is difficult to know how much of their response reflects their motivations at the time of enlistment and how much of it has resulted from being part of the organization. The effect of intense socialization is summed up by this quote from a male respondent (M17):

Yeah what other people like some people say oh man, that's tough like the others are tough, but the Marine Corps is the best. Like I remember in boot camp like they tried to push that a lot onto you like the whole pride issue. They tell you how the Marine Corps did this, how the Marine Corps did that and try to bring in -- try to make you appreciate it and try to establish that Marine Corps' history of greatness.

However, even if their values have changed over time, this group of respondents clearly linked prestige, pride and the search for a challenge, as meaningful, unifying motivations that brought them into the Corps and sustained them through their service.

As discussed in the previous section, the respondents often framed their decision to serve in the Marine Corps as an extension of personal values: they valued work, so they found the service branch that in their view was the most physically demanding; they valued prestige and pride, so they chose the service that most embodied status and tradition; and they valued a warrior ethos, so they chose the service that, from their perspective, most embodied the Aztec fighting tradition of their community. They formed a cohesive vision of their own individual values, grounded in their own social location as determined by their ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic position, and formed a connection with the institutional values of the Marine Corps. Service in the Marine Corps emerged as a meaningful way for the respondents to fulfill their own practical and financial needs; it also created a bridge between their own occupational and



institutional considerations. They did not have to choose between securing a job and working in an occupation that furthered their sense of duty and identity, as the Marine Corps provided a way for them to have both.

The majority of respondents also highlighted their dedication to family and the cohesiveness of their biological family. Despite the struggles that many respondents observed during their youth, whether of financial pressures or the negative influences of the community of their youth, they found stability in their families. Their families grounded them and protected them and, in turn, the respondents were fiercely loyal to them. These family ties often were undergirded by a comprehensive understanding of community and ethnic lineage. All of the respondents were proud of their ethnic heritage, and many found ways to stay connected to their community even once they joined the Marine Corps. Some did this by participating in ethnic dance troupes; others stayed connected by participating in installation-specific Hispanic heritage groups. However, the majority found connection to their ethnic community by joining the Marine Corps, which became a family to them, and provided an acceptable outlet for them to continue the warrior tradition of Mexico's descendants.

In the next chapter, I discuss many of the common experiences of Mexican American men and women while serving in the Marine Corps. I note similarities that may have roots in their common ethnicity, but also parse out differences by gender, home of record, and citizenship status. I also explore the different experiences by gender, which appears to be the most salient characteristic for both the men and women.

## **Chapter IX: Experiences in the USMC – The Influence of Race, Ethnicity, and Community**

In the previous chapters, I considered what experiences and/or characteristics were drawing Mexican American respondents to the Marines, with a focus on both occupational motivations and institutional values. In this chapter, I focus on the experiences of the respondents while in the service. Overall, the men and women in this study share similar motivations for service; there appears to be a common foundation, rooted largely in the combination of class standing, the community of their youth, and their ethnicity, that attracts them to the Corps, regardless of gender. In the next two chapters, I explore whether these similarities continue once they begin their service. Using the words of the respondents themselves, I address my research question of: **How do the military experiences of Mexican American men and women in the Marine Corps compare?** I also consider my sub-question of: **Do these experiences differ by social characteristics and if so, which ones?**

Central to my discussion on the experiences of Mexican American men and women is the application of an intersectional perspective. Because the military legally stratifies servicemembers by gender, I am interested in how gender influences military experiences. However, I also consider the role of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic position because gender stratification exists within other systems of power. Additionally, the lived experiences of men and women in the Marine Corps are not only shaped by their gender, but also by how it intersects with other social characteristics. With this perspective, I can consider both the obvious and fine gradients of power that may doubly-disadvantage certain groups as well as provide privileges for others. Thus, even though

Mexican American men and women may share common social views and experiences based on their ethnicity and socioeconomic position, their perspectives also may differ by gender; there is no one set “Mexican American” perspective or experience because ethnicity, race, and other social characteristics shape lived experiences in meaningful, different ways. Thus, the experience is not uniform, nor easily categorized, yet the broad social characteristics of race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic position, provide useful conceptual tools for understanding how bodies are marked, divided, united, and incorporated into organizations, like the Marine Corps.

The men and women in this study share similar motivations for service and similar reasons for selecting the Marine Corps as their branch of service; these similarities are largely rooted in their common socioeconomic statuses. These influences also may be tied to their common ethnicity and from the communities of their youth, which tended to be majority Hispanic. However, the commonalities between the respondents transitioned to clear divisions by gender once I asked them to reflect upon their experiences while in the Marine Corps. At that point, gender superseded all other external characteristics in its salience. Gender is the master status for the respondents in this study; it overshadows all other social characteristics and has an extensive effect on how one, especially a woman, experiences the Marine Corps. Even though I expected to see a difference in experience by gender, I expected to find more commonalities between the Mexican American men and women based on ethnicity, socioeconomic position, and other social characteristics than I actually did. Because of the importance of gender, I divide my discussion of the experiences of Mexican American Marines into two chapters based on the overarching issues and concepts noted by the respondents. In this chapter I

focus on the influence of race, ethnicity, and community and in the subsequent chapter focus on the influence of gender. I include an intersectional perspective in both chapters, but also separate the concepts for clarity and to highlight the major issues noted by the respondents. I also want to recognize the overarching importance of gender in a gendered organization like the Marine Corps and so, I choose to address it separately.

In this chapter, and addressing my second research question, I first consider the experiences of the respondents by focusing on their observations regarding the role of ethnicity and race and to a lesser degree, socioeconomic position and citizenship status. They view these social characteristics as having a major role in their experience in the Marine Corps. In regard to ethnicity, the majority of respondents discussed the large number of Hispanics in the Marine Corps, even as they noted stratification in the population by skin color, language ability, and country of origin. They did not view themselves as a minority group, but as a population growing in size and influence within the Corps, especially in the enlisted ranks. They also framed the Marine Corps experience as being part of the larger Mexican American experience, especially for those from poorer communities. They believed it was becoming part of the culture as a common reference point for Mexican Americans broadly. However, there were differences in the noted relevance of the structural presence of Mexican Americans, with the men expressing greater awareness of this change than the women. There also are class differences in the noted structural presence of Mexican American Marines with the respondents noting that their size and influence was not as great in the more technical MOS's or in the officer corps.

There also was a difference in the respondents' reflections regarding race. Race did not appear to be a salient characteristic for either the men or the women. The majority framed themselves by their ethnicity and gender; however, they did use race to frame and stratify others. The men, in particular, relied upon race to frame African Americans, a minority group that has a smaller proportional and numerical presence in the Marine Corps than Hispanics. This stratification was most pronounced when the respondents talked about Puerto Ricans, who may be different racially, despite sharing the broader label of Hispanic. The respondents used this hierarchy of race to frame their own distinctiveness as men, whereas the women were much less likely to note these differences. This difference in experience between the men and the women shows how men, who can more easily adapt to the gendered demands of the Marine Corps, are able to create further distinctions by race, ethnicity, and overall integration, while the women are less likely to focus on these differences. For the women, gender remains the most salient characteristic, making these other distinctions less pertinent to their own experience.

*The Structural Presence of Mexican Americans in the Marine Corps: Ethnicity as Community*

Even with an intersectional perspective, there are times when certain characteristics seem to increase in visibility and importance, both from an organizational and an individual perspective. In terms of their numeric and proportional representation, Mexican Americans, as an ethnic group, are a minority in the Marine Corps. They have greater representation than African Americans, but they have lower numbers when compared to the dominant group of whites, and especially white males. Thus, although

the Marine Corps is the service branch with the greatest proportional presence of Mexican American men and women, it also is the branch with the greatest proportion of white men. It is unique in its demographic composition, as the other services tend to have higher overall concentrations of minority groups, even if the specific groups are smaller and whites remain the dominant group. In this study, the high proportional concentration of Mexican Americans was noticed by almost all of the respondents. The appearance of ethnic commonality became meaningful, even as other differences by language and home community became relevant as well. Many also remember being surprised by the high visibility of Mexican Americans throughout their Marine Corps careers.

When asked what it is like to be a Mexican American in the Marine Corps, the most common response was that Hispanics are everywhere; in other words, the respondents did not feel like a minority group, but that they were rejoining their ethnic community. One woman (F10), for example, replied to the question with, “I mean I’ve definitely seen a lot of Hispanics around there. So but as far as, like, being a Hispanic in the Marine Corps, I don’t think that we get treated very differently only because of the fact that like I said that most of the Marine Corps as far as I know, it’s Hispanic.” She explained this further by including her observations from recruit training graduations at both MCRD San Diego and MCRD Parris Island. On the West Coast she observed, “Like I went to my ex’s brother’s graduation on the West Coast. Almost everybody that graduated was Hispanic. And I’m sure that would come from the fact that most of the Marines came from California and Texas.” She had a similar observation on the East Coast which she explains as, “But on the East Coast, I have noticed too like there are

definitely a lot of Hispanics even in my section most at least I would say 75% of the Marines in my section alone - in supply alone - are Hispanic...it's definitely the majority of the Marine Corps as far as I've seen." She also states that the high proportion of Mexican Americans is not just limited to recruit training, but also applies to the manpower policies of her own unit. Her work peers have noticed this trend and it has become a source of good-natured banter. She states:

We joke around a lot, like it's kind of funny cause, like, my boyfriend at the time, right now he's actually white. He's Italian and Irish. So we always joke around a lot saying how like he's going to become the minority of our section and all that stuff. And it's like we joke around about a lot of things like cause whenever we've got new Marines usually they are Hispanic. The last four times that we've had new Marines they've been all Hispanic. And they'd be, like, oh, here we go another Hispanic, another Mexican to the group or something like that. So we definitely joke around about it a lot.

She ends her observation about the high visibility of Mexican Americans by linking service in the Marine Corps to the broader Mexican American community. She says, "...being in the Marine Corps that it's just like - I feel like I'm definitely associated with the Hispanic community."

Like the previous respondent, several of the women noticed the high proportion of Mexican Americans in the Marines. However, the men reported even greater recognition of this trend; this may be because the majority of Mexican Americans in the Marine Corps are men, which makes them more noticeable to other men as peers. Sometimes they noticed this trend right away, as communicated by these male respondents. One commented (M7), "Especially initially when I went to Camp Pendleton, or, yeah Camp Pendleton to San Diego well there was like...they're everywhere," whereas another one said, (M13), "Everywhere I'd go I found one. 'You're in Okinawa, Japan?' ... And then it

became pretty evident to me as I, you know, was reading rosters off... barracks rosters. Yeah, I went 'wow.'" These comments were reoccurring as demonstrated by another male (M16) who stated, "I did notice that the Marine Corps is populated with a high percent of Mexicans." Other times they did not notice this trend right away, but it became evident to them with reflection, as demonstrated by this quote (M3), "I think probably in our unit there was definitely a lot of Hispanics. And that was different, I mean I don't think I was really aware of it at the time, but now I look back and there's a lot of them."

Oftentimes the visibility was not limited to Mexican Americans, but applied to Hispanics overall. Although there are stratification and prejudices among the different ethnic groups within the Hispanic community (which I address later in the chapter), many of the male respondents also noted the high proportion of Hispanics and found camaraderie within the extended group. In some cases, they were surprised to find so many Hispanics, as expressed by this male respondent (M14), who says:

When I joined I was just, you know, what they show in the commercial is interracial thing but they always just show the poster boy with the blond hair and blue eyes. And I guess you expect to see a lot of white guys there and you're thinking you know they're going to be you know racist toward me cause I'm a Latino and -- but when I went to boot camp, half of my platoon were Latinos. They were all from different countries. We had, you know, Guatemalans, Mexicans and El Salvadorian, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Nicaraguan. I don't know like you know all kinds of Latinos in the Marine Corps, you know, guys from Honduras, from El Salvador.

After creating this first impression, many of the respondents began to expect this high numerical presence as they moved to new work centers and new military installations. One male respondent (M2) discusses how the high proportion of Hispanics could be found everywhere with, "In the Corps in general. Everywhere you go, whether it be



admin, whether it be like the maintenance guys or whatever, there's always a few Hispanic dudes." This same individual also noticed a difference in Hispanic representation as a civilian. He experienced a higher concentration in the Marine Corps than he did as a civilian employee in southern California. He explains it as, "I think, there's more of us in the Marine Corps to begin with so it was easier to get along, but if you have a civilian job I'm always like, I'm the only Hispanic dude in my class. I don't speak Spanish anymore other than with my parents. But when I was in the Marine Corps, I spoke Spanish all the time."

From this high representation, many of the respondents felt a sense of camaraderie and community with fellow Mexican American Marines. They believed their numbers were sufficient enough to cushion them against discrimination from other racial and ethnic groups in the service. They experienced social cohesiveness, formed from their common ethnic identity, and had a critical mass, where the collective was large enough to protect the individual, especially the men. The social cohesiveness stemmed from belief in a distinct type of kinship with other Mexican American Marines. Sometimes this link was based on common experiences grounded in their common social locations, such as expressed by this woman who says, "Everybody has big families, and we all love eating Mexican food and cooking it and, you know, it was pretty similar." Others saw a more sentimental, powerful connection that extended through perceived bloodlines and kin connections. One male respondent (M7) characterized the connection as, "we're basically the same family, same Hispanic families." Another male respondent (M13) found ties through a common Mexican-Aztec heritage, which he describes as:

And you know, I think it's kind of like -- 'cause, you know, the Mexicans, they just descended from the Aztec warriors and in a way, it's kind of like your own little tribe of people, you know, that -- you know, you'll fight for each other, you'll die for each other, and you know that you can depend on these people. And these people will never turn their back on you. And, you know, it's just -- you just form this bond and it's -- I don't know. I think it has a lot to maybe evolutionary perspective on it, you know. Probably somewhere in between and the fact that that's how Aztecs used to live. You know, they were warriors, like that.

In addition to values, sometimes this kinship was connected to the sharing of a common language, with Spanish proficiency becoming a marker of one's "Mexicanness." Many respondents spoke Spanish with co-workers, even though Marine Corps policy prohibits this. When asked to explain why the Marine Corps' policy, one respondent (M5) explained it as, "If you're talking in Spanish they can't understand what you're saying. So they take it as you're being disrespectful to them. You can be talking behind their back or whatever. And so you're not supposed to do that. So in uniform you're only supposed to speak English..." Despite these rules, the sharing of a language continued within the ranks and often brought Mexican American Marines even closer, as demonstrated by this quote from a male respondent (M18) who says, "We did -- sometimes we did sit together a little bit tighter than let's say than the white guys. It seems to me like the Mexicans were sometimes able to speak Spanish and talk amongst each other so there was a little bit better communication or more communication, not better but more communication."

Building on this sense of community, when faced with discrimination, even if presented in a joking manner, many discussed how their large numbers empowered them to unite against these incidents of discrimination. One female respondent (F13), for example, explains the dynamic as:

And, you know, we would kind of hang around together sometimes, you know, and we could -- you know, we'd stick together in a shop. You know, we had like a little bond too because if they were kind of like making fun of Mexicans that day, you know, we kind of rally up against them or you know, whatever. But yeah, it was kind of an unwritten rule that we would all look after each other.

Confident in the supportive nature of the Mexican American community within the Corps, many of the respondents admitted to seeking out other Mexicans with each move. One man (M10) describes it as, "You know, oddly enough, there's a lot of Hispanics in the Marines. It's not that hard to transition into." The respondents used the perceived similarities in preferences and values that they shared with other Mexican Americans as a buffer against the changes and leadership structures inherent to the military lifestyle. A male respondent (M2) describes his preference for fellow Mexicans as:

I would say so because I remember like when I had to go to Okinawa, the first, once I found out who was being deployed with me I pointed out, I saw who the other Mexican dudes were going to be and oh okay, I'm going to be close with them. I'm going to stick with them. Turns out I didn't, I didn't like them. I ended up getting close with this Italian dude so, I don't know. I did look for it and I kind of did look to bond with my other Mexican, Hispanic Marines but, and then that's basically when also like when I would, when we were done with work at the end of the day, I bonded with all the other Mexican dudes in my, we'd hang out, go get some drinks or something with the other Mexican dudes in my shop or something. So I think in a way there is kind of a subculture.

Another woman (F13) also discussed this dynamic, but rather than discuss the group perspective, she focused on her leaders and the connections she had with them. She felt as though she benefitted from having Mexican Americans in her chain of command, especially since she felt a bond rooted in their common ethnicity. She explains it as:

Yeah, 'cause I had -- an NCO bugged me and he was really nice and he, you know, he would talk to me and he didn't treat me like I was your, you

know, he was really nice to me because I think he felt like we had some sort of bond it's because we're both Hispanic. I think he was actually Mexican working -- you know, he got into the military. But, yeah, you know, we're very respectful with each other. We are happy to, you know, have each other around because we were outnumbered. It was nice to have other people to talk in Spanish with or whatever, you know, share -- you know, stories about our families or talk about, or you know, things like that. Just kind of relate to each other where I couldn't with anybody else.

In addition to finding community and support within the Marine Corps, many respondents believed that minority groups, and Mexican Americans in particular, were set to become powerful players in the Marine Corps' leadership hierarchy. They described their presence as (M5), "Being a Hispanic in the Marine Corps is almost like having a club within a club," which extended to both numerical and influential dominance. Many of the respondents jokingly referred to discussions such as (M16), "we talked of how we are taking over the Marine Corps." Some even expressed how this sentiment was spreading outside the Mexican American community to others who became convinced that (M15):

But like I said I know that it's out there because even higher ranking guys or even lower ranking guys they'll say the Marine Corps has gone through a thing where it's like I think the last few the highest ranking enlisted members which is the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, the last few of them have been of a minority background and so that was one thing that I did -- I saw that was common with everybody they would -- a lot of people would say if you're not a minority you'll never be a Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps.

Although still a minority group, the majority of respondents expressed awareness of and a connection to other Mexican Americans in the Marine Corps. They did not feel like powerless individuals, but found safety, empowerment, and community from their high proportional presence across the Corps.

However, the perception that Mexican Americans had a large presence in the Marine Corps also was specific to the respondent's MOS. Several of the respondents who worked in highly technical positions did not report seeing as many in their own work centers, even if they noticed a lot of Mexican Americans on the military installation generally. One female respondent (F5), who worked in a very technical, specialized field, did not work with many Mexican Americans in her work center, which she explains as, "...not in my MOS. When I would be in comm [communications] squadrons where there was more I'd see a lot of them in radio or like the less technical stuff but not really. No, not really. I didn't really run into them." However, she also recalled having a Hispanic NCO in her work center with whom she frequently communicated in Spanish. This interaction stopped though because:

I only had one gunny [Gunnery Sergeant] who didn't like it because one time I worked with one Hispanic sergeant. In my MOS there's not a lot of Hispanics, computers, so that was kind of another sad thing because you want to be around people just you had things in common. So one time I had to work with one sergeant. We were both sergeants at the time and we worked great together so I'll take care of this. You got this? Okay, great, boom, boom, we were just we worked really good together. And so we'd speak Spanish sometimes. Gunny didn't like that. [He'd say]... 'You're in America, you speak English' and we just did it anyway just to make him mad but that was the only time that my ethnicity came into play. They didn't like that.

Another woman (F8) in a highly technical electrical field reported the same experience. Although she saw plenty of Mexican Americans on the base, she did not have many in her shop, which she explains as:

Actually, no there's not [a lot of Mexican Americans]. I mean there's actually not a lot of Hispanics. Not in my unit, not even in my shop and in my shop there's like seven of us at the most, but I mean yeah, there's actually -- there's like overall if I was to look at our base, at the New River Air Station, yes there's a lot of Hispanics. If I look at, you know, my

work center just my shop, there's actually not a lot Hispanics. It's like, it's mostly Caucasians and there's even fewer black people.

This recognition of working in areas with few Mexican Americans was limited to those in technical fields, which require higher ASVAB scores, and was expressed only by female respondents. The men tended to see others like them, as expressed by this respondent who is an infantryman (M9) who says, "I have noticed there's actually a lot of Hispanics in the infantry side though. I don't know...they just like infantry here. It's better than home. I guess, many of them that's all they know of. But there is a lot of like Hispanics in infantry. And it's fine."

The perception that there were a lot of Mexican Americans in the Marines also was specific to one's rank, with several respondents noting that Mexican Americans had large numbers in the enlisted ranks, but that this trend did not carry over to the officer corps. As discussed in Chapter Four, this observation reflects current demographic trends, as Mexican Americans are less represented in the officer corps, mainly because of the requirement to have a college degree prior to commissioning. One male respondent (M2) summarizes this as:

They're all, and I remember this clearly because there were a lot of pilots on base and everything. I never saw a Hispanic pilot, never saw a Hispanic officer. I saw a chief warrant officer that was Hispanic one time but most of us were enlisted, gunny sergeant or sergeant majors or something. If I did have someone, but yea, that was Hispanic that was on top of me it was like enlisted, never really any officers.

Thus, even though the majority of respondents noted that Mexican Americans had a large presence in the Marine Corps, they also noted that this presence was limited by MOS and by rank. Several expressed a desire to see more Mexican Americans as officers, even as they celebrated their large presence in the enlisted ranks. They believed that their ethnic

community already had made great strides in securing a notable, respected presence in the Corps. They found strength in these numbers and assurance that they would be treated equitably and if not, that they had support to handle any negative issues.

In addition to encountering large numbers of Mexican Americans in the Corps, many respondents also remember their enlistment as an opportunity to learn more about their ethnic heritage. Because of the visibility and cohesiveness of Mexican American Marines in their units, many respondents, who began their military careers with little recognition of their ethnicity, found opportunities to learn and internalize Mexican American history, culture, and values. The influence of Mexican American culture within the Marine Corps was great enough to make them identify, in many cases for the first time, with their cultural roots. One male respondent (M17), for example, who did not grow up in a predominantly Hispanic community, claims that his sense of identity changed once he encountered other Mexican Americans in the Marines. He says, “So like in Hawaii that’s when I think I got more into my Mexican side cause I was surrounded by a lot of Hispanic people.” This sentiment was shared by some of the women as well. One woman (F7), who grew up in a large Hispanic community, but only connected to her ethnicity through gang life, recalls:

I do want to mention though the fact that when I went to -- when I was raised in my neighborhood, I wasn’t into the Mexican music, Spanish music. I didn’t really care to speak Spanish, you know I didn’t learn it so it was -- I didn’t want to work hard to learn it. And so I didn’t really care about my culture just the fact that it had a gangster side. But when I went to Okinawa, and I was already in about 5 years, I was a sergeant when I went over there and I noticed that I got in touch with my roots. There I learned a lot of Spanish music, talked with a lot of you know Spanish guys, Puerto Ricans, Colombians, Dominicans, Mexicans...

In these cases, the Marine Corps emerges as an organization that is so numerically and culturally influenced by Mexican Americans and Hispanics that those who did not readily identify with this side of their ethnicity often emerged as aware and proud of their Mexican roots. Living and working in a predominantly white organization, many of the respondents sought out other Hispanics as a way to learn and practice their own culture. Mexican Americans were able to establish both a safe place for ethnic identification that was also strong and vibrant. Service in the Marine Corps became a site for ethnic exploration and identification, rather than one of restriction. Ethnicity became a recognized difference among Marines that also became a way of finding and maintaining community. However, even with this sense of cohesion, an intersectional perspective also demonstrates finer gradients of distinction based on sub-components of ethnicity such as language and community of origin.

#### *Stratification among Hispanics by Race, Ethnicity, and Community*

Overall, many of the respondents noted a general feeling of contentment and safety within the Marine Corps due to the large number of Mexican Americans. However, many also noted a hierarchy within this same population regarding one's "Mexicanness." This stratification often was connected to one's appearance, especially one's race, and one's assimilation into American culture, measured by one's knowledge of Spanish and whether one comes from a Hispanic community or not. There were certain factors that made one more authentically Mexican and that could be used to measure where one fit in the ethnic group. This issue was especially in play for respondents of mixed ethnicity and race. Several men and women self-identified as being half white and half Mexican, yet they all strongly identified with the Mexican side



culturally because of their extended families and the community where they were raised. However, these respondents tended to be racially white and many were not fluent in Spanish. This made them less Mexican in the eyes of some of their peers who claimed greater ethnic purity. One male respondent (M4), for example, who traces his family roots to the Basque Europeans who settled in Mexico, remembers not being welcomed by other Mexican American Marines, because they thought he was a “white boy,” even though he had been “in a deeper kind of way, kind of embracing my Mexican roots.”

Other mixed-race respondents recall a similar welcome into their units. Some had distinct Spanish surnames which created the impression, unsupported by their physical presence, that they were “authentically” Mexican. However, perceptions of them changed once they arrived and their peers saw that they were light-skinned (racially white) or unable to converse in Spanish. Although they considered themselves Hispanic and often were considered so by white Marines, they had to work to be recognized and accepted by the Mexican American community in their work center or living area. Thus, they were not accepted as racially white nor as ethnically Hispanic; they initially functioned in a limbo status. Other respondents experienced a different problem: they looked Mexican, yet they had a non-Spanish surname, making it difficult for peers to place them based on a single characteristic. One female respondent (F7), for example, who grew up in a heavily-concentrated Mexican American community in California, recalls:

Because the fact that when I went in my last name is [Irish sounding]. It's always been; that's my maiden name. So when I went in, they automatically assumed I was married because they were like you look Mexican but why do you have a white last name? And then I explained well, my dad he's Irish and they are like, oh. And then when they found

out I couldn't speak Spanish, it was like oh, you're not really Mexican. Yes, I am and they were like you're you know brown on the outside, but white on the inside. And I was like no, I'm Mexican. I was just was brought up you know in a different area and you know so what? You know I don't know my dad so I don't really relate to that Irish side at all. And so they -- if you didn't speak Spanish you didn't fit in, you know. They kind of talked about you or would speak Spanish in front of you so that you wouldn't understand what they were saying.

This stratification often extended to one's home of record, with distinctions made between those from Texas and those from California, with general exclusion of those from other states. Although not the majority, several of the respondents reported an initial tension between individuals from these two states. One male respondent (M2) describes it as, "the only thing was, oh you're Mexican. You're either from Cali or from Texas. So they'd come and yell at you, you from Cali or Texas. From Cali. And it was almost like bad blood between the two, like we didn't like the dudes from Texas and they didn't like us." Another male respondent, who was from Texas, remembers a similar breaking off among the men by their home of record while he was in the School of Infantry. He explains (M7):

Because, I remember being there was cliques, there was Mexicans from LA. There was Mexicans from San Diego, there's Mexicans from Texas. And we kind of all kind of stayed in our groups. But I actually was, I could actually, had friends in all three groups. But I actually, I actually spent more time with the guys from LA because it was LA and they were going home every weekend so I wanted to go home with those guys. So I would go to LA. But you know we were young kids. And I think about it now you know, we don't know any better and you're going to go back to what you know. That's in everything, you're going to go back to what you know. So I knew guys from Texas, same background, so we kind of stuck together. But then I remember thinking why am I sticking with these guys? I've already done what they've done, let me go see LA you know? That was one of the things that I chose I remember, on my interview when I got interviewed was world travel. Like let me go with these guys in LA. Valadez [pseudonym] was his name, PFC Valadez from LA, East LA. And I became friends with him. And I became friends with Miranda, he

was from San Diego. And I would go to LA and San Diego with these guys to I guess experience different things. But there, I was like one, the only one that did that. The other guys were still just staying with their group.

When asked to explain these differences by state, a common refrain from the Texans/Tejanos was that their group was more authentically Mexican than those from California. They could not exactly pinpoint the tension, but believed there were different levels of assimilation between the populations, with the Californians furthered removed from the traditions and language of Texas. The Californians, in contrast, considered themselves to be more mature and worldly than their Texan peers. One male respondent (M6) explained it to me as, “One of the main differences is that a lot of them don’t know how to speak Spanish at all. And even if they do try, it doesn’t come out like it should. And you can tell and they’re subject to being called, like coconuts, cause you’re brown on the outside and white on the inside.” Thus, there was stratification among the respondents based on their community of origin, and to a lesser extent, their language ability, which emerges as a proxy for assimilation.

However, it appears as though this stratification within the Mexican American community was short term. Although perceptions grounded in this hierarchy emerged as an initial way of categorizing people, none of the respondents saw this as an ongoing trend. Once familiar with each other, Marines moved past these distinctions, and the term Mexican American Marine became more inclusive. This need to pull together may come from the realization that they were working in a predominantly white organization, where they remained the minority. These respondents, especially the men, recognized the growing presence of Mexican Americans in the Marine Corps, and may have chosen

to overlook differences to unite around important social characteristics: one's race and ethnicity.

In addition to this stratification within the Mexican American community by one's skin color, language ability, and ethnic purity, many of the respondents also noted a difference among Hispanics in the Marine Corps. In most cases, this distinction was benign with the respondents seeing more commonalities than differences, especially for those of mixed ethnicity. One male respondent (M16), for example, describes interaction among different Hispanic groups as, "but our race kind of is close to the other Latin races too. So not just the Mexican Americans but Salvadorans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans and all that kind of stuff – we always find a right way with each other." However, several of the male and female respondents also made distinctions between Mexican Americans and other Hispanics, especially Puerto Ricans, to the point where they expressed prejudicial views about other groups. One female respondent (F7) explains it as, "The only difference was there was, like, rivalry like how do you say? Like the Mexicans with the Tejanos, the Cholitos, they all were against the Puerto Ricans and Dominicans and Colombians."

The main distinctions claimed by the respondents to exist between Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans were language, race, and areas of settlement in the United States. First, several of the respondents considered Puerto Ricans to speak a different, less respectable form of Spanish while they, as Mexicans, used a more coherent, precise form of the language. Although each Latin country has its own dialect and vocabulary/slang, the difference in Spanish usage was a significant obstacle toward integration for some of the respondents, as it demonstrated difference rather than

community. One female respondent (F9) explains it as, “They talk like -- they’re not -- they talk their Spanish is more like East Coast, like how people from Puerto Rico talk, cause their dialect is a little bit different than the Mexicans. So they talk differently.” Whereas this respondent presented the differences as an observation, other respondents implied more negative judgment in their description of Puerto Rican Spanish. When asked to explain further his perceived differences between Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, one male respondent (M5) described them as, “I guess because we listen to different music and the way they talk. It's almost like they're lazy. They don't want to finish saying all the words or speak Spanish the right way.” This perception comes from a Puerto Rican linguistic trend to cut off the ends of words that Mexicans would include in their speech.

In addition to language, the negative stereotypes of Puerto Ricans also involved race and where they had settled in the United States. Puerto Rico, like other island populations and countries in the Atlantic Ocean, was once home to a large number of African slaves. Because of this historical fact, there is a large number of Puerto Ricans who are racially Black and ethnically Hispanic, a demographic trend that differs from Mexican Americans who are more likely to be racially white and/or Indian. One female respondent (F9) describes the differences as, “...because a lot of the especially East Coast, a lot of Puerto Ricans over there, they kind of look more like Black people cause they’re Black Hispanics. So they were -- they’re different you know.” This racial difference made integration with Puerto Ricans an uncomfortable reality for some of the respondents because as described by one female respondent (F7), “Like the Mexicans would think the Puerto Ricans are black and then the Puerto Ricans, because the

Mexicans didn't like them, the Puerto Ricans wouldn't like the Mexicans.” Similarly, a male respondent (M2) describes the prejudices held against Puerto Ricans by some of his fellow Mexican American Marines as:

Most of them from the East Coast were like Puerto Rican and there was even more bad blood between I think the Mexican Marines and the Puerto Rican Marines. It was just like, even though I did have a good Puerto Rican Marine friend from Harlem, but other than that I didn't, I don't know. It's just different. I don't know. The way they talk and then, I'm not trying to, I'm not a racist or nothing like that, but the differences kind of make you like shy away from it a little bit, or kind of like not hate them, but also kind of like not be as open.

This discussion of having more guarded relationships with Puerto Ricans was expressed by several male respondents who admitted to a rivalry between groups. A different male respondent (M5) characterizes their interaction as, “Because I know being a Mexican we didn't really get along with the Puerto Ricans or the Jew people. But the Puerto Rican and the Jew people get along really good. And there's...I mean it's just funny how the Marine Corps there can be rivalries within rivalries within rivalries. It's kind of crazy.” Racial differences created distinctions among the Hispanic population broadly, an issue that did not affect relations among Mexican Americans, who, at least in this sample, saw themselves as either racially white and/or Indian. They also tied these racial differences to one's community of origin, with Puerto Ricans characterized as black and from the East Coast, and therefore, different from other Hispanics.

Despite being linked with the common label of Hispanic, many respondents did not see a connection with Puerto Ricans or consider themselves to share a common identity. Building on this perspective, several stated that Puerto Ricans also did not consider themselves Latinos. One male respondent (M14) explains it as, “Yeah so you'll

see Cubans, Dominicans and you know Puerto Ricans, but I mean they don't really consider themselves even though they are Latinos. They just you know they think Puerto Ricans they are their own ethnic group or whatever..." Although the majority of respondents found a common bond with all Hispanics, including Puerto Ricans, several male and female respondents forwarded predominantly negative distinctions between the two ethnic groups. Overall, race was an important distinction for many of the respondents, and the biggest marker of difference between them, as Mexican Americans, and Puerto Ricans, who embody greater racial diversity. It became another way of marking where one stood in the ethnic stratification system that organized much of social life, especially before interaction could occur, in the Marine Corps. This also shows how the respondents used their own race, ethnicity, and Spanish language use to create distinction between themselves and among others.

*Perceptions of Belonging: Experiencing Race, Ethnicity, and Community*

In addition to the ethnic stratification that occurred within the Mexican American and Hispanic community, the majority of respondents also had to manage the perceptions and reactions of others regarding their own race and ethnicity. Although not as salient as gender, these characteristics, and how they intersected with other facets of social life, emerged as powerful organizing devices for the respondents, especially as they interacted with other characteristics, such as community of origin. This intersection of characteristics influenced perceptions, from others and from the respondents themselves, of which bodies were best suited for military service. Although I focus on race and ethnicity in this section (mainly because they were important characteristics drawn out by the respondents), I also point out the multiplicity of lived experiences in the organization,

when possible. With an intersectional perspective, I focus on those qualities of existence perceived as most impactful for the respondents, especially in how they were incorporated into the organization.

In some cases, the respondents reported subdued racism that was impossible to report due to its nature, but which achieved its desired effect of showing difference and power to the respondent. Additionally, they also described a culture of recognition and assimilation where the ethnic and racial identities of all Marines, including the Mexican Americans, were singled out for derision and then used as symbols of brotherhood. Thus, fellow Marines were able to explicitly recognize the race and ethnicity of other Marines, and to do so in a derogatory way, as a way of demonstrating fraternity. Finally, even though many respondents described an atmosphere where race and ethnicity were broached in humorous ways, many also reported prejudicial views about African Americans, especially African American men. They either believed these views themselves or had heard them in the work environment. This tension demonstrates that there is no one “minority” experience in the military, and that groups who share a common status among the dominant group – that of racial minority, for example - may also create distinctions between and among each other.

Before discussing how the respondents framed others, I first focus on the racism and discrimination some felt in the Marine Corps. Although not the majority, several of the respondents reported experiencing racism in the ranks because their appearance and name were obvious markers of their Hispanic ethnicity. In most cases, they believed these behaviors and attitudes were specific to individuals and that, as described by one female respondent (F2), “...not everybody’s like that and that’s not the Marine Corps as a



whole. And those are just a few dinosaurs that we still have in that hopefully will retire soon.” This respondent was especially outspoken about the subtle racism she experienced as a Marine. With an almost twenty-year career, this woman has experienced the Marine Corps over a longer period of time than the majority of respondents and has progressed to a relatively high rank, which may have shaped her experiences. She also had a father who served in the Army during the Vietnam War; he experienced severe racism during his time and he had shared these experiences with her. His warnings have made her more attuned to the issue. Additionally, her long service has given her a mature, thoughtful perspective on racism in the Corps, which she describes as:

And you still have to deal with the racism. It just might not be as blatant as it used to be. And when you do encounter it you just know in your soul and your gut that you’re being treated differently because of your race or gender. But unless you have hard evidence you really just have to kind of suck it up and deal with it and wait to move on or wait for that person to leave because it is more difficult because the racism that we do have in the military nowadays they keep it under wraps. It’s just they’ve become very good at it and they’re able to do enough to make sure you know but not to do enough to allow you to do anything about it...Exactly and I have personally had to deal with that. And it is very difficult, for me it’s very difficult and it can be very demoralizing.

She remembers one leader, in particular, who harbored deep prejudices against Hispanics.

She recalls her experience with this individual as:

I was actually in an organization that I for sure knew that one of my top people that was in charge of us was, I mean, he just did not like Hispanic people, he didn’t like them. He did everything possible to make them look bad, not just females but he did it with the males too. And again it was so subtle. And it was so far apart that it was very hard for any of us to prove or to say anything. But when we sat down with each other we could definitely see the difference between us and our, I’ll say our white counterparts...It’s hard to fight that when you have no sufficient evidence.

The Marine Corps upholds the formal policies prohibiting discrimination by race and ethnicity, and as such, personnel understand that obvious acts of discrimination will be punished. However, the formal policy, although helpful, cannot reshape the attitudes, and sometimes the behaviors of those who enter the service with negative views toward others. Problems arise when individuals with prejudicial attitudes feel empowered to act on or express them, especially in a manner that evades formal detection and prosecution. In particular, this becomes a problem when the individual is in a position of authority in the organization, such as a higher ranking officer or senior enlisted member. Thus, although the female respondent was the most thoughtful about experiencing subdued racism, she was not the only one and her willingness to just deal with it also was shared in the reflections of others. One male respondent (M6) acknowledged that there was subtle racism in one of his units, but he chose to ignore it as a way of protecting himself from possible repercussions, especially since the racism was difficult to prove. He thought challenging the issues would hurt his career and cause him personal harm. He explains his decision to stay quiet as, "I just took everything that came my way and I absorbed it...I was gonna absorb it and I was gonna make it to my honorable discharge."

Other respondents also noted individual incidents of stereotyping where their behavior was labeled negatively because of their ethnicity and larger concerns about their loyalty and citizenship status. However, there rarely was a sustained pattern that they felt they had to contend with on an ongoing basis. A male respondent (M1), for example, who served in infantry, recalls hearing his supervisors talk in derogatory terms about Mexican Americans. He explains the experience as, "So I've dealt with racism from that angle and of course they didn't like anybody from California, especially Mexicans from

California, did not like us which we'd just flat out have, the higher ups would have a conversation about who was the more useless Marine, a Mexican or a Californian and then they'd pull me over who's both." He knew he was being singled out because of his ethnicity and because of perceptions that Californians were liberal, but he also knew that the actions of his superiors were subtle enough to escape any formal complaints. He also believed these comments to be limited to those few supervisors and not representative of his unit overall.

Similarly, other respondents reported single incidents of discrimination based on their ethnicity which left an impression, but which they did not consider to be representative of the Marine Corps. Sometimes this discrimination occurred during recruit training when the respondents had little knowledge as to the general standards of conduct in the Marine Corps and had no ability to challenge those who were guilty of the infraction. Interestingly, none of the women reported this type of behavior during recruit training; this could be because their Drill Instructors were much more focused on stressing the salience of gender in the Corps to their recruits which they highlighted repeatedly. In contrast, several of the men reported incidents during recruit training when their ethnicity was highlighted in a negative way. In all cases this attention came from their Drill Instructors, who had complete authority over them, leaving the men little opportunity for redress. It never came from their fellow recruits because of the extreme training environment which regulated every action of the recruits as well as their interactions with others. One example of a discriminatory incident is explained by a male respondent (M15) who went to recruit training in San Diego. He recalls:

When I was in boot camp once again, I was on the rifle range and I have a very dark skin complexion. So you can tell right away that I'm Hispanic or something. And when I was there one of the instructors on the rifle range asked me if I was Mexican American and I told him yes I was and he asked if I was a citizen so I said yes I am and when we're in boot camp we don't really question what's going on and things like that. So I was going with it at first and but it really bothered me because he asked me -- he was asking me like this personal like questions about my ethnicity. He asked me if the US ever went to war with Mexico who would I join or who like I was with and I told him I said well I'm with the US Marine Corps so I told him my allegiance's pretty much to the United States. And he and this other guy kind of like smirked and he's like oh yeah, that's just the -- he said that's the answer that they train people to say or whatever. So I was like I think that was my first experience with the harsh racism in the Marine Corps.

In this case, the respondent was targeted for his ethnicity and because the DI believed that he had more loyalty to Mexico than the United States, despite being born and raised in Texas. His patriotism was considered suspect, even though he had volunteered to serve, because of how his DI interpreted his ethnicity and community of origin. When discrimination occurred during recruit training, the respondents coped by accepting the derision; few questioned what they experienced. They felt powerless in the situation because it was a training environment and they believed that the Drill Instructors were purposefully targeting their race and ethnicity as a way to break them down mentally. The majority did not encounter similar types of behaviors in the operational Marine Corps, further framing these acts of discrimination as a training anomaly.

However, there were times when Marines experienced discrimination outside of recruit training, although they remember this discrimination as being limited to a certain duty station. For example, a female respondent (F9) reported discrimination connected to both her ethnicity and her California roots when she in-processed into a reserve unit on the East Coast. She was sent to the unit as an active duty liaison, but was working with

reservists from the New York area. She believes that these individuals stereotyped her as being a gangster because of her appearance and home of record, even though she had no previous connections to gang life. She recalls the experience as:

When I was at that duty station yes cause I was a Hispanic girl from California and they thought I was a chola from East LA. And I was like what? Cause I have a tattoo on the back of my ear that I had got and the recruiters knew about it and I had it and I tattoo my eyebrows because when I was doing the bad stuff I messed up my eyebrows cause I would pick at them. And so all these people thought-- like a lot of them thought that I was like just a chola from East LA. First of all I'm not even from LA, second of all I'm far from being a chola because my mom would have beaten my ass if I was a chola. I said I grew up on a farm with cows, pigs and horses, you know. I had to work in the fields with my grandfather so I'm far from being a chola. I said I have never had an affiliation of any gang being in California ever and I can't believe you guys think so. She thought I was a chola from East LA because I'm from California and I'm Mexican.

She believes that if she were white that her tattoos and appearance would have led to the assumption that she was a “surfer from Long Beach or something.” However, because she was Mexican and a Californian, she believes that several members of this reserve unit, who were not accustomed to seeing people with Mexican characteristics, made prejudicial assumptions about her based on her physical appearance. Thus, despite the fact that she grew up in a rural community, she was stereotyped negatively due to beliefs that Hispanics from California had a uniform gangster lifestyle, and that her appearance reflected this reality.

Despite these negative experiences, the respondents did not consider racist behaviors to be representative of Marine Corps culture, but as one time incidents. Even with individual experiences of racism, all but two respondents described the Marine Corps as being essentially a performance-oriented organization with the race and

ethnicity of people as unimportant when it came to staffing decisions. The women shared this perspective on the insignificance of ethnicity and race in the decision-making of leaders; however, they certainly noticed a difference by gender, which I discuss in the next chapter. However, in regard to race and ethnicity, the general perspective resembled that of this respondent (M16) who says, “In the Marine Corps, the thing that I like was there was no race issue or nothing. Everyone is welcome, if you are there for a challenge.” Similarly, this quote from an infantryman (M11) also is representative of the broader opinion:

The Marine Corps, another interesting thing about it, it didn't matter what your race was, it mattered how you performed. If you don't, you don't, it's one of the things that they did, is they never promoted someone that was not a leader. That was a huge thing. Even though you had the qualifications for it, if you could not lead other Marines, they would not promote you. And that, I mean, our leadership there is, I had you know black you know company commander. I had a black squad leader, Hispanic platoon sergeant, you know? Hispanic executive officers here and there. So it wasn't, I don't think it was you know, based on who's who, or based on you know more of a background and who, who looks better, whatever? It's more on performance.

Thus, the majority of the respondents saw the Marine Corps as mainly focused on the physical and leadership abilities of each Marine and unwilling to sacrifice effectiveness for preferential treatment. At the formal organizational level, the Marine Corps did not condone racist behavior; its members followed the formal guidelines on appropriate behavior, although many did just the bare minimum to maintain compliance. Ethnicity was not considered a worthy dividing line between and among Marines.

Although race and ethnicity may not have a perceived role in formal staffing decisions, these characteristics did have a prominent role in the informal culture of the Marine Corps as tools for recognizing and organizing fellow Marines. Many of the

respondents acknowledged a type of friendly name-calling that went on between Marines that was based on one's race and ethnicity. The terms used were derogatory in nature and certainly would have been an insult if stated by an unknown person or a superior.

However, the respondents framed them as friendly jabs between friends. These "insults" were not meant to be demeaning, but to signify the depth of trust between the respondents and others. For example, a male respondent (M9) provides an example of this interaction as:

Like yeah there's joking around about racism but with that it's like a close buddy of mine is like, my buddies are also white. And there is like one I've served with is black and stuff. They're the only ones that can call me a wetback or this and that, and I would not care about it, because they're like a brother to me. And I would name call him too you know, like dirty bastard or whatever but that's like the way we get along and especially when we're out in public when I'm with them and we call each other something people definitely stare.

This type of interaction, based on racial and ethnic recognition and name-calling was a reoccurring theme among the respondents. Other men had similar memories, which they describe as (M13) "We joked around often and if you didn't have a tough skin and took racial comments as a joke then life was tough on you." or (M4) "I'm not going to lie in the Marine Corps I mean there's a lot of [racial] jokes but it's never really like as far as me personally I've never felt it."

Likewise, the women also recalled similar interactions where their race and ethnicity were highlighted through the use of derisive terms. Like the men, they did not perceive this name-calling as mean-spirited, but as a unique part of Marine Corps culture that reflected the camaraderie of the unit. One female respondent (F8), who is still on active duty, explains the atmosphere as, "...we crack jokes and everything, white jokes,

black jokes, Hispanic jokes cause it's you know, it's just a ha ha thing but nobody actually means anything. There's actually like the -- racism is like the last thing on our minds." Other women had similar recollections; they remember good-natured jokes that identified their race and ethnicity, but that were presented in such a way as to demonstrate community. Another female respondent (F13), who separated from the Marine Corps after one term, describes the interaction in her unit as:

I have to say for me it wasn't too bad. I mean, yeah, there's, you know, people would make fun of other races, nationalities. But it's not just, you know, I don't -- okay, first of all, it's majority Caucasian. There was more Caucasians than any other. But you know, everybody got along. But you know, there was jokes all the time, white jokes, some Mexican jokes, you know, everything. All kinds of jokes. It's not like it was just, oh, all the poor Mexicans get picked on. It wasn't like that. So everybody, yeah, everybody gets picked on but you know. Yeah, I saw a little bit of racist -- but not racism, but you know, I got called a "beaner" a lot. You know, stuff like that. You know, just joking around. I didn't take it personally.

The experiences of these Marines reveal a common culture where race and ethnicity are brought into the open as topics of discussion; they confront head-on the negative perceptions of each race and ethnicity and then coalesce as Marines above these stereotypes. Frequently they are addressed using derogatory terms, but the respondents do not find offense in these interactions because they appear to apply to everyone, regardless of race and ethnicity. Mexican Americans experienced name-calling, but so did other groups, including the dominant group of racially white non-Hispanic Marines. These interactions were allowed to occur because there was a deeper understanding that these individuals were united in a common mission. Rather than create divisions between people, this culture of racial and ethnic recognition through name-calling seems to



provide an outlet for Marines to recognize their differences while affirming their common identity as Marines.

Even with the recognition of differences embedded into the culture, almost all of the respondents describe the Marine Corps as an organization whose fundamental strength was its ability to integrate people into a cohesive whole. They remember encountering incredible diversity within the ranks and observing the integration of people who in most other scenarios would never meet or if they did, would avoid each other.

One male respondent (M11) describes this experience as:

There is far less blacks in the Marine Corps than there were Hispanics, whites, probably about the same as there were Asians in the Marine Corps. But it was, it was interesting with our black Marines - they fit right in, you know? And you had, it was, it was interesting the dynamics, to see the dynamics where we had you know Caucasian Marines from the deep South that were raised in highly racist families completely getting along with black Marines and actually like cracking jokes at each other and messing around, actually developing a deep bond. And that was astounding to me.

The women shared similar observations regarding the integrative capacity of the Marine Corps. They were aware of the diversity in the ranks, especially among other women since there were so few of them. One woman (F3) describes the demographic make-up of the Corps as:

Oh my God it's, it's like a melting pot. You know how they say United States is a melting pot? I felt that the Marine Corps was a melting pot. Because you really do, even though one of my roommates was Hispanic, I had a Jamaican roommate at one point. And then I had a white roommate. You know? It's just like you really, you, I don't know, it's a little bit of everything. You learn different... everyone is from everywhere. Especially in the females because they're so few so they really do come from everywhere. From every corner of the big United States so you really do get to see a lot of people from different cultures and just the way they think, the way they do stuff, it's a little different.

They were amazed by the diversity of their fellow Marines and the organization's ability to blend them into a common identity. Another female respondent (F2) remembers confusing two Marines of different races because she was so focused on finding a Marine of the right MOS and rank that she completely overlooked their physical appearance.

She describes the incident as:

I made a joke one time with this student how everything gets kind of blurred in our eyes after a while, especially being in such an environment as ours. I went up to one of my corporals one time. And I said Corporal Smith. I need you to go do this for me right now. And the corporal turned around in his chair and he looked up at me and he's like, "ma'am. I'm not Corporal Smith." I'm like "oh, whatever. All the corporals look alike." And he's like "yes, but I'm black. Corporal Smith is white. And Corporal Smith actually was white with blonde hair so I mean they didn't look anything alike." But again to me I wasn't looking at them by race. I wasn't looking at them by gender. I was looking at them as a corporal that could get something done.

In her eyes, she did not see race or ethnicity because she was looking for a lower ranking enlisted Marine; the bodies were interchangeable as long as they had the right rank and skill set. Her experience demonstrates the skill with which the Marine Corps assimilates individuals from different backgrounds, races, and ethnicities into a common identity with its own recognizable divisions of rank and MOS. Overall, the identity of Marine has the power of unifying diverse bodies under one title; it has the potential to carry greater significance than other identities and characteristics such as one's race and ethnicity. It also demonstrates the need to include other markers of identity in an intersectional analysis. The respondents noted the role of race and ethnicity in their organizational experiences, but they also subscribed to a belief that their professional title of Marine carried greater weight. Thus, it is important to role of organizational socialization in

blending previous markers of difference into new titles and identities and how this also shapes one's experience.

However, despite the focus on assimilation and integration, many of the male respondents expressed prejudicial attitudes toward another racial minority in the Marine Corps: African Americans. Although from a general perspective they saw a Marine Corps that successfully integrated different types of people, at a personal level they had developed uncomplimentary beliefs about the values, capabilities, and work ethic of African Americans. There is the possibility that these Marines brought these prejudices with them into the Corps. However, there also is the chance that they adopted these views after becoming acculturated into the Corps. A common refrain from respondents is that the Marine Corps does not see color, but there were terms commonly used in Marine Corps speech that separated African American Marines, and anyone else with dark skin, from everyone else. Specifically, there were distinctions between "light green Marines" and "dark green Marines." One female respondent (F1) explains the terminology as:

Respondent: ...like I remember in boot camp one of the first things that my Drill Instructor said to us was like she said -- she was like there are no longer any brown recruits or white recruits or yellow recruits, she's like you guys are either light green or dark green and that's it. Like that's what they called us.

*Interviewer: What's the difference between light green and dark green?*

Respondent: Light green would be white Marines and the dark Marines would be all the brown and black Marines. But that was all. That was the only way that they would segregate us. And they wouldn't -- like they would just say that there're like there's no such thing as Mexican or Asian or White or any of this. They would say either light green or dark green. And that's it.

Although this respondent includes dark-skinned Hispanics in the category of “dark green Marines,” most respondents familiar with this terminology only included African Americans under this term. This categorization of light and dark green Marines was expressed by enough respondents to conclude that it was not just the culture of one training base or one Drill Instructor, but rather common organizational terminology. It also shows that divisions by race persist, despite claims that everyone is united under the common title of Marine, and that these divisions may be experienced most by African American men.

Perceptions about the abilities and work ethic of African American Marines were influenced by their seemingly small numbers in the Marine Corps and their MOS selection. Whereas the male respondents recalled seeing lots of other Hispanics in the ranks, they remember seeing only a few African Americans in their units. For example, one male respondent (M8), who worked as a mechanic, explains the racial composition of his unit as, “...there was, we had maybe two African Americans in our platoons. Yes, we had like two. We hung out with them. We talked to them. Together they weren’t together a lot, kind of different. One was from New Orleans. One was from Georgia. They may have been treated different maybe, but I wouldn’t know.” In this case, the respondent recalls only a few token African Americans in his unit and remembers talking to them, but only at a superficial level. Others observed African Americans, but noticed they were concentrated in certain occupations. A different male respondent (M10) explains the racial difference in MOS’s as, “I honestly believe that some of the black guys just go in there just to have something to do that pays. Because most of them I noticed enlisted into jobs like supply or administration.” This respondent worked as a

mechanic, but did not remember seeing African Americans in his MOS. Rather, they were perceived as working in the less risky jobs and as being motivated by the occupational benefits, like pay and benefits, rather than the more institutional demands like service and hard work.

These recollections of African Americans are more neutral than other perceptions of African American Marines and their role within the unit. A male respondent (M5), who worked in logistics, recalls seeing more African Americans in the Army than in the Marine Corps while deployed. When asked to explain why he thought there was a difference, he initially paused and claimed that he did not want to sound racist. After reminding him that his comments were anonymous, he responded with, "I'll just tell you the facts. But it might be that the Army's easier and there's a lot of lazy Black people out there." He believed that African Americans purposefully did not choose the Marine Corps because of the high work and physical standards required of all and that they chose the Army as a way of gaining the benefits of service with minimal sacrifice and effort. He tied the structural location of African Americans in the military to discriminatory beliefs about them and the Army as a service, rather than to broader social trends that may have shaped their decision-making as a minority group.

These perceptions about the low numbers and occupational placement of African Americans were the most pronounced among the infantrymen. Overall, white men are the majority in infantry, followed by Hispanic men; African American men are underrepresented in the combat specialties. Many of the respondents observed this trend and provided their own rationale for its existence. One male respondent (M1), who was an infantryman, describes the low number of African Americans as:

It was very rare because there was not a lot of them. But in the infantry the Marines have this saying that we don't see in colors in the Marine Corps. The only color I see is green. But they also have dark green Marines or what they call them for the black guys. Of course the thing about that is that there wasn't a lot of black guys in the infantry. And I think one of the reasons for that was again the onus from Vietnam about how they people would always say that they'd send a black guy out to fight the white man's war. And because of that fact they still stuck around. There's very few of them that go and choose infantry, not to say that there isn't a lot of them in the military because there is. But they're doing like supply or admin or stuff like that. Or one of the biggest motherfuckers I've ever seen was one of my receiving drill instructors, the staff sergeant. The dude was huge and he was the first real Marine that I had to spend a lot of time with and he was one of them. And then we had another good friend of mine, Barksdale [pseudonym]. And I think altogether in our company there was three.

Other male respondents had similar observations, although no others linked the low numbers of African Americans to their past history in the Vietnam War. Rather, they viewed their enlistment behaviors as representative of negative characteristics that they associated with the African American race; in other words, they forwarded discriminatory stereotypes about African American men. Another infantrymen (M9) describes the demographic composition of his past units as, "...you won't see that many of them. We always talk about that." When asked to explain why he thinks that is, he replied with:

Of course joking around saying they're lazy. But you a lot of blacks go into jobs of either radio operators. They are cooks. And then yeah definitely non-infantry where you see them. But yeah it's something we joke around about a lot especially with the ones who actually do go infantry. Which I've got some buddies that you know, are black and yeah we give them crap all the time. Hey where's your backup you know? Just whenever they're kidding each other, just joking around and stuff, like oh, especially like a lot of times it's like okay, I'm like who's the minority here? Because there will be a like a couple white guys of course more Hispanics. So yeah you're the minority right now. Just joking around about it and stuff.

Thus, whereas many of the respondents describe a Marine Corps that is race blind and capable of skillfully assimilating people from all backgrounds, there are negative perceptions about the willingness of African Americans to serve and their ability to do so. These stereotypes were especially prevalent among the male respondents, who noticed a lack of African American Marines, and forwarded their own rationales on why this was so. They unintentionally describe a hierarchy where certain bodies are deemed as less capable because of racial prejudices and stereotypes. Despite sharing a common gender, the male respondents created further distinctions between themselves and African American men based on perceptions of which group had the more honorable motivations for service and willingness to sacrifice. This difference by race and ethnicity demonstrates how the male experience is not unified, but diverse and complex.

In contrast, the women frequently reiterated the Marine Corps dichotomy of green versus dark green Marines, but they did not share additional explanations for why there were so few African American men and women in the ranks. Their experience is more in line with this quote from a female Marine (F1) who saw more unity among women of different races and ethnicities because of their overall small numbers in the Marine Corps and their heightened visibility. She explains it as:

It's a little different as a woman because you don't have that many women to find an actual group with. So you group with your roommates because that's who you're living with, and my roommate was African-American. I think all my roommates were African-American. I never once had a Hispanic roommate.

Unlike the men, the women did not use racial stereotypes to explain why there were fewer African Americans, and they did not focus on African American men versus women, in the Marine Corps; they just noticed the trend. They also discussed greater

camaraderie among the women, despite differences by race, ethnicity, and community of origin, because of the broader organizational rules and culture that limited their participation as women. Thus, their different recollections regarding the role of race may be because they also were a recognizable minority group saddled with stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes with which they had to contend. The women understood the power of group-based categories to shape and limit individual military experiences.

In this chapter, I explored the experiences of Mexican American men and women in the Marine Corps with a focus on those social characteristics that they highlighted as having the greatest perceived influence. Using an intersectional perspective, I find there is no one set “Mexican American” perspective or experience because ethnicity, race, and other social characteristics shape lived experiences in meaningful, different ways, although there were some noted commonalities. In regard to ethnicity, the majority of respondents discussed the large number of Hispanics in the Marine Corps, even as they noted further stratification in the population. They saw themselves as a group growing in size and influence within the Corps, despite noted differences by class (officer versus enlisted, for example). Many also described a culture of recognition and assimilation where the ethnic and racial identities of all Marines, including the Mexican Americans, were singled out for derision, but then superseded in importance by the overarching title of “Marine.”

There also was a difference in the respondents’ reflections regarding race. Race did not appear to be a salient characteristic for either the men or the women, but they did use it to frame and stratify others. The men, in particular, relied upon race to frame African Americans. The respondents used a hierarchy of race to frame their own



distinctiveness as men, whereas the women were much less likely to note these differences. Overall, these data demonstrate how race, ethnicity, and community interconnect to shape lived experiences and the ways majority and minority groups use them to create further, important distinctions. Building on this intersectional approach, I next explore the role of gender among the respondents, which emerged as the most salient characteristic and dividing line among the Marines interviewed.

## **Chapter X: Experiences in the USMC - The Overwhelming Influence of Gender**

In the previous chapter, I focus on the broad social characteristics of race, ethnicity, and community as conceptual tools for understanding how bodies are marked, divided, united, and incorporated into the Marine Corps. These characteristics, both as physical and social markers and as organizing systems of power, shape the experiences of the respondents in complicated, important ways and also influence their perceptions of how others interpret their military service. Continuing the use of an intersectional lens, in this chapter I focus on the observations of the respondents regarding the role of gender and consider how their experiences are shaped by gender norms, stereotypes, and pressures, especially when they intersect with sexuality. I also consider how beliefs surrounding gender shape respondent perceptions of others' performances in the Corps. This singular focus on gender is part of my broader intersectional focus; however, I present it separately because of its overarching importance in the Marine Corps, both from an organizational and from an individual perspective. This chapter, like the previous one, addresses my research question of: **How do the military experiences of Mexican American men and women in the Marine Corps compare?** I also consider the sub-question of: **Do these characteristics and experiences differ by social characteristics, such as gender?**

To explain these research questions, I focus on the respondents' observations on the role of gender, which emerges as the master status for the female respondents. For the women, gender was the guiding principle of their experience in the Marine Corps. It determined how they were trained and with whom as well as the MOS's in which they were allowed to serve. Gender also became an ongoing challenge they had to consider

every day. Although a natural part of social life, it became omnipresent for the female respondents.

Regarding their structural position, all of the women and the majority of the men were aware of the small proportion of women in the Marine Corps. The women were considered a unified category by gender, despite the diversity of races, ethnicities, and other social characteristics that shaped them overall. The women knew they were a small minority, as the evidence was everywhere to them, and their small proportions shaped the larger group culture in predictable, visible ways. The men also recognized the low representation of women, with the majority of male respondents reporting little to no contact with female Marines, and even less knowledge and contact with those who were Mexican American. The limited structural presence of women also influenced perceptions of MOS's, with the occupations allowing women viewed as less prestigious by many of the male respondents.

In addition to the skewed gender composition of the Marine Corps, the respondents also describe performance pressures connected to gender expectations, which are highlighted in a gendered organization like the Marine Corps. Several of the men, especially those who served for longer than one term, spoke of the need to perform at a high level despite physical and/or mental injuries. They described an organization with little understanding of the scars of war, especially if the wounds were hidden. The pressures of service changed based on their occupation and their physical and mental injuries, but were cited by many of the men as a fundamental part of being a Marine, especially a male one.

The women felt similar pressures to perform, however their experiences are framed by an awareness of their heightened visibility in the organization due to their small numbers and their legally-mandated absence from offensive ground combat positions. They understood how their gender shaped their experience in the organization and how this experience was formed by the intersection of their gender, ethnicity, and professional identity as Marines. Building on the demands of the title and role of “Marine,” all of the respondents described an ongoing need to prove their worthiness to their peers, even while confronting sexist behaviors and attitudes in the organization. Thus, according to these respondents and despite how it combines with other social characteristics, gender remains a fundamental building block of social life, especially in a gendered organization like the Marine Corps. It continues to influence who serves in the military and in what capacity; it also shapes how their service is perceived by others. Lived experiences, then, are not only shaped by one’s social characteristics, but by the social institutions in which one must operate.

*The Structural Presence of Women in the Marine Corps: Gender as Omnipresent*

Mexican American Marines are a minority group in the Marine Corps. However, their structural presence as an ethnic group has reached a point where they have achieved enough representation to feel strength in numbers as a unified ethnic group consisting of various races, genders, communities of origin, and socioeconomic positions. As discussed in the previous chapter, the respondents observed Mexican Americans and other Hispanics throughout their units and the Corps. In a way, their growing numbers provided the respondents with a safety net based on their ethnicity. They knew that they were a minority group, but they also were aware of their growing structural and

institutional power, especially in the enlisted ranks. The women, as Mexican Americans, shared in this observation, but they differed in that they did not remember seeing large numbers of Mexican American women; their recollections of the growing Mexican American community in the Corps were limited to men. The low percentage of women in the Marine Corps supports this observation (revisit Chapter Four for the statistics on the proportional presence of women in all the service branches), making the likelihood of seeing another woman, much less a Mexican American woman, very small. This small representation has implications for how they frame the importance of other social characteristics in their experience as Marines, with the majority focusing on women as a unified category, rather than one further parsed by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic position.

The observations of the female respondents reflect this demographic trend. The women were well aware of their minority status by gender, especially since many were the only woman in their work center. One female respondent (F2) describes her work environment as, “And some people are taken back by that even in the military, especially in the Marine Corps because we are only, especially in the officer field, there are only about four percent of us. And in most places I will be the only female on the staff and I’ll be like that for my entire time there with that organization.” The proportion of female officers is smaller than the proportion of female enlisted servicemembers, but her observation is reflected by the majority of female respondents, the rest of whom served only as enlisted Marines. For example, another woman (F7), who worked as a cook, recalls, “...after boot camp when I realized there was only like at the most 50 of us and like male Marines were like 400 and I was like wow! I didn’t really know that we were

the few of the few” while another (F3) who worked in supply recalls, “...I was literally the only female there.”

Not only did the women have to contend with small numbers, but they also had to contend with negative attitudes and/or stereotypes from their male peers, who had little to no contact with female Marines because of their proportions. One woman (F13), who worked in maintenance, recalls the interaction as, “You know, as a woman, I was the only girl in the shop a lot of the time. I mean, there was -- one time we had another female in the shop. I was the only girl in a shop of 60 to 80 males. And so that was kind of hard because when I first got there, you know, they didn't want me there.” The women had to counter increased visibility because of their gender – it was obvious that they were “different” based on their physical appearance – as well as increased stereotyping because of their limited contact with male Marines. They were viewed as suspect outsiders, with little ability to interact and change these perceptions on a large scale. This linkage between the small proportion of women and the negative attitudes of some Marines was shared by another respondent (F1), who also worked as a cook. She described her experience as:

...the male, the dominants in there, because when I was in, it was 500 males to one female. So it was really hard to get to do a lot of the things that you wanted to do, and they stereotyped you a lot, that you're not able to do it. You're going to go, you're going to get pregnant, or you're going to get involved in other stuff, and not be able to handle the types of duties that a male Marine would.

Because the Marine Corps segregates the men and women during recruit training, the women did not notice their numerical isolation until they arrived at their first work assignment, even if they had been warned about it during Recruit Training. Previously,

their experience in the Marine Corps had consisted almost solely of women, but this changed quickly for them. One respondent (F3) describes the transition from a gender-segregated to a gender-isolated environment as:

The minute you get to your first duty station to be honest. Because when you're doing all the training...in the Marine Corps boot camps are separate. The MCT is separate, and MOS school you do gather but everybody is kind of still lost and like trying to figure out left from right. We're just trying to get to our duty station but the minute you get to your duty station you feel it, or I felt it. MOS school you felt it a little. But like I said everybody is still kind of like what's going on? But once you get to your first duty station I mean the day you check in it's on from there on.

The women experienced a gradual transition from exclusively women to some women and men to almost all men with only one to two women in each work center. They noticed the change and experienced a shift in the group culture because of their limited numerical presence. They also quickly realized that, at least by gender, they were a distinct minority, and that their gender was going to have an overwhelming influence on their overall experience.

Because of their small numbers in the Corps, the women not only had to negotiate heightened visibility, but they also had to contend with perceptions that their presence was changing the normal course of interaction for the men. Sometimes the women did this intentionally; they purposefully asked their peers and/or leadership to reconsider topics of conversation or ways of interaction once they joined the group. One female respondent (F1) describes how she approached the topic of profanity-ridden speech common between male peers under the guise of professionalism. She explains:

And even while I was in, I remember one particular time there was our, one of our company, he was one of our top staff NCOs and he was, he would talk to us a lot pretty comfortably but I don't know, one day he was explaining something to me and he was using cuss words and I looked at

him and I said “you know, why are you using cuss words to me?” And it kind of set him back and I don’t think he realized it and I, it’s not that I expected him to be different because I was a woman, but I expect people to speak still in a professional manner. And I know in the military, especially with males, a lot of times that gets lost. So I think it took him aback but he gained a lot of respect for me and said, “You know what? You’re right. I shouldn’t be, we’re discussing something else. There’s no reason for that language to be used.”

Many of the men also were aware of the presence of women and the need to change their behaviors and actions with the broader groups. They shifted their behavior mainly because of a concern of getting into trouble for sexual harassment. Overall, they did not perceive their behavior as being unprofessional, especially when they were dealing with men only, but they also were aware that they had to change once women joined the team. One male respondent who previously had only worked with men as an infantryman had to change his approach once he began training men and women in Marine Combat Training. He explains the difference as:

...so when I first came to combat skills training I was like oh crap, like well hopefully I won’t say something inappropriate while I’m teaching a class because it’s not teaching my guys using whatever language I want. I hope I don’t offend somebody and get in trouble. But it was fine. I never really had trouble with it.

Other times the women were aware that their presence may change the normal course of interaction, but they did not expect their male peers to change behavioral norms just because a woman was present. One woman (F7) describes the challenges of fitting in a male-dominated environment and her conscious decision to accept certain behaviors and norms as a way of fitting into the organization. She describes her experience as:

So it was like the image of trying to fit in that was the toughest. I had to -- whenever they would have how do you say? I don’t know the word I’m looking for but when they would have naked pictures of females, disgraceful pictures, you know I had to just like suck it up, overlook it. I



didn't feel disrespected because that was what they were doing to you know, that's what they were looking at other women, they weren't doing it directly to me but at the same time I didn't want to say, oh you know that's not respectful. You should take that down cause then you know I'm a girl in their Corps and I'm crying about it. So I kind of just, you know I kind of just sucked up a lot of stuff to deal with you know just to fit in I guess.

Thus, not only were the women were aware of their minority status, but they also understood that their presence changed the dynamic in the work center. Sometimes the men consciously changed their behavior to avoid perceptions of harassment, whereas other times the women requested a change of behavior in the name of professionalism. However, the norm was for the women to accept the behavioral and cultural norms without expectations of change and accommodation (Kanter 1977a). They lobbied for inclusion and felt that asking for change drew increased, unwanted attention to their gender.

Although less aware of the stereotypes faced by the women, the men also were cognizant of the low number of women in the Marine Corps. One male respondent (M2), who worked in aviation, noticed a difference in the gender composition by service branch. He recalls, "I think it'd be different in the Marines just because the sheer numbers of, I think there's a lot more men. I saw a lot more women in the Navy and I saw a lot more women in the Air Force." The observations of this respondent are accurate and reflect the limited opportunities for men and women to interact in the Marine Corps. Many of the men had never talked to or even seen a female Marine during their time of service; this was especially pronounced for those in ground combat positions where women cannot legally serve. When asked about their working relationships with female Marines, I received responses such as (M16), "I never really have talked to a

female Marine” and (M8), “Women Marines, yes. We had one.” Another male respondent was startled to see women wearing the Marine Corps uniforms and explained his reaction as:

And like the whole north side of Camp Pendleton is infantry. The south side is everything else. So we’re left alone up there, we’re in the freaking no man’s land. You know? No one bothers us over there, we won’t bother nobody. But there’s no females around like, I had never seen a female Marine, until my second enlistment never. So it’s like hey you’re wearing the same uniform I am. You have long hair. But yeah that’s when I was like okay, and then it’s like the thing is like we’re always especially being grunts always told hey watch your mouth. There might be females like you know, look away.

Another male respondent (M10) described his reaction to seeing a female Marine as, “Oh, so rarely [did I work with a female Marine]. Not enough. The only one I saw in Iraq was in the mailroom. Yeah, so that was a pleasure.” The infantrymen, in particular, had almost no exposure to female Marines. One male respondent (M11), when asked about the experiences of female Marines responded with, “I am clueless. They kept them away from us. They kept them away from the infantry and there’s, you know, definitely a reason behind it.” When asked to explain the reasons behind this intentional separation, he framed it as:

Because it, honestly like with the high dynamics of an infantry and the cohesion they really want to keep you focused on your job. And what you have to do to get your mission accomplished and they saw you know, females and males working together ... in the infantry they saw that as dangerous. They don’t want the development of anything other than a friendship or... They don’t want any sexual aspect to it... [Even in] the non-infantry unit I went to was an artillery unit and they were kind in the same boat where they would, even though female Marines were in their area on the base, but they weren’t really incorporated like you would see them working like you know, personnel jobs. But that’s about it. I, I honestly wouldn’t be able to say you know, how it was to like work with them.

This respondent, as well as the other infantrymen in the sample, had no interaction with female Marines and had difficulty even imagining what their work experience was like or how they contributed to the overall Marine Corps mission. Finally, a few men were convinced that they were interacting with women in a normal work environment and that the proportion of women was representative and balanced. As the dominant, privileged group, the men were able to frame the entrance of women into the Marine Corps as permissible, and even a fortunate option. They were the gatekeepers and they were allowing the women to join their organization and even “enjoy themselves.” One male respondent explains the composition of his work center as:

Yeah, we worked with a lot of women cause we were a -- like we were aviation command so we did have a big group of women, I would say about -- in our command which is -- our command was huge, he had a big squad. In about 1,000 I would say we would have at least about 20 women in the Marines.

According to his observation, women were only 0.2 percent of the workforce, but he framed this as being a normal, and even “big group” of women.

Even when they had an opportunity to work with them, many of the men framed these relationships as tangential, and potentially risky. They did not go out of their way to engage in conversation or build bonds with their female co-workers. When asked about the level of interaction, one male respondent (M2) described it as, “Not at all actually. There was very few and, maybe, like not friends, but acquaintances I guess.”

Another male respondent (M3), who worked in communications, recalls:

Very seldom did we interact at all with any females at all. The only time that we worked with females was probably the second time that I was deployed and they were just military police so it wasn't like, you had no reason to like talk with them or work with them or anything. I'd just see them around. That was it.

Others framed the lack of interaction between themselves and female Marines as a conscious choice made because of a desire to avoid any perceptions of harassment or mistreatment; this reflects the lack of appropriate models of male-female interaction in the Marine Corps. They believed that there was more to lose than gain by talking to their female peers. One male respondent (M9) frames his decision to avoid female Marines as, “Like watch your mouth, go away and not talk to them. Like all they do, like that's how I was brought up. That you talk to a female Marine all she's going to do is get you in trouble.” His belief was shared by others, such as this male respondent (M14) who worked in administration, who explains:

That I don't know, I don't know. I don't know, I guess because just what a man can do -- I don't know to tell you the truth. I don't know. I've never asked them. I don't really get into with the female Marines, I don't really ask them why they join and I don't really like dealing -- asking females questions. Yeah cause I'd say a few things and get them a wrong way and they just snap at me when I was lower ranking so I just pretty much just carry own business with them and -- I mean, I joke around but it's mainly just business with them.

Similarly, many men were convinced that this small proportion of women created too much trouble for the Marine Corps. These stereotypes were accurate to them, even if they had little to no personal interaction with female Marines themselves. One infantryman (M1), for example, believed that women should not serve in the enlisted ranks. He based his opinion on perceptions of improper sexual relations and related pregnancies caused by the presence of women on a deployment. He describes his observations as:

It doesn't work out that well. And this is coming from an enlisted point of view. There was, on the Pearl Harbor there was plenty of instances where in the middle we were stuck out at sea for four months and we lost, there

was (loads of), we would get new recruits, not new recruits, but new navy personnel that would get flown in all the time. And there was instances where they wouldn't even get to port and they had to be shipped off because they got caught doing something they shouldn't have with another guy. And some of them got pregnant and they had to leave. Others who were married and they got caught doing stuff. And in the, when we're out at sea women are just like men. And there's the sexual factor definitely became a point. You know I don't think that it works out that well with and not to be sounding sexist or anything like that. But I think that there is definitely some certain jobs that just females should do and that's some certain jobs that men should do, not because that women can't do it but because that there is just logistically speaking there is, the mission would be hampered by having them mixed together.

Others did not argue for even more restrictive occupational limitations for women, but they did have stereotypes about women's behavior in the Marine Corps that often were based on limited interaction with female Marines or were based on the behavior of a minority of women. In these cases, the behaviors of a few women came to represent all; women became a unified category, rather than individuals. Several men, in addition to the respondent above, characterized women as bringing promiscuous sexual behavior into the Corps and believed that, even with their small numbers, they were having a disastrous impact. One male respondent (M19), for example, explains the general belief among male Marines that they should avoid any type of personal relationship with a female Marine because:

...you're gonna get a hard time and the only reason they do is...Say, you've been with one female Marine you've been with half of the Marine Corps. And just for that thing it does not look good. There's never a good feeling towards a lot of people and so they kind of know about to like stay away from that kind of thing.

Representative of the opinions of many other respondents, one male (M12) described women through the language of negative stereotyping, although he added the caveat that he would not perceive them in this way if they did everything correctly. He says:

Oh, the female Marines in my unit were very, I don't want to say all, there was one. But the rest of them were very, I don't want to say whiny. But they always complained about every little thing that happened to them. They were always complaining about, about something. And so they were always on light duty. They were never on full duty, so they never did any of the runs we did. They never did any of that with the exception of one who was, I had a lot of respect for her. Yeah and, but I mean we weren't really biased towards females, I guess some were. But you know, there was that one that was very good, but that they all, acted like they were you know, that, that I don't want to sound sexist. If they did what they were supposed to do, they weren't labeled like that.

Many of the male respondents also forwarded beliefs as to how men should appropriately respond, believing it was their responsibility to give the women a hard time, in the interest of treating them the same. One infantryman (M9) explains his rationale as:

I don't know it's just like because there is the whole thing like oh you're female you can't do this, something they have to put up with. And of course being the cocky grunt, I would give the females a hard time. But nothing too hard, like step it up. And I, I wouldn't give them too hard of a time, I'll make sure I would treat them equal. I've been in different units and you'll see the females get treated a little different. All the females, they go a little easier on them, on them you know? Or watch the way I talk. I kind of try to keep it the same.

Other men, with little interaction to substantiate their opinion, believed that women had an easy time, sometimes as a result of their small numbers. One male respondent (M16) characterized the experience of women as being "fun." When asked why he believed that, he explained, "cause they never complained." Others shared his sentiment, as demonstrated by this quote (M4) "I just for the most part I, at least where I worked, the women really... I see they had it pretty good for the most part, generally speaking." as well as this perspective of (M9), "Oh, I think they have a good experience, yeah."

The female respondents were aware of the stereotyping forwarded by the men. Many of the women believed these negative assumptions began during recruit training, which is segregated by gender in the Marine Corps. Part of their reasoning stems from interactions they had with men as they gradually interacted toward the end of recruit training and through Marine Combat Training. One woman (F10) recalls a conversation she had with a male recruit as:

So in the beginning of training, the first two months of training, we trained separately but then in the last month of training, we kind of co-trained. We still went separate, but we trained side by side with them. I remember this one time when we went through an obstacle course and one of the guys was just talking to me and my platoon like, "I don't even know why you guys are here, you guys can't even do anything, you guys are just a bunch of girls." It's like - we're going through the same obstacle course that you're going through right now so I don't even know what you're talking about. And a lot of times we would deal with things like that.

Not only were the women made aware of the men's negative stereotyping through conversation, but they also witnessed negative behaviors from the men while in recruit training. One female respondent (F5) initially supported the Marine Corps policy of segregated recruit training. However, she changed her mind once she worked with a female soldier while deployed. She admired the way the soldier's NCOs incorporated her into the unit and cared about her training qualifications. She describes the Army team as:

She came out there with these guys and she had trained with them to come out because they came out together even though they had deployed from different units. And I remember talking about them doing training as far as like special weapons and courses and things like that that they had to do and she struggled. She wasn't a good shooter but I mean, that's not what was the issue, but I remember being around them and how they looked out for her and how they would say and she used to tell me the story about how she just couldn't pass this one course and how her one of the NCOs was on her like we're not leaving here until you pass, but it wasn't derogatory like oh, you suck, what's wrong with you? And there it wasn't

like you're female, you suck, you need to get it together. It was just like hey, she was another one of his troops.

In contrast, she remembers her interactions with male Marines while in recruit training as being hostile and absent of teamwork. After interacting with this Army team, she became convinced that segregated recruit training was breeding negative behaviors among the men, which they brought into their units. She recalls being surprised by the negative behaviors encouraged by the Marine Corps' Drill Instructors, who made a point of labeling female Marines as inferior. Based on her own observations and conversations with male Marines, she describes the behavior of the male Marines while in recruit training as:

I talked to a lot of guys about boot camp and they said that their Drill Instructors would tell them things about females. So all of a sudden they already have perceptions and then grunts would go and it gets even more just depending on if they went to the grunt side...it's even you know expanded even more. If it's integrated well I'm sure the males just are not going to sit there telling them you know oh, watch out for these women. I mean we would walk by them and they would say don't even look at them, they're nasty, they're this and that. Like in boot camp when we would march by the Drill Instructors would tell the male platoons to turn about face and look up at the sky and not look at us cause we're nasty and we're this and that blah, blah, blah. So, I think you know like I said before I was like training males together women is a bad idea but cause you know things happen but if you put men and women together anyway I'm sure in closed dorms things are going to happen. So either have that or have this culture of you know entitled to whatever you want to call it towards females I mean I would rather have to deal with things that would normally happen. And I just thought about that you know, if probably that culture is never bred there and they go out and you know they continue to work when is it going to come up?

She believed that the structure of recruit training with its gender segregation, in addition to women's structural location in the Marine Corps overall, bred an atmosphere of animosity for women. The separation of men and women allowed for perceptions of



difference to grow and continue, leading to an atmosphere that had the potential for being hostile toward women.

According to the women, the negative impact of gender segregation was especially noticeable when working with “grunt” Marines, or those who served in ground combat MOS’s. These men had little to no interaction with female Marines, and as a result, had inaccurate perceptions of what female Marines did in the Corps. Yet, as “grunts” they also had disproportionate influence in the Marine Corps, shaping the organizational climate in a way that is more challenging for women. One female respondent (F2) describes the impact of this limited contact on the broader gender climate as:

And it does make it difficult for some of those Marines that come up from the ground level, all male, occupational specialties, maybe some of the helicopter pilots, like I can’t remember the name of the ones, the ones where they just all had males. Or they come up from infantry or artillery or tanks where there are not females. And then even as senior leaders they still have that mentality like you know what. If you haven’t been in the infantry or you have never served at a regimental level you don’t have that same credibility with me like someone that has. And us, as females, we can’t do that. We’re not allowed to be down at those levels. So it does affect the mentality and I mean that comes with, I would say that’s a type of new racism that the military and the Department of Defense is just now starting to realize.

The structural presence of women in the Marine Corps also influenced perceptions of which MOS’s most epitomized the Marine Corps values of honor and courage. A hierarchy of occupations emerged from the respondents with direct combat specialties, such as infantry, receiving almost universal acknowledgment as being the heart of the Marine Corps. In contrast, those occupations where women were allowed to serve – such as those involved with support or aviation – were perceived as being on the

periphery of the Marine Corps mission and less encompassing of the institutional values of the service. Although important, these MOS's were considered to be a more watered-down version of the Corps.

One demonstration of this hierarchy is the slang terms the respondents used to refer to each other by their occupational community. Those who served in MOS's connected to ground combat were known as grunts, a term with potential negative meaning, but which often was embraced by those who worked in the combat specialties. Everybody who was not a grunt had a different nickname: Personnel Other than Grunt, or POG. The infantrymen used this term the most, but some of respondents from other MOS's used the term as well to refer to themselves. Finally, those who worked in aviation were known as wingers, a term with less perceived judgment attached.

Part of this sentiment of difference and distinction between the MOS communities came from the integrated training that those in aviation and non-ground combat MOS's experienced. Whereas those in ground combat MOS's trained only with other men, those in aviation and/or MOS's with more of a support function trained with women. From the perspective of the infantrymen, this integration led to a more watered-down version of training, which they were fortunate enough to avoid. One infantryman (M1), whose opinion is representative of others from the combat arms says, "...and a lot of time it carried over to the POGs. The POGs, because when they went through their training a lot of time, depending on what their MOS was, they went with women and so a lot of times these POGs didn't have the same discipline as the infantry guys did." Thus, there were perceptions that having women in one's unit reduced training effectiveness; the women were viewed as negatively influencing the Marine Corps. Due to their limited numbers

within the Marine Corps, the women encountered increased visibility as a token minority. Unlike ethnicity for the majority of respondents, gender emerges as a salient characteristic and division: the women were aware that they were considered different and the men were aware that the presence of women interrupted the normal flow of interaction for units that were all male, or almost all male (Kanter 1977a). One female respondent (F5), for example, describes how race was less relevant to perceptions of difference than gender:

It wasn't that -- I didn't hear people saying dark green Marines or whatever but it between a male and a female as far as a female Marine or a male Marine. But then that was just -- maybe there was something physical that a female just can't do. There's nothing against it, is just some -- I have knowledge just I can't do everything a male can do. I'm not going to try and lift that box when I know can't you know. I'm going to hurt myself. But other than that I never saw that from the staff you know the distinction came between a good Marine and a bad Marine. I didn't hear like oh he's this or this color or that color. It was good Marine, bad Marine or males or females.

The low percentage of women in the Marine Corps meant that most of the respondents had little to no interaction with women. The female respondents acknowledged that their limited structural presence shaped every facet of their experience, especially the dramatic transition from an all-female Recruit Training unit to a gender-isolated experience in the operational Marine Corps. Their small proportional presence in the Marine shaped interaction and the organizational culture in specific ways. First, the likelihood of seeing another woman, much less a Mexican American woman, was small, making other social characteristics less relevant in shaping their organizational experiences when compared to the dominating role of gender. The women became, and described themselves, as a unified category, despite the diversity of other social

characteristics that shaped their lived experience. Second, most of the male respondents had little to no interaction with female Marines and had difficulty comprehending how their experiences differed or how gender influenced their integration into the organization. They considered the proportion of women to be significant enough to create problems, yet also small enough to be more of a hassle than a group worthy of serious consideration. Thus, for the women, their limited structural presence shaped their experiences in a dramatic way, as they attempted to prove themselves as female Marines in a highly gendered organization.

*Doing Gender to Prove Yourself as a Marine: The Women*

The structural position of women in the Marine Corps shaped how the female respondents viewed their role in the organization. Gender emerges as overwhelmingly important, both as a way of categorizing all women into a unified social category and as a key marker of difference in the Corps; it also intersects with sexuality in meaningful ways, both at the organizational and the individual level. Many of the women described an atmosphere where they were the sole female in their unit, while many of the men recalled little to no interaction with female Marines. Because of their small numbers in a masculine organization, the women felt heightened visibility accompanied by increased performance pressures as they worked to gain inclusion (Kanter 1977a). They were aware that their proportional presence as tokens brought the increased possibility of negative stereotyping, especially because of the elite status associated with the Marine Corps (Yoder 1991). The women also knew their performance was being assessed constantly for weakness by the men and by other women and that their everyday performances represented not only themselves as Marines, but all women broadly. In this

section, I discuss the challenges encountered by the female respondents in the Marine Corps because of their gender and their token status. These pressures had implications for how the women interacted with each other, with the possibility of increased peer scrutiny and even isolation. The women describe an environment where they constantly had to demonstrate their relevance to the organization; daily, they had to perform at a high level to counter the negative stereotypes surrounding their gender. Thus, gender is the master status for the respondents in this study; it overshadows all other social characteristics and has an extensive effect on how the women experience the Marine Corps.

Although the female respondents discuss the challenges of being in the Marine Corps as women, they also acknowledge that the service prides itself as being physically demanding and the nation's premier fighting force. As a result, the pressures of being a Marine extend to all in the service because the title of Marine is considered a prestigious title to earn and then hold. The women were cognizant of the history, traditions, and values connected to being a Marine and knew they had earned their place in the organization. They also believed that Marines were an elite group, which required them to deal with the demands of military service in a tough, gracious way. One female respondent (F1) characterizes this belief as:

So I know it's really hard, especially as a lower ranking person to establish yourself. I know a lot of it is you get respect when you prove you can handle it and deserve it. So you come in and you're immediately tested because you have a lot of people who have been there, done that. So it's, and I know especially in the Marine Corps there's a lot to live up to just because I mean you are, the name, if you say a Marine the thing that comes to people's heads, to their minds is the top and they're going to be the top. So you automatically have a lot of pressure to live up to that and

your standards should be high. And if they're not, then people are going to call you out on it immediately.

Thus, the title of Marine, earned through successful completion of Recruit Training and honorable service, includes the burden of proving oneself as the best. The title, and the accompanying social expectations, bring prestige, but also include constant demonstration of these elite qualities.

In addition to the performance pressures associated with being a Marine, the women also describe an ongoing requirement to demonstrate that they belonged there. Because of their gender and the stereotypes associated with it, they had additional performance pressures which extended beyond demonstrating the prestige connected to all Marines. These pressures were centered on perceptions that they were there to meet men rather than serve and that their presence overall, by reducing the standards and changing the culture, had a deleterious effect on the organization. The same respondent who discussed the high standards of the Corps, also described her own personal experience as a female Marine as:

In the Marine Corps it's, every day it's constantly proving yourself. Every day thinking if I don't do this they're going to think that I'm weak and that I can't handle it and that I shouldn't be here. And if don't live up to the same standards as them then they're going to put me in that category and brush me off and not take me seriously.

These women, and some of the men, knew they were working against negative stereotypes that had a long legacy and great staying power. One of the women (F4), for example, explained that the term "WM," or "Women Marine," was considered derogatory because it was used in the early years of gender integration. At this time, women were not considered true Marines, but were labeled as WMs. This discrepancy

was noted on their official documents, where the letter “W” always preceded their social security number as a marker of difference. Because of this history where female Marines were marked as different and not deserving of the sole title “Marine,” many respondents, as well as the Marine Corps generally, refer to women in the Marine Corps as “female Marines,” rather than the more derogatory “women Marine.” The history of these terms demonstrates that the Marine Corps historically has highlighted and relied upon gender as a key marker of difference.

In addition to past terms that marked the women as different, many of the respondents also noted current negative stereotypes that shaped their reception into new units and influenced how they interacted with their male and female peers. Often, these stereotypes had sexual overtones and were connected to perceptions of promiscuity and/or the use of pregnancy as a way to escape duty. In these cases, gender intersected with sexuality to feed into stereotypes that the women were sexually available and if they were not, that they were lesbians. The women also had to contend with perceptions that they used the physical capabilities of their body, and especially the possibility of pregnancy, to escape their duties. One female respondent (F1), who served only one enlistment, recalls, “So it was really hard to get to do a lot of the things that you wanted to do, and they stereotyped you a lot, that you’re not able to do it. You’re going to go, you’re going to get pregnant, or you’re going to get involved in other stuff, and not be able to handle the types of duties that a male Marine would.” Another female respondent (F8), who is still on active duty, explains it as, “And it’s like whenever you first get to your unit sometimes you are like labeled already as either as someone that’s easy or not

easy. And it's like even if you are not doing anything, if you smile at the wrong person and immediately you have rumors about you."

Because of this tendency to stereotype women as sexually available, this respondent was guarded in how she interacted with other Marines. Although she has gained more confidence in her self-presentation and ability to control rumors, she describes her previous cautionary behavior as:

I didn't want to freaking talk to anybody that was higher-up than me cause I didn't want any rumors to start. I didn't want to smile at the wrong person for the longest time cause I was so freaked out about having rumors. Like -- it's like you become friends with somebody that's a higher rank than you and if they're married there's rumors of you having an affair.

This fear of being perceived as sexually promiscuous was not only repeated by several women, but it also was noticed by many men. These men noted that women had to behave cautiously around their male colleagues to avoid perceptions of sexual availability; this surveillance of their behavior continued even if the women were married. One male respondent (M5), whose characterization represents many of the men's viewpoints, states that female Marines fall into several, easily described roles. He says:

Because there are females who, you know, to fit in, to be accepted they have to be sexually active with a lot of...and we had names for those type of girls...I mean I know that most the female Marines I served with I could categorize. I mean there are the ones who were lesbians. And I mean you could tell right off the bat. There were the ones who wanted just to be, you know, treated like any other person. Who wanted to be Marines and they, you know, and they worked for it. And they didn't go around like they had to sleep with every Marine to get along with them. Of course they had...I would say that they had some of the harder times because a lot of male Marines are expecting that from the females. And so they take advantage of it. So if you wouldn't put out maybe you wouldn't get treated right. Everybody could treat you...they'd be rude to you or



whatever. And I mean it happens. And it's still something that happens now. And I'm sure it happens in all the other branches, too. But I mean that's just how it is.

In this case, the respondent created categories of women based on their sexuality; these categories were based on acceptable ways gender can intersect with sexuality. There were lesbians, women who were perceived as sexually available to their male peers, and then those who were actually there to be Marines and not have sexual relationships. His discussion suggests that high-performing female Marines must limit any hint of sexuality to avoid having that dimension of their social life take over their entire reputation.

Some of the women went as far to claim that the Marine Corps did not want women in its ranks and that this message had been communicated to them through both subtle and direct messages. One woman (F12), who was the daughter of a career Marine and had spent her childhood growing up on Marine Corps installations, was shocked to learn early in her enlistment that women were not wanted, at least in her unit. She explains it as:

You know I was raised by a Marine, never knew anything about gender discrimination because my dad never discriminated against me. I'm a woman you know I was a girl who could do anything in my father's eyes. And you know like I said, I was born on a Marine Corps base, raised by a Marine, earned the title, I'm a Marine. I never saw myself as anything less. And until I went to Japan...that's when I learned that -- my first lesson in gender discrimination was there.

When I asked her to explain what that lesson was, she countered with, "Women are not wanted in the Marine Corps." In this unit, she had a supervisor, who from her perspective, repeatedly targeted women for punishment. She provided an example of a time when this NCO corralled all the women in the unit and made them stand outside in the rain for over an hour. The men, however, were allowed to stay in their barracks. It

was not clear to her why the women were being punished, other than the NCO was angry at them as a group. This respondent described an overall toxic atmosphere at her first duty station where women routinely were targeted for harassment and differential treatment. This installation, unfortunately, was the also the site where she experienced a sexual assault, demonstrating that the overall negative gender environment led by the NCO in charge perhaps emboldened certain individuals to assault fellow Marines (Firestone and Harris 1994). Because of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder connected to Military Sexual Trauma, this respondent's Marine career was cut short.

Although this respondent was the only one to share that she was a survivor of sexual violence, other women expressed the belief that the Marine Corps did not want women in its ranks. Sometimes they linked this belief to the men in their work centers, who were able to communicate subtly that women were not wanted, through tactics such as constant scrutiny and gossip (Miller 1997). As a token population, the women routinely were the only women in their work centers, making them even more vulnerable to harassment. Unlike their experiences as ethnic minorities, they did not have a "critical mass" to handle these situations, which often did not meet the requirements to be formal harassment (Miller 1997). In many cases, this harassment was not sexual, but was oriented toward reminding the women of traditional gender roles, which they were viewed as violating. One woman (F10) characterizes this interaction with her male colleagues as:

And it's definitely hard to deal with it -- I mean as far as I can see, definitely a lot of male Marines are very like macho like you know and they're like females in the Marine Corps, what is that about? You know? It's definitely sometimes... it's hard to be in the Marine Corps with a

bunch of guys that think that girls shouldn't even be part of the Marine Corps but at some – some point every male Marine is like that...

Her sentiment was shared by many, including another female respondent (F13) who presented a similar negative experience with:

You know, as a woman, I was the only girl in the shop a lot most of the time. I mean, there was -- one time we had another female in the shop. I was the only girl in a shop of 60 to 80 males. And so that was kind of hard because when I first got there, you know, they didn't want me there. So I mean, they weren't really hard on me but I have to say that's one part of the Marine Corps, kind of bad, you know...

Other women did not link this attitude to specific men or work centers, but to the Marine Corps broadly. They believed that the Marine Corps only had women in the ranks because it was required to do so and not because the organization valued their presence.

One woman (F4), who served a career in the Corps, describes the Marine Corps' approach to women as:

...to be frank with you I think that if the Marine Corps had their way that right now - if they were to ask the Marine Corps would you -- do you think women ought to be in the Marine Corps? They would probably say no. So and again I love the Marine Corps. I love everything but that's something that I just feel strongly about because it was pretty evident.

To counter these negative stereotypes, the need to prove oneself was described by all of the female respondents, even by the few who considered the service to be an ideal working environment. The women were acutely aware that they were being watched for error and weakness and that this surveillance occurred constantly. They believe that the men were leery of them until they had a chance to observe their work capabilities and the men had the chance to “categorize” the woman into the appropriate type of female Marine. The challenges of proving oneself were especially prevalent when they moved into a new work center because the assumption was that they would shirk their duties and

create an additional work burden for their team or that they were there to flirt and hang out with the men. One female respondent (F3) describes how, even if she successfully demonstrated her competency to her current unit, she would have to go through the process all over again when she moved:

... the only thing that did suck about being a female was that no matter what unit you went to, and what reputation you came with, you always had to prove yourself. When I left one unit to go to the other, when the unit that I had left, they had me in the highest regard like hey [her name] is good to go. She holds her own weight, this and that. But I get to that next unit and they see, oh here comes a female. I think that's in every branch. You know, oh here comes a female. We're going to have to carry her. So it was constant having to prove yourself and then even when you're in a unit, you're established where you're at, what you, you know, who you are but you get new people that come in and they already have that concept of a female. Not knowing you. I mean yeah they'll learn who you are and hear who you are and stuff but that was the only thing that you, I felt like it was that constant pressure. I have to prove myself. I have to prove myself. I can't just keep up with the guys, I got to do better than the guys. And the guys as long as they keep up, they're good. For me it was: no, I can't just keep up. I have to outdo them to stay good pretty much.

The majority of women cited superb physical fitness as critical to gaining acceptance with their male peers. They knew that the different physical fitness testing requirements between the men and women created perceptions of inequity, even though the standards were designed to accommodate physiological differences between the male and female body. One woman (F6), who was forced to take her physical fitness test only three months after delivering her first child (the Department of Defense standard allows women six months for recuperation), thought that her supervisor had unreasonable assumptions about her physical performance so close to childbirth and that he targeted her as a way of demonstrating that he would not account for the differential demands of childbirth. As a woman and a mother, she required new, legitimate accommodations,

which her supervisor, who was grounded in the male model of physical fitness testing, was not willing to grant. She describes the tension as:

It can be tough -- it can be tough because well, obviously not all standards are the same as males but you know many of them do see it that way. Many of them do think that you have to or be the same as they are, right? And it's understandable but you know for example we obviously have different bodies which can withstand different things and they can do things that we can't and we can do things that we can't and it's different right? So, I would say just the only problem that I had was really just the physical standard because we women have babies and they don't. So we still have to live up to those physical standards so we have to find a way to do it. And it's hard but they sometimes don't understand that.

She completed her Physical Fitness Test, as ordered, but she was embarrassed by her scores, which were the lowest she had ever received and challenged perceptions, both personally and of her co-workers, that she possessed the skills needed to be a Marine.

However, this respondent did not feel she could challenge her superior because she “was ordered to do it.”

Often, the women did not feel as though they were recognized as equals until they were able to demonstrate their physical prowess, yet they also had to do it in a manner that did not overshadow the accomplishments of their male peers. For the women, physical fitness trumped work performance and military professionalism as the main determinant peers used to judge one's organizational worth. One female respondent (F5), who was a college athlete prior to joining the Marine Corps, explains how she relied on her physical fitness to gain esteem among her peers with:

That's when I'd get respect. Honestly it's so funny but when I'd go out there and run and do my PFT's and they'd actually see hey, I can hold my own. I'm not a crybaby. I got, I would be, I do mixed martial arts, I have my black belt and then I'd get some respect when they'd finally see like I'm not doing anything. I am who I am. But it always the physical aspect that would finally give me some respect when they would see that I could

fun and hang with them but until then it was always that question like who does she think she is? Nobody!

This respondent progressed through the enlisted ranks rapidly while consistently earning a perfect score on her Physical Fitness Test. However, even with these successes, she felt that she encountered additional resistance because of her remarkable record. Whereas the respondent believes that a male Marine with the same record would have been received into a new unit as a celebrated addition, she felt like she was targeted with negative attitudes because she was a woman with stellar achievements. Her achievements became threatening, rather than something to be lauded because they threatened the supremacy of male physical fitness. Her experience in the Marine Corps was a constant balancing act: she had to demonstrate competency and value to the organization, but also risked outperforming her male peers, who viewed this as a hostile act.

Sometimes the women were advised of this pressure to perform before entering the Marine Corps. One respondent (F2) recalls the advice of her recruiter, which she referred to throughout her career. She recalls his advice as:

And the last thing I recall him telling me was looking at me and saying, “carry your own bags.” And that’s lasted with me the entire nineteen years in the Marine Corps because it was such a significant phrase to say to somebody that meant so many different things at the time. And I realized throughout my career that it is true we need, especially the females that we needed to carry our own bags, whether it’s actual bags or just carry our own weight around and be able to hold our own.

In this case, the respondent was advised by her male recruiter to be aware of the stereotypes surrounding women, such as the tendency to allow men to handle the more physical aspects of the job, and to act consciously against them by not giving in to temptation. As one of the only women he ever recruited, he was sensitive to the

challenges she would face in the Corps, which he discussed with her before she entered recruit training.

Just as this recruiter seems especially perceptive of the challenges women faced, many of the male respondents voiced similar observations. Based on their own experiences, they knew that the female Marines faced additional performance pressures due to their heightened visibility. One male respondent (M13) describes the pressure felt by female Marines as:

...women get a bad rap. You know and it's kind of shitty. That's the way it is but it's the boy's club and it seems...it's heartbreaking because I've had some female Marines serve under me that...and I, I'd do anything to have more of them, you know, then some of the male Marines. They have to work harder. In my opinion, over the thirteen years I served on the Corps, they have to work harder not only to stay Marines but to prove to the other Marines that they are Marines. You know it's, it's, you know, you always hear the rumors, you know, she slept her way to the top or, you know, that sort. You do have those Marines I think. You know all it takes is one bad female Marine to make all of them look bad. And it does happen.

This individual understood that women had to work harder than the men to gain acceptance into the Marine Corps. He also understood that the poor decisions and actions of one woman could color or confirm the perceptions of most men toward female Marines. As a result, the women were always working against negative stereotypes that gained traction because the actions of one woman could color the work ethic and value of all women in the Corps.

Even with the negative perceptions about the abilities and motivations of women, many men were also aware that women could perform at a high level in the Marine Corps and that they could be trusted to take care of the mission. They had co-workers or subordinates who challenged stereotypes by being knowledgeable about their jobs and

ready to work. An example of this perspective comes from a male respondent (M19) who explains:

'Cause I met a lot of female Marines who are very well up to the task and they break that stereotype of being a female member who really likes a lot of attention. And so that's -- it's very awesome to see just to look at -- they're so strong-minded and very independent. I think so as well because they have different things to prove as a female Marine as opposed to Hispanic male Marine. I think they actually have more to prove to be honest - that they want to be as good as the males, if not even better.

Unfortunately, some did not adopt this viewpoint until after they completed their enlistment, which means they forwarded negative stereotypes while in the service. One male respondent (M5), who was severely wounded while on deployment, remembers his first impression of female Marines as generally unfavorable. His picture of them changed, however, once he served with some women in Iraq. He remembers his initial impression, which stayed with him through most of his time in the Marine Corps as:

Well, it...I know when we first started to work with them you automatically don't have respect for them even if they're Marines just because they're women. I guess...I don't know. I mean we shouldn't look at it like that but that's the way we did back then. I don't look at it like that now. I've worked with a lot of female Marines who I still talk to now. I would put my life in a lot of their hands. I went to combat with some of them...Because there are females who, you know, to fit in, to be accepted they have to be sexually active with a lot of...and we had names for those type of girls.

Finally, the men were also aware of the negative stereotypes the women were working against and did not think the women were making a good decision to willingly enter into such a male-dominated environment. It was difficult for them to understand why any woman would choose to serve in the Marine Corps, knowing that she would be a minority and surrounded by young, hyper-masculine men. This perspective is a way of framing the women's struggles as their own fault since they would not be negotiating



such a tough environment if they just allowed the men to take care of it. Rather than view service in the Marine Corps as an individual right and responsibility, this belief frames service as one best left to the organizational majority: men. One male respondent (M2) describes the atmosphere for women as:

If you were a girly girl then all the guys would hit on you know so I don't know. It just seemed kind of, I wouldn't want to be a Marine woman, it's just so many guys around you and, I don't know, it's overwhelming. Too much testosterone for a woman and then dirty jokes and talking about women derogatorily so I don't know. It's kind of overwhelming, I think.

In some cases, they saw the potential for harassment and recognized that the presence of women changed the dynamics of the work environment, as described by another respondent (M18):

I'd say they had to deal with a lot of the guys. Not only to try to prove themselves to the guys but also dealing with a lot of the guys hitting on them. Maybe even the possibility of harassment. Even though I didn't really see any harassment and sometimes even maybe the harassment was the other way around where the girl was harassing the guy. But I didn't see any harassment, but I'm guessing they probably had to face a lot of that. But what I saw was that we -- most of the time we would figure out how the girl was and how she was to joke around with -- we figured out her tolerance for that and made sure we didn't go above that -- above her tolerance cause we didn't want to push the buttons and get in trouble.

In this case, the men test the women to see how much of their previous behavior could continue, even if they contained norms that could be perceived as offensive or harassment. The women with greater tolerance were viewed as easier to work with because they did not require additional accommodation.

Many of the male respondents also forwarded suggestions for how women should act in the Marine Corps (although interestingly, they did not do so for other men). They viewed the environment as being hostile towards women and recommended that they

show caution while interacting with male Marines. The opinions of these male respondents were based partly on observations on how the presence of women changed the workplace environment as well as the subsequent banter that would follow after a woman left the area. One male respondent (M7) offers the following advice for female Marines:

To be careful with the males, because there's not many of them. And the Marine Corps is an excellent place for females to excel but they're also vulnerable. Because there is so little of them. I mean it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter if you know, there would be times we'd have, we have a staff meeting and maybe the Colonel was talking about something and one of his Marines or one of the admin Marines walks in to give the Colonel something or give documents and if it's a female, like the room stops. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. You know there's still that all eyes are on the female. Good or bad. Just to be careful.

This perspective puts the burden of professionalism on the women, rather than the men, who are not required to change their behaviors, and shows how the women, as tokens, are expected to adjust to the dominant masculine culture.

As a token population in the Marine Corps, the women faced additional performance pressures where their actions, and the interpretation of these actions, represented not only themselves, but all women in the Marine Corps broadly. Thus, when it came to performance, one woman's behavior, regardless of race and ethnicity, had the potential to affect all women. This focus demonstrates the salience of gender among female Marines, who perceive it as having a larger impact on their place in the organization than other social characteristics. Although the female respondents were aware of the importance of their race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic position, it was their gender that they cited unanimously as being the largest organizational division they had to negotiate. Because of this additional pressure, the majority of female respondents

discussed a need to separate themselves from other women who fell into stereotypical roles, especially of a sexual nature, or did not perform at a high enough level. One female respondent (F5) describes how she was always trying to separate herself from those who fit into the negative stereotypes as:

...there's a minority that had a reputation. So then either you associated with them, then you get caught up in that reputation also. So I wouldn't [hang out with them] because I didn't want to be associated. Even though I wasn't related or associated with those females, I'd still get that perception. That was another thing I was always fighting - perception.

Because of this ongoing need to prove themselves, the women tended to be extra tough on each other. They believed that the negative performance of one woman affected all of them because of their heightened visibility and the tendency to categorize all women as uniform in their intent and abilities. As a result, they felt the pressure to perform and/or behave in certain manner from more senior women and also exercised this pressure on their peers and subordinates. Regarding their sexual behavior, one female respondent (F1) explains the surveillance and self-regulation among the women as:

I mean because it is true, a lot females get in there and they get involved with males because they're, they get a lot of attention that they wouldn't normally get. So it's hard because we have that, the stereotype is true for a lot of them and it's, there's other females that work hard to not be like that so even on the main side a lot of our staff NCOs and higher ups, they're very hard on us females, our lower ranking females, because they expect a lot out of you because they worked hard to get where they're at and to portray a certain type of image and they're expecting you to live up to that. So it is, so they stick together but it's like they kind of also have to separate from those females who aren't doing what they're supposed to be doing.

Most of the women reported being cautious around their male peers in terms of their behavior or situational decision-making. They did not want their actions to be perceived as sexually flirtatious, nor did they want to end up in situations, such as driving a truck

alone with a male peer, that could be distorted as creating opportunities for sexual rendezvous. The female respondents were aware that their actions were being watched and that if viewed as inappropriate, could have negative repercussions for all women.

In addition to sexual behavior, the women also had concerns with one of its potential consequences: pregnancy. Several women had children while in the Marine Corps, but they all described the need to deflect negative attitudes, and at times experienced outright discrimination, as demonstrated by the previous discussion of the woman who was forced to take her physical fitness test early. Another respondent, for example, recalled being forced to stand in one position for an extended period of time during a hot, humid Okinawan day by her supervisor. She was in her third trimester of pregnancy and ended up breaking down and leaving the spot for a cooler climate. Rather than connecting her actions to her physical health, her supervisor charged her with disobeying a direct order and formally reprimanded her. This is the same individual who made the women stand in the rain for an hour while the male Marines were able to stay in their rooms. Another respondent (F15) described how she attempted to work throughout her pregnancy, but that she still encountered a lot of negative attitudes and comments about her status. She explained it as:

Well when I was pregnant I worked in the same warehouse that I did before I was pregnant and I worked until the day that I went into labor. Actually I was at work when I went into labor and I had to go to the hospital. And the only reason I only worked half days was because my gunny [Gunnery Sergeant] said I have to because I'm too far into my pregnancy that if I work for them I may get stressed out and I go to early labor. But I still worked, I still did my part, I pulled my weight and I did my effort and I don't think that people should judge you just because you're a female because females can do a lot of things that males can't and a lot of things that they can. But even doing this, a lot of people straight told me you can't deploy so you're a useless Marine. And I said no, maybe

I can't deploy but I can still do my job in the rear, I don't have to be on a deployment to show you that I can do my job. I can do my job just fine from the United States.

Unfortunately, negative perceptions toward pregnancy were not only expressed by male Marines, but were also expressed by some of the female respondents who thought that pregnancy among their female peers fed into stereotypes about the work performance of women, making their own professional lives more difficult. Pregnancy also highlighted the physiological differences between men and women, causing increased tension in an organization whose ideal worker is modeled after the needs and strengths of the male body. One female respondent (F8), who is single and without children, describes the challenges of working with pregnant Marines as:

Like because we have such -- okay we don't have a lot of women that -- women that are in the Marine Corps, a good percentage of them it's like they get to wherever their first duty station is at and they get pregnant and so they get -- they kind of like get desk jobs...And it just -- it puts a bad name on them, on just on all of us. Because even after they have a baby, then they still have like 6 months to sit around and do nothing and they kind of like get used to it...And then it's really hard to get back into the whole you know work ethic thing and it just -- it puts a bad name on us, I guess...It is like completely different. If you're one of those people that's hardworking and you're hardworking and then you get pregnant, it's different than if you get there and you're lazy and then you get pregnant and you get lazier and after your pregnancy you don't start doing anything. They just -- they don't want to deal with it. And they just --they don't want you there....The pregnant women - they don't lose the weight and they become lazy. I mean like in my squadron I see it...And it just -- it pisses me off...

Whereas the female respondents who had children while in the Marine were sensitive to possible negative perceptions and the additional challenges, many of the women without children saw pregnant Marines as creating a disservice for all women.

Not only did the women face greater visibility and performance pressures with their sexual behavior, but they also faced increased scrutiny regarding their physical abilities. Sometimes this pressure was tied directly to their MOS. Many, especially those who worked in aviation, were in positions that required them to carry and/or manage heavy equipment. Aware that their behavior had consequences for themselves and for other women, many made the point of performing at a high physical level, even if it strained their body. One woman (F13), who worked in aviation maintenance, recalls her desire to physically perform at the same level as her male peers even though it was a struggle. She explains her experience as:

So I think it kind of took its toll on me physically after a while it's a lot of heavy lifting and a lot of running around and you know, some tight spaces, and I was you know, feeling the effects of it, you know, and just me being female when we have to lift heavy stuff, you know. I had to say I had to prove myself, you know. There were times where, you know, we carry these heavy toolboxes and probably some of them probably weigh 80 pounds at least. I couldn't tell you exactly how much but they're heavy. And you know, my pride would get to the best out of me. I wouldn't let a male hold it because there's a lot of expectations of like with rank. You know, somebody that was above me, you know, I was of little rank so I was expected to carry the toolbox 'cause he's instructing me. He's showing me how to do a job and you know, I wanna be -- also, I don't wanna be that person that's like, oh, I can't carry my own weight. So you know, it was very physically demanding and after a while it just takes its toll...

This pressure was communicated by other respondents, who demonstrated an ongoing awareness that they had to match the physical abilities of their male peers for greater acceptance into the organization. They also were aware of those women who did not meet the physical requirements required in their MOS, and framed them as making their own jobs even more difficult. One woman (F3) explains the challenge of working with women who did not try to perform at a high physical level as:

Because like I said, I'm one of the kind that I, I felt the pressure. And I would, I don't know, I guess I held or hold women to a higher standard because of that pressure. Because I didn't want to go into the unit and have the guys oh she's just another female. And like I said, some girls were fine with that and they would live up to that standard. And to me I was like no, you have to show them you can do it. And, and some girls like I said, would just go in there and be like oh yeah I'm a girl. Can you lift this for me? Can you carry this for me? You know? And yeah they made it in the Marine Corps but I didn't think they belonged there. I don't know, I don't like ...it's a personal thing I guess? But you have to prove yourself.

This focus on physical abilities also extended to women's performance on their annual physical fitness tests. As discussed earlier, many women were able to gain greater respect within their units by maxing out their physical fitness tests, and even outscoring many of the men. They expected the same performance from other women and were disappointed when this was not the case, as is discussed by one respondent (F5) who consistently scored very high on her own physical fitness test. She says:

And so that always hurt me when I'd see females falling at PT. I would think how can you not keep up? Yeah, you're making me look bad and I'm just going to have to fight ten times harder to make up for what you're doing. You know, so I was looking back and always knew if you fall now it was most -- almost all of the females and maybe one male just like come on they could kill me.

Because of the challenges of working in a male-dominated organization, the women not only monitored their own performance, but also policed the performance of other women. Rather than bond together as a minority group, the women were more skeptical of each other and took extra steps to distinguish between themselves, as hard-working Marines, and some of their female peers, who they felt were a discredit to women. Some blatantly labeled other female Marines as lacking the core values and abilities required of a Marine. One woman (F8), for example states, "It's honestly just

work ethic. Work ethic is the highest thing and unfortunately the women in the Marine Corps have some of the worse work ethic.” When I asked if she noticed it more because there was a smaller proportion of women in the Marines, she replied with:

We probably notice it more because there’s just less of them. It’s like in my shop right now, there is me and 2 corporals, one sergeant, 2 lance corporals, there’s 5 women in my shop right now. There’s about 100 of us, 5 of us are women. Out of us 5, only me and that sergeant work. And so I mean, 3 out of 5 not carrying their weight puts us down pretty much, you know?

In this case, the respondent, who did not have similar observations about her male colleagues, believed that the women in her shop were disproportionately lazy, which made it even more frustrating to her because of their high visibility.

Often, the women were the sole females in their units so they did not have the option of building a relationship with other women; however, they did feel pressure to gain acceptance with the men. They worked to become one of the guys by showing that they were not like other women, whom they categorized as being sensitive to the words, actions, and overall behavioral norms of men in the Marine Corps (Kanter 1977a). Thus, they believed they were working against broader stereotypes of women in the service as being too sensitive or disruptive and actively tried to demonstrate that they were different from other women. Some even went as far as to argue in support of men’s sensitivities toward female Marines, by agreeing that it is women (and not men) who create unnecessary sexual harassment issues. One female respondent (F13) exemplifies this attitude, while also showing how she categorizes herself as being exceptional. She explains it as:

I understand why the males don't want them [women] because they're threatened. They think they can't say whatever they want or talk about



women or do this or do that. But you know, I wasn't one of those types of girls who was, you know, insulted by things like that. You know, I said I was a tomboy. I grew up with guys in the neighborhood so I already fit in with people that way. But you know, it was hard winning over the males 'cause they didn't want me there... I -- you took everything with a grain of salt. It didn't bother me. You know, they had a problem, of course, I was gonna say something but they didn't do anything that offended me, you know. Maybe other women, yes. But it didn't offend me....But you know, they even -- you know, they liked me after they got to know me. You know, they just realized that I was one of those type of women that they -- you know, 'cause they're scared of somebody calling sexual harassment on them or anything like that. And they realized that I was, you know, somebody that could be a friend to them, and a lot of them did. You know, we stayed close and we hung out and did stuff.

This respondent characterizes herself as being different from typical women, who she views as knowingly entering into a male environment and then demanding accommodation. In contrast, she presents herself as malleable enough to adjust to her male colleagues, rather than vice versa, and to be comfortable with the dominant culture.

At the extreme, one woman (F9), who admitted to several different relationships with male colleagues, blamed women for using rape as a way to cover up their own poor judgments. She discussed the topic when sharing some of the advice she gave a young woman in her community who was thinking of joining the Marines. She told her:

And don't be in school [where they go to learn their MOS] and get caught next to some dude and then you cry rape. A few times I had to see that at a school dorm. And it's ridiculous. I think it's ridiculous that us as women are going to sit there and party with this dude and give him some -- he gets this indication you want to and you do it and then you're embarrassed afterwards cause of who he is and so there you are saying he raped me you know. Sometimes it is, they do get a little pushy and they can be, but you have to make sure you got that evidence that you got raped...

This woman was unique in her perspective regarding the link between women's willingness to unfairly cry rape and the innocent actions of men; however, her viewpoint

at a broader level is representative of the willingness of many of the respondents to mold their opinions and actions to the male-oriented environment of the Marine Corps.

Because of the increased pressures and the need to align themselves with their male colleagues, the women were extra tough on each other, both in their opinions and in their training. Many of the female respondents cited experience with higher ranking women who, rather than adopt a more amicable style of interaction, were tougher and more judgmental of them. These higher ranking women were known to call out individuals, and especially women, for minor uniform infractions and to challenge them in their physical fitness. One female respondent (F1), for example, recalls a female noncommissioned officer who went out of her way to challenge other women on their professionalism. She describes her as:

But she was very hard on females. She was one of those who was super tough in how she was supposed to be and she expected all females to be like that. Like as far as hair, if your hair wasn't the way it was supposed to be she would call you out. If your camis [uniform] were not pressed and tight, I mean she was like the best looking Marine around the chow hall, male or female, so I mean if your boots were not shiny she would tell you - you need to go work on them. Physical fitness standards that you needed to be living up to them and still maintaining what the guys, because she can do it, everybody can do it.

This experience with directive leadership by a higher ranking woman often began during recruit training. Many of the women recall being told by their drill instructors to be cautious about their self-presentation because their male colleagues would inevitably place them into set categories. One woman (F5), who claims she was unaware of the environment she was entering into, describes how her drill instructor introduced them to the increased scrutiny and stereotyping in the Marine Corps with:

So I remember my drill instructor in boot camp said you can either be a bitch, a whore, or a slut. Pick which one because those are your options. The drill instructor said that to our platoon. And I was like what? I didn't understand at the time. But once you get out there you see that either you don't give in and if you don't give in to guys or whatever you're going to be that bitch. Oh she's this. Or if you do well then you're going to be one of the other two. So it's just what it ends up being because you're a minority and then so either you're going to be saying no a lot, so you're going to be a bitch or the other way. So that was another stereotype was just like wow, really?

This respondent went on to serve eight years in the Marine Corps, but she decided to separate after deciding it was not worth the constant battle of having to prove her effectiveness to her male peers, who could not accept that she was just there to work.

Although the majority of female respondents cited their gender as shaping their experience in a challenging, often negative, way, several also believed that the Marine Corps was improving and that they themselves were less likely to experience gender harassment and/or discrimination now than in years past. One woman (F6), who decided to separate after having her first child and finding life in the Marines to be too "complicated," also stated that she felt welcomed in her unit. She describes her own experience as:

I really never found any difference. I mean, I did my work and I was -- I felt appreciated. I thought -- you know I think I did a good job and they always let me know about it and they always rewarded me with whatever they thought I deserved but so I mean I -- and everybody else you know that I saw that worked as hard or they got the same treatment if they worked with or they got what they deserved or you know whatever the situation was. But I never saw any difference.

Another woman (F11), who is on her third enlistment and plans on serving through retirement, believes that the Marine Corps has progressed significantly from when she

first joined. As a recruiter, she currently uses her reflections on how women's roles have changed to situate the viewpoints of potential female recruits. She tells them:

When they come to me you know what, the main thing I tell them is like you really have to be comfortable with that decision. They're not going to treat you as a girl, they're going to treat as an equal and you're going to go through the same thing the guys do. And you know what now, it's kind of cool. When I first joined yeah, I saw the difference between like half of the guys were like oh, female in the Marine Corps? And the other half all they wanted to do was like sleep with you. But now like it has changed so much within the last 10 years and now it doesn't really matter. I've been to like -- every place I've been through I pretty much have been the only girl and now that I move up I don't see any like resistance from the guys thinking oh, she's a female. I don't get treated differently cause I'm a female. I get treated as a Marine. That's why like before the 70s, they used to call us women Marines. Now they don't really call us anything, they just call us Marines cause they don't want to make that distinction.

Although these perspectives are not the majority, they demonstrate that some women believe that the Marine Corps has become more welcoming of female servicemembers. This does not mean that gender is less salient for them; in fact, all of the women made a point of framing their experience as a Marine through the lens of being a female Marine, but it does show the importance of individual interactions and the climate set by leaders in setting the broader experience.

Based on the data, gender emerges as a highly salient characteristic and division for the women. It shaped every facet of their experience, unlike other social characteristics which had less of a perceived influence on their role within the organization. Gender emerges as overwhelmingly important, both as a way of categorizing all women into a unified social category and as a key marker of difference in the Corps; it had an impact at both the individual and organizational level. Both the women and the men were well aware of the limited structural presence of women. They

knew of their small numbers and of the restrictions shaping women's MOS selections, including their full exclusion from those with the most prestige. Because of their small numbers, the women experienced heightened visibility, which led to increased performance pressures as they worked against numerous negative stereotypes. These stereotypes and the threats they presented made the women more aware of their own performances, which they knew were being assessed constantly for weakness by the men and by other women. As their everyday performances represented not only themselves as Marines, but all women broadly, the women faced additional pressures to succeed. Gender was their master status, and all women, regardless of their social characteristics, became a unified category struggling to find acceptance in a gendered, prestigious organization.

*Doing Gender to Prove Yourself as a Marine: The Men*

When asked to describe what it is like to serve in the Marine Corps, the women would immediately segue into what it is like to be a woman in the Corps. Their gender shaped their experience in a profound way: from their segregated training in boot camp, to their different physical fitness standards, to occupational limitations, and to their small proportions and the ongoing stereotypes with which they had to contend. Gender was omnipresent in their life, and the female respondents, in turn, were quick to reflect on it.

Although the men do not share similar pressures related to their visibility, they also faced performance expectations, connected to perceptions of strength, toughness, and what it is to be a man in the Marine Corps. However, unlike the women, they never directly reflected on what it was like to be a man in the Marine Corps, even broadly or as a Mexican American. For them gender was not as obvious, although it still shaped their

experience in the Corps, albeit in more subtle ways. For them, service in the Marine Corps was proper fulfillment of their gender, even as it intersected with other social characteristics. As men, they found confirmation of their masculinity while in the service. This linkage between military service and being a man sometimes was made explicit by the male respondents who framed their decision to serve as a natural life choice for them, which I discussed in Chapter VIII. None of the male respondents framed their experience as challenging because of limitations associated with their gender. In most cases, serving in the Marine Corps was about serving in the most physically demanding service because that is something men do, especially Mexican American men. At times, however, the struggle between appearing as a stoic, hardy Marine and working through the physical and emotional toll of service became a flashpoint for several respondents. It was during times when men became injured, while either on deployment or as a result of rigorous training, where several of the respondents saw their loyalty to the organization and their overall toughness as men challenged. In this section, I briefly review how the men framed service in the Marine Corps as a logical extension of their masculinity, which some did within a hierarchy of MOS's. I then focus on those cases where the male respondents experienced an injury, both physical and mental, and how these injuries framed their role, as men, in the organization.

Proving oneself as a man was not an oft cited reason for why the male respondents chose to enlist in the Marine Corps, even if it may have been a main motivation. Whereas several of the female respondents explicitly stated that they joined the Marine Corps as a way of demonstrating their toughness, the men did not link their decision to serve in the Marine Corps to their gender nor did they frame their experiences

in this manner. Many did cite the desire to serve in the most elite service and in the one they perceived as being the toughest; these rationales can be considered as “proxies” for proving one’s masculinity. Certainly, some of the male respondents believed that the process of becoming a Marine would help them develop into men, like this respondent (M10) who explained his reason for serving as, “You know just, you know, mature into a grown man. I thought that structure would help me.” However, the majority framed their decision to serve in more logical terms, like the need to earn an income, and through intangibles, such as the appeal of serving in the toughest, most physically demanding service branch. These rationales can be considered as “proxies” for proving one’s masculinity because they are linked to socially-acceptable norms of what it means to be a man. Because the military historically has been composed of mainly men, the respondents’ decision to serve is not viewed as an aberrant choice, but as a normal one. Further, as discussed in Chapter VIII, many of the male respondents framed their decision to serve as a logical extension of their identity as Mexican American men who, because of their ethnic lineage, came from a fighting tradition; in this case, their ethnicity and gender intersect to create new gender norms which can be fulfilled through military service.

Because of their numerical dominance, the men did not face the same performance pressures as the women; they did not have to worry about their actions as being representative of all men. Rather, they only had to worry about their individual performance and how it reflected their standing, not as a man, but as a Marine. However, there were distinctions in performance among the men, with the most commonly cited one being the hierarchy of MOS’s that I introduced earlier. As discussed, many of the

men served in MOS's that included women and that did not have fighting as their main focus. This distinction was one way men ranked themselves in the organization, although only the infantrymen spoke of these differences. The male respondents who served in infantry made the distinction that although everyone held the title Marine, that they were the only true riflemen in the Corps. These respondents understood that the Marine Corps depended on all of the MOS's to work together to fulfill the mission, but they also saw distinctions by MOS on who most embodied the physical demands of being a Marine. They disparagingly referred to men who worked in MOS's outside of the combat arms as POGs, which I discussed earlier.

Although this was a common refrain among all of the men in the combat arms, I use one infantryman's perspective (M1), because his observations are straightforward and representative of his peers. He explains the difference in physical appearance between "grunts" and "POGs" by arguing that POGs have more time to work out and beef up their appearance, while the grunts, who are the true warriors, appear less intimidating, although they have greater physical skills. He explains it as:

A POG is personnel other than grunt. And we would say that's a POG right there. Well why is he a POG? Because he has all the time in the world to stay back, he goes and does his job. After he's done he goes to the gym and he has all that extra energy. Us, we go, we starve, we walk, do a lot of running, and we're training all the time. And when we're not, we go back and then you go to the gym or for the most of us it was always standby to standby. We'd go in the morning and do our run and go back to our barracks and just try to catch some sleep, just lay there and wait for something to happen.

He also made a distinction by training and work standards, with the viewpoint that POGs have room for error since they only handle a rifle during training, but they do not have to use it in deployed environments. He sees their combat skills training as more for show



versus the real training and experiences of infantrymen, and as a false marker of toughness. Infantrymen, in contrast, are training for their lives since these are the scenarios they will encounter while deployed. He explains the distinction as:

But when it came to training some of the POGs would go and they'd do like it's like once a year or something they'd go out and do training just so they can say that hey. Everyone who's a Marine is a rifleman. And they'd go and do that for, so they'd go out and be in the field for a week. They'd probably fall all over themselves doing live fire ranges or go to mountain town and do the urban warfare stuff or whatever. We would do that but we would do that with the notion that this is your job. And we are actually going to do this. And if you don't get this right you're going to die and people are going to die with you. And so where the POGs would do it if you screw something up oh, well, oh, you suck at it (mocking voice), with us, you screwed up you do it again and again and again. Your whole unit gets to do it. And you're probably going to get your ass beat. And if you're hurt you do it. If you're foot's broken you're going to go out there and you're going to watch them do it and they're going to give you shit until you probably throw off your crutches and do it your damn self. We knew that our job, as Marines, we're going to be killers.

Finally, he made distinctions between how the POG's carry themselves in public versus how the grunts do so. He argues that the POG's must use obvious symbols to show their group membership and by extension, their physical toughness. Because they are unsure of their Marine identity, they must broadcast to everyone that they are Marines as an affirmation of their elite group membership. In contrast, the grunts are aware of their fighting abilities and are comfortable enough with their identity that they choose not to show it, and often deflect inquires about their organizational membership with snarky comments. He concludes with:

And the weird thing about that is when you would go out in the town and you'd see all these moto [short for motivation] guys who were wearing like Marine Corps t-shirts, wearing the high and tight haircuts or the horseshoes [type of haircut] and we would also point to them and be like yes, see that guy, that guys a POG... because we're not, we never went out, and we're never like the Marine Corps guys. If you went out and

wore a Marine Corps t-shirt or wore a high and tight or something like that we'd call you a boot [derisive term for someone just out of basic training]. We'd say oh see that guy, he's either new or he's a POG. All of us we started wearing our hair a little lower just to get it to barely within regulation and we didn't even want to fess up to being a Marine when you're out in town, no way. We'd make up stupid stories like somebody would come up to us and oh what do you do? Oh yes me, I'm a dolphin trainer. Oh we'd go, oh, yes, me, I'm a plumber, I'm a 'whatever' because we lived and breathed Marine Corps. And all the other jobs you're the Marine mechanic. You're a Marine administrator, you're a freaking secretary. You're an administrative assistant. You're a legal assistant. You're something. So they go out in town and they want to show people hey, I'm a Marine. It's like they're reminding themselves. We know. As infantry guys we know. We know everything that there is to know.

As demonstrated by these data, there is a hierarchy among the men regarding their position in the Marine Corps, which the infantrymen, who are considered the heart of the Marine Corps, actively strive to maintain. This hierarchy divides along occupational specialties, with the grunts presenting themselves as holding a more primal toughness than their male peers who serve in other occupations. Part of this hierarchy emerges from a perceived feminization of jobs within the Corps, as more occupations are opened to women. Those men in the combat arms, however, can claim distinction because women cannot serve with them; they truly are serving in jobs that only men can do, at least from a formal policy standpoint. Interestingly, the men serving in occupations other than ground combat (or the POGs) did not acknowledge this hierarchy, although they were well aware of the different terms and stereotypes used to characterize each community. This distinction suggests that the enforcement of masculinity and status in the Marines Corps resides with those who most gain an advantage from guarding it, rather than from those who serve in occupations other than infantry which are perceived as less central to

the Marine Corps' institutional identity. Occupation intersects with gender to create a hierarchy of masculinity in the organization.

In addition to a distinction between men by MOS, there also emerged a difference between men surrounding their physical abilities. Unfortunately, this distinction often did not emerge until the men were injured and felt compelled to show strength despite their body's calls for rest and recuperation. These experiences provide an interesting contrast to the women who often framed their experience in the Marine Corps as a constant struggle to prove they belonged in the organization. The women were cognizant of their precarious position and knew they had to perform at a high level constantly. In contrast, when asked about what they think their male peers experienced, they provided responses similar to this one (F3), "I think they don't have the constant pressure of having to prove themselves." Although the men did not directly cite performance pressures akin to the women, they did have their own struggles, albeit in an indirect way, which were often connected to times when they could no longer perform at a peak level.

Of all 34 respondents, only one suffered a serious, physical wound while deployed. This individual, who worked in motor transport, suffered an IED attack that left him severely wounded. After eighteen months of recovery at Bethesda Naval Medical Center, this individual was medically retired from the Marine Corps. His injuries were serious and his sacrifice was obvious, leaving no doubt as to his position within the Marine Corps and its core values. He was valued, even as a wounded veteran.

No other male respondent suffered such a traumatic incident. However, others did report physical and mental injuries sustained while in the service, but, unlike the previous respondent, their reception within the organization was marked by suspicion. Rather than

being recognized as heroes who also sacrificed for the mission, their injuries, which were linked to either pushing themselves too far physically or to ongoing exposure to deployment-related stress, were viewed as signs of weakness. The men were viewed as malingerers who were using their injuries to avoid work.

For example, one individual, who planned on serving in the Marines through retirement, separated after 12 years of service due to injuries sustained through physical fitness training that he led as a MOS instructor. Because the MOS training was combined with the other services, he pushed his fellow Marines to train harder and longer to show physical superiority. As the instructor and leader, this individual trained at a high level every day, which eventually led to a permanent debilitating back injury for him. Initially, he ignored the pain because he did not want to slow down. He finally reached a breaking point when he collapsed on a training run and had to have a friend rescue him because he was unable to move. Although he went to a chiropractor, he downplayed his injury which he perceived as a manageable nuisance. He did not want to admit the scope of his injuries which he explains as, “And one of the main reasons that I let it go so long was I was scared. I was scared of being hurt, you know.” He delayed receiving medical help because he knew that being injured would make him an outsider in the Marine Corps. He explains his perspective by recalling a conversation he had with a chaplain which he details as:

The Marine Corps is a great organization. There's a brotherhood that supports you but I remember talking to a chaplain on base because I was really, you know, depressed at the time. The pain was really killing me. I was trying to hide it. But I talked to him for a little bit and he said something that I'll never forget. And it's actually stuck with me for many years. He said, "You Marines are the tightest bunch of people I've ever met. You eat together. You sit together. You'll do anything for each

other." He asked me if I watched the Animal Channel. "Yeah, I watch it. It's one of my favorite shows along with the Discovery Channel. He said, "You ever see a pack of wild dogs in Australia, the Dingo dogs?" I go, "Yes, sir," I said. "Do you notice how they hunt together? They're a very tight knit group. They do everything together." He goes, "You guys remind me of the Dingo dogs." We kind of laughed at it. He said, "You guys hunt in packs." But, on the downside, do you know what happens to one of those Dingo dogs once he gets hurt?" I said, "No, sir, I don't." "The other ones turn around and eat him."

His injury eventually progressed to a point where he was in severe pain that left him bedridden for several days after he completed his mandatory physical fitness tests. It was at this point that he decided to see a doctor who treated him with steroid shots and eventually surgery. Because he was no longer able to meet the Marine Corps' physical testing requirements, he separated from the service, a tough decision for him. He knew once his injury became public that he would be viewed differently by fellow Marines, which is exactly what he experienced. He explains that there is a, "stigma that comes with being injured. It's a weakness. A lot of times Marines look at you like, 'Okay, you're sandbagged,' or, 'You're milking it,' you know. And I've been guilty of it, you know." Although he loves the Marine Corps, he also recognizes that it has a culture that frames weak or injured bodies as nuisances to be overcome, and if that is not possible, to be discarded.

The experience of injuries, pain, and stigma cited by the above individual were also mentioned by another respondent, who was a career infantryman (M7). Over the course of his twenty year career, this individual had ten deployments, including two deployments within a two year period in Iraq. It was during his second deployment where, according to the respondent, "The day that could have ended for me three times in less than 2 minutes," where he was injured. Although he did not describe the type of

injury sustained, he made it clear that his experience had permanently affected some of his mental processes, especially those associated with memory. He explains his injuries as:

...when I was injured I didn't say anything and when I returned back, when I came back in 2005, I was not, there was something wrong with me but I didn't want to share it. I didn't want to, because it, because we're not supposed to do that. That's just the way we are. Just the way, that's the way we grew up in the Marine Corps. And when I got back I was, ever since April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2005 I was, the way I explained it to my doctors was like a level [as in the tool], and you got to keep the bubble between the line and then you know it's level. My bubble is just off. Not a whole lot off, but just a little bit. And when I came back and the doctor, I explained to my doctors, you know that, and that I kept dropping things and I kept falling. I kept forgetting stuff. I couldn't, I couldn't, as a recruiter I loved talking and I could express myself pretty damn good. And after I found myself struggling with teaching, with giving classes, speaking, words. Words escape me even today. I can't, I know the word I want and I see it in my head but I can't say it.

Since this individual was close to retirement, he requested a special assignment, or "twilight tour," that would allow him to serve without deploying. However, he met resistance from a higher ranking enlisted Marine who thought he was fabricating his injury as a way to avoid further deployments. He explains the situation as:

And I never, I never said anything. And when I told my doctors that, it was year after the fact. So then I started going to therapy and all this stuff. But a year had already passed and a year of trying to hide it was not good. And Marines are still doing it today. Still doing it today. And even though the last deployment that I was supposed to go to Afghanistan, when I didn't want to extend and my, and I had, also injured and I was non-deployable I was, I was oh, what's the word? I was an outcast because I was hurt. And I was using my injury to not deploy. Yeah, that's what my, that's what my battalion Sergeant Major told me. Which him and I went round and round about it. Fortunately for me his, his boss I go back a long way. So I said okay whatever, Sergeant Major may I be excused? And I went to my buddy's office and I told him what was going on. And this guy was a new Sergeant Major so he was still learning. And I understand his job. I understand that he needs staff and CO's. I completely understand, but his style of leadership was to me, was not

leadership. He was being a bully was what he was. And so my buddy got me transferred out of there and sent me to another Battalion.

The first Sergeant Major was able to discount the respondent's injuries because they were hidden; there were no visible wounds, only the words and actions of the affected servicemember. The wartime standard of visible wounds meriting consideration and often recognition did not apply in scenarios where Marines had issues such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. When I asked him about whether the Marine Corps as an organization is appropriately addressing the traumas experienced by deployed servicemembers, he countered with, "you might read papers or articles that they are, but they're not. I'm telling you right now that they're not." He concluded by describing the overall culture of the Marine Corps which he presents as:

Everybody is walking around like oh my God, so macho and it's, it's really funny now that I think about it. You have to see it. And everybody, nobody wants to show weakness. And so that, unfortunately is not always good. Also the good thing is that everything is a priority and everything must be done yesterday. And we excel in that, the Marine Corps excels in that. Just when you think it can't be done, we do it. And it's, it's, it's a characteristic that we love that it's, that we cherish, that we, what's the word? That we loved being recognized for.

This respondent recognizes the strengths of the Marine Corps, including its ability to overcome the most difficult tasks. However, as a task-oriented organization, this respondent also believes that the Marine Corps overlooks the contributions and needs of its people because it is so mission focused. Marines, whom he characterizes as being excessively macho, prioritize the task at hand over personal needs, leading to a culture that overlooks and devalues those who are injured and unable to perform at their previous level.

As discussed, the male Marines interviewed for this study expressed different pressures and concerns than the female Marines. None of the male respondents considered their presence in the Marine Corps to be an atypical decision or experience; they were participating in an organization where their bodies were the norm and where the culture had developed around men as the numerical majority. However, there were distinctions around the men, which were largely based on their MOS's and where this placed them in the organization. The infantrymen unilaterally placed themselves in a different category, where they described themselves as being the true fighters, and in essence, the true Marines. Thus, some of the men had to negotiate an occupational hierarchy that confirmed the true masculinity of some to the detriment of others. Finally, several of the men described an organizational culture that prioritized toughness and mission accomplishment and relegated personal needs, such as hidden injuries, to a "softer" realm outside of the Marine Corps. The Marines prided themselves on being able to work through pain; however, once that pain became insurmountable they were treated as outcasts. The men were forced to choose between their identity as proven Marines, or the weaker other.



## **Chapter XI: Conclusion**

The stated purpose of this research is to examine why Mexican American men and women disproportionately are selecting the Marine Corps as their branch of service and to compare their experiences while in the military through an intersectional lens; this was my immediate goal. Although limited in their generalizability, the results provide a detailed description of the factors that influenced the decision-making processes of the respondents as well as those that shaped their experiences while in the Marine Corps. However, this research does not just speak to who serves in the American military and in what capacity, but also addresses broader sociological issues such as culture, intersectionality, intra-Latino perceptions on race and ethnicity, gender in the military and in the Mexican American population, and the increasingly institutional motivations of today's all-volunteer force. In this chapter, I first review the key issues surrounding my research questions. Then, I frame the main findings of this study within those sociological theories and concepts to which my research contributes and, in some cases, challenges. I conclude with a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the study and suggested areas for future research.

This research broadly stems from the changing demographics of American society which, in turn, influence the demographics of the American military. Hispanics, including Mexican Americans, are one of the largest and fastest growing minority groups in the United States. They also are a youthful population with a high propensity to serve, making them an important recruiting base. The proportions of Hispanics are increasing across the military; however, Hispanics are concentrated in the sea services of the Navy

and the Marine Corps. No sociological research currently exists on why they are disproportionately drawn to these services over others. This trend holds for Hispanic women, who equal Hispanic men in military representation in both the Navy and the Marine Corps. Although their representation in the Navy reflects similar trends for women of other racial and ethnic groups, their overrepresentation in the Marine Corps is a unique trend. This trend runs counter to previous analyses on women's military participation, especially since women in the Marine Corps do not have the option of serving in traditionally feminine fields, such as nursing, which is where a large number of military women are concentrated in the other services. Furthermore, because Hispanic men are at greater risk for wartime casualty in the Marine Corps over the other services, it also is important to consider what drives them into this service. For these reasons, I focus on Hispanic men and women in the Marine Corps, rather than Hispanic men and women in the military overall.

Furthermore, although I am interested in the increase of Hispanics in the Marine Corps, I limit my population of study to Mexican Americans. I focus on Mexican Americans, rather than Hispanics generally, because they are the largest group in the Hispanic American population and the largest Hispanic group in the Marine Corps. Furthermore, there are important differences between how Mexican Americans and other Hispanic groups, such as Puerto Ricans and Cubans, are incorporated into the American population because of different citizenship statuses and different cultures. Finally, Mexican Americans are unique in that a sizeable proportion of their population is indigenous to the United States; that is they trace their ancestry to the American Southwest and Texas. The term "Hispanic" includes people from over twenty countries,

whereas the term “Mexican American,” although still imperfect, creates more specificity to my population of interest. However, this term was still problematic, which I discuss later in the chapter, and may have shaped my sample in meaningful ways. It is difficult to categorize such a diverse population as Mexican Americans, who may differ in characteristics such as community of origin, race and ethnicity, generational status, and socioeconomic position, with one term. My use of this term may have created respondent-centered confusion on whom I was actually including in my sample. It also demonstrates the limitations of using a universal identity marker on a population who is not unified in its own identification.

Finally, rather than provide a macro-level perspective on the intervening institutions and processes that bring a Mexican American into the Marine Corps, I complete a qualitative analysis that focuses on the motivations and experiences of the servicemembers using their own words. This method is particularly well-suited because of the small number of Mexican American women in the Marine Corps, who would be difficult to capture using other research designs. As a way to circumvent their small presence, past analyses of Mexican Americans in the military tend to categorize them under the broader term of “Hispanic,” with little differentiation between countries of origin. Quantitative analyses also tend to lump Hispanic men and women together which opens the possibility for men’s perspectives to emerge as the “Hispanic” perspective. This has been the critique of previous research on minority populations in the American military, especially African American men, and I aim to build from the lessons learned of previous studies of this nature. To provide a different perspective with greater specificity, I interview Mexican American men and women, and frame their decisions

and experiences through an intersectional lens that includes other characteristics such as ethnicity (including “blended” ethnicities), gender, race, socioeconomic position, and community of origin.

This intersectional perspective grounded in qualitative research is especially valuable because there is little social scientific analysis on the decision-making processes of Mexican American women. Past research has characterized their entrance into the Marine Corps as a product (albeit a somewhat counterintuitive one) of the traditional gender roles perceived to be the norm in the Mexican American community. This perspective frames the decision of Mexican American women to enlist in the Marine Corp as a trailing behavior; that is, the women are following the men, rather than acting on their own agency. This perspective is problematic for several reasons. First, it does not account for the diversity of lived experiences within the Mexican American community that an intersectional perspective highlights. Certain Mexican American women may be more traditional in their perceptions of appropriate gender roles; these women may also differ in important ways by generational status, socioeconomic position, family structure, etc. from those women who choose to serve. This argument also does not account for the changes in values that have occurred within the Mexican American community, nor does it account for the interpretations of experience forwarded by the women themselves. Rather, it forwards a blanket cultural perspective which my results directly challenge.

To question these gendered and ethnicized assumptions, I interviewed Mexican American men (n=19) and women (n=15) who have served in the Marine Corps since 2001 and, through their own words, frame how military service intersects with their

conceptions of self. Specifically, I examined their motivations for service, their reasons for selecting the Marine Corps as their service branch, and their experiences while in the military with attention to the social characteristics that they highlight as shaping their experience. Two main questions guided this research. My first research question was: **what personal characteristics or experiences are associated with the decision to enlist in the Marine Corps for Mexican Americans?** Additionally, because my dissertation examined the military experiences of Mexican Americans serving in the Marine Corps during a time of war, my second question was: **How do the military experiences of Mexican American men and women in the Marine Corps compare?** Additionally, a sub-question which guides my intersectional analysis is: **Do these characteristics and experiences differ by social characteristics, such as gender?**

### *Discussion of Findings*

This research makes several sociological and theoretical contributions that I want to address explicitly. First, I directly challenge pure cultural arguments as the main explanation for how Mexican Americans navigate major social institutions like the military. Rather, I demonstrate that there is not a universal cultural identity for Mexican American Marines, much less a blanket culture uniting their experience, that singlehandedly explains their motivations for service and their experiences while in the Corps. Instead, I forward an intersectional analysis that shows how different social characteristics, such as socioeconomic position, come together to form a diversity of lived experiences. I also argue that lived experiences are shaped by the social institutions in which one operates, especially in a masculine organization like the Marine Corps. This especially is relevant for the Mexican American women in this sample. Once a part

of the organization, gender became the most important status for them; it shaped their organizational experiences and individual interactions in a dominant way. However, even with these important intersectional distinctions, I still find a place for culture, especially as it pertains to values, but note that it is only one part of a much larger theoretical story. Finally, my research challenges Moskos' conceptualization of the I/O model and pushes for a new view of "pragmatic professionalism" that accounts for volunteer service during a time of war.

The first suggestion that a cultural explanation would not be sufficient came even before I began analyzing the data. While I was recruiting respondents, I encountered challenges to my use of the term "Mexican American" in soliciting participants. As discussed, I consciously chose the Mexican American population over other Hispanic groups because they are the largest ethnic group in the Hispanic population overall and in the Marine Corps. Because of this decision, I searched for a term that would represent accurately the type of person I was looking for: someone who self-identified as being ethnically Mexican American. I settled on the term "Mexican American" over more general terms, such as Latino, Chicano and Tejano, because I thought it offered greater specificity. Like Hispanic, Latino was too broad a term and many people of Mexican ethnicity may not identify with it. Likewise, Chicano and/or Tejano are terms used to describe an ethnic group with common geographic roots, especially California and Texas, and I wanted to broaden my sample beyond those two states.

Despite my intention, my use of the term "Mexican American" was problematic because of the social meanings attached to the label and how these meanings varied by perspective (Oboler 1995). Issues such as generational status, family roots, and ethnic

lineage (e.g., whether one is mixed ethnicity or mixed race) all combined to create a multitude of self-identifications that are not easily corralled under one label. This led to confusion as to whether certain profiles fit my sample. In particular, there was confusion among those potential respondents who were of mixed race/ethnicity – did they qualify as a Mexican American, even though they had one parent who was not? It also created confusion for those respondents who had family roots in the United States that extended generations. Several respondents thought that my use of the term Mexican American signaled that I was looking for recent immigrants or those who were second generation.

These differences in interpretation show the necessity of approaching these data through an intersectional perspective, rather than a fixed cultural one. The respondents do not view themselves as a uniform group, even if I attempted to categorize them initially as one, and they do not offer a singular “version of events.” Although they may share a similar ethnic background, their Mexican ethnicity also combines with other social characteristics to create a diversity of lived experiences. This is demonstrated by the respondents in this study having differing opinions as to who constituted a “Mexican American;” there was no agreed upon definition.

In practical terms, we often resort to broad categorizations to recruit participants, as I did here, and certainly there are many arguments as to why we should continue to do so. However, if we are looking for diversity within our population of interest, and especially if we are committed to an intersectional analysis, it is important to thoughtfully use terms that broaden, rather than limit our potential sample pool. In the future, I recommend that researchers not only pre-test their interview questions, but that they also pre-test the terms they are using to recruit respondents within their target population.

Clarification and suggestions will emerge to help the researcher refine the language and categories used. This is especially important when dealing with complex characteristics such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic position. People (including non-Hispanics) often do not just encompass one “pure” type; thus, it is our responsibility to find language and conceptual tools that provide specificity without unintentionally limiting our respondent pool.

In addition to the challenges of using one term to recruit a diverse sample, I also found that relying on culture as my main conceptual tool to describe the motivations and experiences of this group falls short. My results do not support a purely cultural argument as to why Mexican Americans are serving in the Marine Corps in higher proportions than the other service branches, although the application of a cultural argument provides some easy, and perhaps even explanatory, reasons. Culture remains relevant as a conceptual tool, but it must be interrogated and properly hedged. For example, I did hear from the respondents that they chose the Marine Corps because it reminds them of family and because it speaks to their conceptions of *machismo*; they found an alignment between the culture of their family and community and the culture of the Marine Corps. This cultural perspective, however, is not enough. First, it makes the mistake of applying a uniform culture to the diverse population of Mexican Americans who differ in meaningful ways and may have different conceptions of *machismo* and other norms of behavior. Mexican Americans who are recent immigrants, or who come from certain areas of the United States, may have different perceptions of gender norms, especially as they concern *machismo*. Culture also evolves as new groups move into and out of communities; it is not static nor is it deterministic. Thus, even though a cultural



argument may have been sufficient in the past, it is difficult to claim that a population's culture remains untouched and holds the same influence and power it always has.

Finally, the reliance on a pure cultural argument also includes assumptions, often racialized and ethnicized, that present the way of life of Hispanic families and communities as "other" and different from mainstream values. Mexican Americans are shaped by culture, but like other groups in the American population (both minority and majority), they also are influenced by other social characteristics.

Yet, I also want to stress that culture is relevant to my conclusions, albeit in a more subdued way. As a meaningful system of symbols, culture includes values and conceptions of a collective identity among those in a common population. Perhaps the most telling example of the role of culture for the respondents came from the combat Marines who reflected on the common traditions, histories, and values of the Marine Corps and the Mexican American population. For example, using the meaning attached to the "blood stripe" of the Marine Corps uniform, a connection was made between the warrior tradition of Mexico – beginning with the Aztecs and continuing through the Mexican American War – with the traditions and culture of the Marine Corps. An invisible connection came into play linking servicemembers, by virtue of their ethnic lineage, with their chosen occupation based on actual historical occurrences that linked Mexicans and the Marine Corps. These commonalities lead to the creation of a common collective identity shaped and maintained by a culture that becomes one way the respondents frame themselves and their place in the organization. The interpretation of the Battle of Chapultepec may be unique to those Marines with a Mexican American background, as they search for a meaningful storyline to frame their own decisions and

experiences. Thus, for many of the respondents, culture emerges as a motivating factor. It becomes a convenient way to explain trends because of perceived differences and uniqueness; however, there are other factors involved as well.

The use of an intersectional perspective, in contrast, reminds us that motivations and experiences also are shaped by the many combinations of characteristics that form each individual and group. For example, I asked each respondent to describe their first exposure to the Marine Corps and to explain why they selected it over the other branches. Under a pure cultural argument and as has been done in the past, I could frame their decision as the logical outcome of individuals who grew up in very traditional, patriarchal households. The men, as a demonstration of their dominance, chose the Marine Corps to continue this role, and the women merely followed them. However, the culture argument does not provide a very satisfying or complete approach, especially since many of the respondents did not grow up in these types of households and the respondents did not frame themselves in this way. Rather, they were drawn to military service and selected the Marine Corps because of a combination of occupational and institutional motivations that resulted more from their social location than any other factor. Rather than being categorized as having an all-powerful, unique culture, this finding suggests that Mexican Americans are similar in their motivations to other servicemembers, especially those from a common class position. My research, then, advocates for a more thorough, intersectional analysis that highlights and deconstructs the role of other social characteristics in addition to culture. Culture plays a role, but it is not the main act.

Not only did my research highlight the need and fruitfulness of an intersectional analysis, but it also demonstrated the continued relevance of Moskos'

Institutional/Occupational model, albeit with a few updates (1977). My first research question was about the factors associated with the decision to enlist in the Marine Corps for Mexican Americans. Overall, I found several common motivations that shaped the decisions of both the men and women in this sample to enlist that are largely rooted in a shared social class location. In line with Moskos' conceptualization of the All-Volunteer Force as occupational in its focus, the respondents turned to military service as a way of improving their social location through decent pay, benefits, and the acquisition of human capital. The initial decision to serve often was a strategic one and was made without regard for service branch. The respondents, the majority of whom came from disadvantaged backgrounds, framed military service as an acceptable bridge that transitioned them from the perceived lack of opportunity in their community to the guaranteed job of military service. For many of the respondents, this decision to serve came at a critical point in their life course: they felt a need to escape the community of their youth and restructure their lives; this sentiment was especially strong for those from Texas and California. Both the men and the women from these states presented their hometowns as being either dangerous or professional dead-ends. These individuals also lived in areas with high proportions of Hispanics, demonstrating how ethnicity, socioeconomic position, and community all intersect to shape one's lived experience in an observable way.

In their case, military service was an opportunity to grow beyond the socioeconomic status of their families and communities. In their search for opportunity and financial security, it is these practical considerations that drew the respondents to the military. Although many of the respondents knew that the Marine Corps was the branch

they wanted to serve in, others “fell” into the Marine Corps because of recruiter willingness to work with them. Their service branch selection was a calculated decision: they knew they wanted to serve so they chose the branch with the most resources and dedication to make this happen.

In an occupational sense, the respondents in this sample are primarily motivated to serve based on a cost-benefit calculation; they weighed the burdens of service against its perceived benefits. At the individual level of analysis, the military emerges as a viable job, especially for entry-level workers. However, even with these practical considerations, the majority of respondents selected the Marine Corps because of institutional considerations, demonstrating that occupational considerations are not the only or even most important ones. All of the respondents chose the Marine Corps because of more emotional, subjective reasons. They viewed the Marine Corps as embodying the core values of service and sacrifice and they respected the focus on the higher good over individual preferences. Both the male and female respondents found honor in working hard, and argued that as Mexican Americans, rising to the challenge of physically demanding labor was part of what distinguished them as an ethnic group. Extending from this common value was the belief that the Marine Corps, as a ground combat oriented force, was the service most in line with institutional values. As discussed earlier, several of the male respondents also highlighted the warrior ethos of the Marine Corps, and connected their service in the Marines to the warrior tradition of Mexicans. They saw themselves as honorably continuing the fighting tradition of their ethnic community. In line with Moskos’ conceptualization of the institutional nature of the military, the respondents framed their service, and especially their selection of the Marine Corps, as

directly connected to individual and community values. They searched for an occupation that would allow them to maintain a positive sense of self, while also allowing them to improve their own socioeconomic position.

Although many of these sentiments may be the result of retrospective bias (the respondents, after all, have been socialized into the Marine Corps), they also may have played a key role in the decision-making process that ultimately led to military service. Thus, the respondents were drawn to serve through a combination of occupational and institutional motivations. Certainly, the military emerged as a viable job, but this job was also a calling with the benefits of service earned through hard work. This framing of motivations was especially acute for the respondents because they chose to serve in the Marine Corps, which is considered to be the most institutional of the service branches. They felt a connection to the service because of its cohesive culture, its reverence for history and historically-grounded symbols, and its unilateral naming of all organizational servicemembers as Marines; the institutional nature of the Corps also intermeshed well with their own individual values.

My findings show the continued relevance of Moskos' I/O model, but also demonstrate how the concepts have evolved, especially when framed through the lens of volunteer service during a time of war. There is the potential that these findings are not specific to the Mexican American population, and in fact, I would hypothesize that they are not, but that there is need to reconsider how the calling of military service has changed in the past decade. The respondents are not only benefiting from the pay, educational assistance, and medical coverage of military service, but also are serving during an especially dangerous and greedy time. They certainly fall in line with Segal's

concept of the “pragmatic professional,” as they are highly institutional in outlook and ethos while also highly occupational in making career decisions. Although servicemembers can be mobilized at any moment, perhaps service during peacetime is less about sacrifice and more about practical concerns; whereas, service during wartime, even with a steady paycheck, shows a reemergence of the military professional committed to duty, service, and sacrifice. This may be especially true of those who enlisted or reenlisted once the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were already underway.

Moskos forwarded his I/O model in the transition years after Vietnam when the United States military was experiencing the relative peace of the Cold War. In light of the decade long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, we have to reconsider why someone chooses to serve with the almost certain guarantee of wartime deployments. This question is especially important for service in the Marine Corps, which has been at the center of military operations in both conflicts. It is not just about money anymore, but also about core, institutional values; service remains valued, even if it remains pragmatic in nature. Thus, I argue that we should reconsider the applicability and meaning behind the I/O model, especially the relevance of the “pragmatic professional” model. I also hypothesize that my findings extend beyond Mexican American servicemembers to almost all servicemembers who have volunteered to serve during this time. War, after all, has a way of changing most social institutions and our role in them.

In addition to challenging how we frame the motivations of current servicemembers, my research also highlights their experiences while in the Marine Corps with attention to how social characteristics intersect to create different lived experiences. The goal here was not to find one universal Mexican American experience, but to

understand how bodies are marked, divided, united, and incorporated into the Marine Corps based on social characteristics like gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic position, and community. With this perspective, I can consider both the obvious and fine gradients of power that may doubly-disadvantage certain categories of people as well provide privileges for others. Thus, an intersectional perspective not only focuses on the strengths and commonalities in a community, but also highlights how intersecting systems of power change the lens of personal experience and move us beyond the uni-causal cultural argument.

Building on my previous finding that the men and women in this study share similar motivations for service grounded in their common socioeconomic statuses, I expected to see a similar trend once they entered the organization, especially in regard to their common ethnicity which made them a minority group in the organization. However, what I found is that the commonalities between the respondents transitioned to clear, meaningful divisions by gender once they made the transition from civilian pooler to recruit and then Marine. Once in the organization, gender superseded all other characteristics in its salience; it is the master status for the respondents in this study. It overshadows all other social characteristics, including race and ethnicity, and has the most sweeping effect on how one, especially a woman, experiences the Marine Corps.

This is not to say that the respondents viewed the social characteristics of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic position as having only a tertiary role in their experience. For example, the majority of respondents discussed, without prompting, the large number of Hispanics in the Marine Corps. They did not view themselves as a minority group, but as a population growing in size and influence, although this growth was mainly in the

enlisted corps. They found solidarity in their growing numbers, as ethnicity became the common link leading to community. From the perspective of the respondents, their ethnicity seemed to have a positive impact on their experience in the Marine Corps, although this was less true for the women than for the men, who benefitted from being a part of the majority gender group. At a structural level, Hispanics, including Mexican Americans, had reached a tipping point in the Marine Corps where they had increased power and support in the organization. Hispanics were everywhere, or at least that was the perception.

However, even with this noted commonality, the respondents also stratified each other by skin color, language ability, and country of origin, creating a division between those who were sufficiently Mexican and those who were not. These divisions appeared to determine who gained inclusion into the Mexican American community, but they were not definitive, and in most cases were relaxed after the respondents got to know each other. Overall, the ability to relate to one another via a common ethnicity created a social safety net that the respondents noted and in many cases actively sought to maintain. It also shows the flexibility accorded to social labels, which may be rooted in perceived essential traits, but which are shaped and reshaped by social interaction.

Building on their common ethnicity, many of the respondents framed the Marine Corps experience as becoming a normalized pathway into adulthood for Mexican American men and women. It was not considered to be an unusual choice, but one in line with broader perceptions of what it means to be a member of their ethnic and class community, especially as more Mexican Americans serve. However, despite these commonalities, the male respondents were more likely to express awareness of this trend



than the women; military service, after all, has long been a marker of masculinity for heterosexual men of all races and ethnicities (Bourg and Segal 2001; De Angelis et al. forthcoming). Further, the recognition of the structural presence of other Mexican Americans by the men may be because the majority of fellow Mexican American Marines were also men. The men were just recognizing others like them while for the women their scope may have been more limited because gender dominated every aspect of their lives, perhaps limiting their focus on other social characteristics.

There also were differences between the male and female respondents regarding their perceptions of race. The majority of men and women did not use race to frame themselves (although they did use ethnicity and gender); however, they did use it to frame others. The men, in particular, relied upon a hierarchy of race to stratify themselves against Puerto Ricans and African Americans (and those Puerto Ricans who are African American). This is not a surprising finding, as the men were looking for ways to distinguish themselves from each other. There is a hierarchy of ascribed characteristics in most social institutions with group membership determining who has access to power and privilege (Acker 1992). Military organizations, such as the Marine Corps, are hierarchical, gendered organizations modeled around the male body and certain conceptions of masculinity. This perspective suggests that the structures, processes, and distributions of power that guide military life, including those that shape what bodies are acceptable for military service, are categorized along gender lines and are determined by the images, needs, and strengths of the male body. In this case, the male respondents already had access to the power and privileges of being a man in a male-focused organization. This created an opening for them to focus on other markers of

difference. As men, they already were united in their standing in the organization so they relied on distinctions in race and ethnicity to further parse themselves. The women, in contrast, did not have the privilege of being the dominant gender in the organization and as such, were bound together by the stereotypes and pressures of serving as women in a highly masculine organization. Unlike the experiences of the men, for the women race and ethnicity became less important in determining their role in the Marine Corps.

After considering the role of race and ethnicity, I then framed the respondents' experiences through the lens of gender, which emerged as the most salient characteristic for all respondents, either as way of defining themselves or as a way of defining others. The women, for example, were well aware of how gender shaped their role in the organization, both at a structural level and at an interactional level. Even though they shared a common ethnicity, the men also were aware of how Mexican American women were different; they were categorized as women first, and Hispanics second. For the women, gender was the guiding principle of their experience in the Marine Corps. It determined how they were trained and with whom as well as the MOS's in which they were allowed to serve. Gender also became an ongoing challenge that they had to consider every day. Although a natural part of social life, it became omnipresent for the female respondents.

Because of their small numbers in a masculine organization, the women recounted extreme performance pressures. The women recalled a work environment where they worked with only a handful of women, if any at all. Similarly, many of the men described a work experience where working with women was infrequent, and if it did occur, as very cautious. As a consequence, the women knew they were a small minority group with

heightened visibility and that their actions had the potential to represent all female Marines, regardless of race or ethnicity. All of the women described an ongoing need to prove their worthiness to their peers, even while confronting sexist behavior and attitudes in the Corps.

In contrast, none of the men directly reflected on what it was like to be a man in the Marine Corps. Gender was not an obvious marker of distinction for them (although it was used to distinguish themselves from women) because service in the Marine Corps was a natural extension of their masculinity and was considered to be a normative pathway for men. However, gender still shaped their experience in the Corps, although this occurred in more subtle ways. First, the infantrymen described a hierarchy of MOS's in the Marine Corps by prestige and status. The ground combat arms, which are closed to women, were described as being the occupations that most embodied the Marine Corps because they were the most connected to raw physical toughness. Based on these perceptions, those men who served in support MOS's (or POGs) and those who worked in aviation (known as wingers) were perceived as having less standing in the organization.

Additionally, distinctions among men were noticed by several respondents who experienced debilitating injuries while either on deployment or because of rigorous physical training. Because their wounds were not visible, they were not acknowledged as serious injuries, but as exaggerated conditions used by the respondents to remove themselves from the Marine Corps mission. The injured respondents became known as malingerers, rather than as wounded warriors, with their dedication to the Marine Corps questioned and their service framed as weak and dispensable. These respondents did not

feel as though the organization or their fellow Marines believed them when they revealed invisible injuries, nor did they think they cared. Even though the military has implemented more programs for wounded servicemembers to receive help for hidden injuries, there is little cultural change to back up these calls for assistance. Part of this inertia stems from the masculine culture of the military, including the Marine Corps' focus on fitness, sacrifice, and its storied ability to accomplish the mission at all costs.

Overall, gender remains a key organizing principle in the Marine Corps, with obvious and fine gradients. Certainly, the women experienced the more obvious gradients of gender as a system of power, as demonstrated by their limited organizational standing. However, all of the respondents experienced the fine gradients of gender, even though its influence and effect were less obvious. In a highly masculine, performance-centered, hierarchical organization like the Marine Corps, the pressures of gender apply to all, although they may be clouded by other performance expectations, such as the requirement to perform at a high level consistently.

Even with an intersectional perspective, gender remains a fundamental building block of social life. It shapes how one's service is perceived by others. Several of the men experienced this first-hand as they struggled to reconcile the demands of invisible injuries with perceptions of how Marines should adapt, overcome, and push through pain. It also continues to influence who serves in the military and in what capacity, especially since there are formal regulations dictating what women can and cannot do in the Marine Corps. For example, all Marines experience gender-segregated Recruit Training, leading to the possibility that some infantrymen will never serve with a female Marine, and women are still forbidden from serving in offensive ground combat positions (There is

the possibility that this prohibition will change in the future.) These guidelines are not based on individual ability, but on blanket judgments on the physical capabilities and group influence of women. Thus, there is legal, formal discrimination against women in the military, which is especially pronounced in the Marine Corps. The combination of these restrictive laws with the limited structural presence of women creates an intense, almost stifling experience, where the women report feeling almost constant surveillance.

The formal laws and the proportional presence of women in the Marine Corps also shape the organizational culture in meaningful ways. Although gender harassment is illegal and the Marine Corps forwards a policy of equal treatment and opportunity, the women in this sample all report an increased need to demonstrate their dedication and worth; they could not have a “down day.” They also described a culture that was very much grounded in the dynamics of an all-male organization. Despite sharing the common title of Marine, the women were aware that their presence interrupted the normal flow of events, and that they often were viewed more as an interloper than a natural participant. Although many understood this challenge before enlisting or were made aware of it during recruit training, the women were still struck by the lack of support in the organization for female Marines, who after all, were Marines as well. Some went as far as to say that it was obvious the Marine Corps did not want women in its ranks. Many experienced harmful working environments and in the case of one female respondent, criminal behavior. Their reflections, which stem from military service in the last decade, demonstrate the ongoing need for the Marine Corps to consider how it integrates its servicemembers and whether the formal divisions it furthers by gender are still necessary in today’s wartime environment. Rather than argue that the

informal norms do not match the formal goals of the organization, the data suggest that the initial formal segregation of women from men and their MOS restrictions allow for this difficult, exclusive culture to continue. The culture matches the formal guidelines that matter most in a military organization – who gets to serve and in what capacity - with policy statements on equal opportunity as ineffective asides.

The issue of gender integration during basic training has been well researched, especially at the policy/implementation level (see, for example, the Final Report from the Congressional Commission on Military Training and Gender-Related Issues 1999). Although civilian leaders have agreed to allow the services to tailor their basic training to their unique mission, there is the potential that this segregation allows for an environment of gender discrimination to grow and then continue. The women in this study report that the most egregious stereotypes and acts of discrimination were experienced during or immediately after recruit training. After segregated training, the male recruits were convinced that the women were not performing at the same level. There were even times when men were encouraged by their Drill Instructors to frame the women in a negative light. Additionally, because this segregated training continued for those in certain MOS's, the men in the ground combat arms had little to no interaction with female Marines, making them clueless as to their abilities and needs. This separation has implications for the organization because it allows for perceptions of differential worth to continue. It also empowers men in the combat arms, who tend to dominate senior leadership positions, to overlook the role of female Marines. At a practical level, this study demonstrates that there are meaningful negative consequences to segregated

training that must be considered alongside some of the benefits, and then weighed as to whether this approach to training should continue.

Even though gender appears to be more salient for women, it does not mean that these women felt completely powerless about their experience in the Marine Corps. Many did express some agency, even if it was stifled. They framed their decision to serve in the Marine Corps as a direct challenge to conceptions of what women, and especially Mexican American women, can do. Their agency suggests a missing component to tokenism theory – mainly, that minority groups may seek out service in an organization with a skewed population to challenge social norms. Despite becoming exhausted with the consequences of their choice, many of the women intentionally sought out service in the Marine Corps as a way of proving their independence and unique strength. Their explanations of their motivations for service and their experiences while in the Corps demonstrate that care must be used when considering how gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic position intersect for Mexican American women. As discussed earlier, there are stereotypical labels used to characterize Mexican American women, which characterize them as passive, self-sacrificial, and focused solely on domestic life. However, the importance of these cultural characterizations can be overstated and their usefulness as explanations for Mexican American attitudes and behaviors seems to be outdated, at least in this case. The women in this sample did not frame their decision to serve in the Marine Corps as a submissive one; they were not merely following the men into the Marines as a byproduct of traditional gender roles, nor did they choose the Marine Corps because they thought it would force them to stay in highly segregated, feminized jobs. Rather, they saw themselves as purposefully entering

into a highly masculine organization as a way of asserting their strength and capabilities and challenging stereotypes about women, especially Hispanic women. They were aware that they were entering into the service commonly perceived as the most physically demanding, which in many cases, is what attracted them to the Marine Corps. They saw Marines in uniform and felt a sense of confidence and strength, which they wanted to incorporate into their own demeanor. Many were also aware that choosing this unconventional path would allow them to avoid pressures to focus solely on domestic life. Service in the Marine Corps became a way of forming their own pathway separate from familial or community expectations and to show that they, as Mexican American women, would serve, not because they were following the men, but because they were following their own goals and expectations. Thus, an analysis that relies upon Kanter's theory of tokenism also should consider the initial motivations that bring individuals to skewed organizations in the first place.

Obviously these women are unique because they chose to serve in the Marine Corps, a decision that is unique for all women, including Mexican American women. However, the concepts and terms used to describe the Hispanic population need to be properly hedged with supporting data. Rather than frame the decision of the women to serve as cultural or as a passive act, it is more appropriate to frame their decision to enlist in the Marine Corps as an active decision that challenges traditional gender constructions in the Hispanic community. These women are not affirming past stereotypes, but are building new models for how to conceptualize gender within the Mexican American community, especially as it emerges in highly masculine organizations like the Marine Corps. They have demonstrated that women also strongly identify with work roles and



that women can be macho, which in this sense represents bravery, honor, respect, and family loyalty, too.

As discussed, there are five main takeaways of this research. First, it challenges past reliance, especially in sociological research, on a pure, uni-causal cultural argument as the main explanation for why Mexican Americans engage in certain behaviors. Past perspectives have relied too much on culture as a blanket explanation for demographic trends such as teen pregnancy, youth gang membership, or military enlistment rates, rather than look at the influence of variables like ethnicity, socioeconomic position, and community of origin. Second, it demonstrates the importance of including an intersectional perspective when looking at group-wide trends. Sociologists have become more sophisticated in their analysis of other minority populations in the military, such as women, other racial and ethnic minorities, and women who are racial and ethnic minorities (see Moore 1996 for a groundbreaking example of this). We must do the same for Hispanics, despite the ease with which pure cultural arguments may sit with this especially ethnicized population. Despite my focus on intersectionality, I also argue that culture, as expressed through individual values and collective identity, plays a role in the motivations and experiences of Mexican Americans in the Marine Corps. It remains important, but should not be the main, or dominant, variable. Rather, culture itself must be imbedded in an intersectional perspective.

In addition to my contribution to the role of culture and intersectionality, my research also directly challenges the I/O model theorized by Moskos during the early years of the All-Volunteer Force, when motivations may have been more occupational in nature. I suggest that motivations have changed as individuals now volunteer to serve

during a time of war. I also assert that these findings extend beyond the Mexican American population to other servicemembers who have volunteered to serve during a time of war. Finally, my research suggests that gender, as the master status for the respondents in this study, shapes how all servicemembers, and especially women, experience their service. Women were viewed as a unified category, despite their diversity in other social characteristics. Certainly, the consequences of being a token population in a masculine organization shaped the culture in predictable, visible ways. However, we also should consider the ways tokens frame their membership in organizations with skewed populations. This allows us to look beyond the organizational experience itself and to consider the role of individual agency in shaping one's life course.

#### *Strengths and Weaknesses of this Study*

To provide a clearer idea of how this study contributes to the broader dialogue, the theoretical and practical implications of this research must be considered alongside the research methodology, the sample collected, and the overall research design. First, the main strength of this study, as with all qualitative research, is the rich, thick description provided in the data. Through qualitative interviewing, we are able to hear the respondents' own interpretations of their motivations for service, their reasons for selecting the Marine Corps, and their experiences while on active duty. Certainly the demographic data show that the military population is changing, as racial and ethnic minorities and women (as well as those who embody multiple characteristics) continue to serve in larger numbers. However, it is difficult to make sense of these changes, and tempting to frame them through the trends of minority groups in the past, without talking

to the affected population. Through interviewing, we are able to conceive of alternatives or new possibilities, and to consider them through the words of the respondents. We also are able to focus on a group - Mexican American women - who, because of their small numbers, are often overlooked in other research methodologies. This research also is timely because Mexican Americans, as well as Hispanics broadly, are a young, growing part of the American population and their participation in the all-volunteer military is vital to its success.

Another strength of this research is that it focuses on the current generation of Marines; that is, those who have served on active duty since September 11, 2001. Several of the respondents enlisted prior to 9/11 so they enlisted under the assumption they were joining a peacetime military. However, the majority entered after this date with the knowledge they would probably deploy to a war zone and in fact, most did experience deployments to either Iraq and/or Afghanistan. The respondents in this study represent a new generation of military veterans with motivations and experiences different from their Cold War and/or Vietnam era counterparts. For the current generation of veterans, theirs is a unique story which merits its own research and conclusions.

However, despite the strengths of this research, there also are weaknesses that must be considered. The use of telephone interviewing facilitated my ability to recruit respondents from across the country rather than from a specific location. Thus, I was able to find participants from areas as diverse as San Diego, CA, to San Antonio, TX, to College Park, MD. It would have been incredibly difficult from both a financial and travel perspective to recruit a similar sample of respondents if all interviews were to be

conducted in person. Telephone interviewing also is more convenient for the respondents. They do not have to go to a predetermined location and they are able to multitask (especially important for the parents in the sample) while talking to me.

With that said, however, there is the potential that I lost information, such as the emotional state of the respondents communicated through body language and gestures, by not being able to see and interact with the respondents. This is especially relevant for those respondents who discussed stressful, meaningful personal experiences such as injuries through combat or through rape. It also is more difficult to build rapport, which is critical to effective qualitative interviewing, over the telephone than in person. Relying on the respondent to detail past recollections also leads to memory bias. The farther removed we are from an experience the more likely we are to reconstruct it in a form more in line with our own preferences and our own personal story. This means mundane experiences may become obsolete and emotional experiences may become reframed in a more positive or negative light so that they can be retold with additional meaning. Although several of the respondents were still on active duty, none of them were brand new Marines and many had been out of the service for several years. There is the possibility that my data are more an interpretation of the processes, people, and institutions that influenced the respondents rather than an actual record. However, this is not necessarily a weakness because overall I am interested in how the respondents frame their own experiences.

This research design also is limited because the conclusions apply only to the sample and do not extend to other Mexican American Marines; thus, my conclusions are not conclusive, but are heuristic. They demonstrate trends that should be further

investigated with additional qualitative research as well as large-scale quantitative analysis, such as through the use of survey instruments. My conclusions also are not generalizable to Marine Corps officers or to servicemembers in other service branches. However, they do provide a baseline that future research can branch from by suggesting important issues and possible questions applicable to Hispanics and other minority groups in the military.

#### *Areas for Future Research*

This dissertation is only the beginning of my research trajectory. I plan to continue this line of questioning with a continued focus on minority populations in the American military, especially Hispanics, by interrogating further some of my new findings and conceptual challenges. In particular, I see the need for further research in regard to the ongoing importance of institutional motivations for today's all-volunteer force which has carried the burden, almost singularly, of serving in two, almost decade long wars. Moskos' I/O model emerged after the Vietnam War when the United States military was engaged in the tense, yet mainly benign, Cold War. Certainly there were regional conflicts and military operations other than war that claimed time, energy, and even lives, but the military was able to space out deployment demands and many servicemembers were able to serve a career without facing the brutal existence of wartime service. Today's servicemembers have a much higher chance of serving in a war zone, sometimes repeatedly, but they do not view themselves as mercenaries only serving for the occupational benefits, but professionals committed to higher ideals of service and sacrifice. They very much reflect the institutional values Moskos first discussed in 1977. Further research should explore how service during wartime, whether

through conscription or through voluntarism, influences individual dedication to institutional values and whether this process is linear or more dialectical.

Further, in this project, my research questions focused only on Mexican American men and women in the Marine Corps. I did not make comparisons across service branches or across other races and ethnicities. I also did not compare the experiences of Mexican American Marines to the experiences of Mexican Americans in other male-dominated organizations. I was specific in my population of interest, even though I see important issues by extending my research questions to a broader segment of the Mexican American, and Hispanic, population.

First, I suggest completing a comparison by service branch of the motivations for service of Mexican American servicemembers. As discussed in Chapter III, Mexican Americans are increasing their representation in all of the service branches, with their largest proportional presence in the Marine Corps and Navy. There may be differences between those Mexican Americans who chose the Marine Corps versus those who chose the Navy, especially for the women. It also would be worthwhile to include the Army and the Air Force. I recommend a quantitative study using personnel data files that links the service branch selection of Mexican American servicemembers to their home of record since we do not know if those Mexican Americans living in California disproportionately are drawn to serving in the Navy and Marine Corps, while those living in Texas disproportionately are drawn to serving in the Army and Air Force. Additionally, the Army traditionally has the largest proportion of African Americans in its ranks, yet it has not shown the same success in recruiting and retaining Hispanics. Future research should consider how Mexican Americans in the Army differ from those

in other services, as well as how their motivations and experiences compare to those of African Americans. Finally, the Air Force has been the least successful in recruiting Hispanics. I would like to apply the same research questions to those who choose the Air Force as their service branch and then compare the results to the data from this study. The Air Force and the Marine Corps often are conceptualized as being on different ends of the Institutional/Occupational spectrum, with the Marine Corps as more institutional and the Air Force as more occupational. We should consider whether these organizational differences influence recruiting in the Mexican American population and how.

In addition to making comparisons across service branches, I also suggest additional research that focuses on Hispanics from different countries of origin (i.e., Puerto Ricans) both in the Marine Corps and in the other services. Because there is great diversity in the Hispanic community, including their different citizenship statuses, there may be motivations and experiences unique to each group. Puerto Ricans, for example, have more racial diversity, and at least from the point of view of this study's respondents, have more in common with African Americans than with Mexican Americans. This is a differential experience worth analyzing.

Additionally, my current analysis shows that lived experiences are not only shaped by one's social characteristics, but by the social institutions in which one must operate. This research confirms that an intersectional perspective is critical to understanding how individuals experience their social lives, and how different combinations of social characteristics shape power, privilege, organizational access, and individual agency. But these perspectives also must be considered against the backdrop

of the formal organizations in which an individual operates. The experiences of the Mexican American women in the Marine Corps were largely shaped by their gender which, as an organizing device, shaped how they were used by the organization. Certainly, their experiences would change in a different social institution or organization where other social characteristics either facilitated or impeded incorporation. Thus, I recommend future research that considers, through an intersectional perspective, how experiences in the military change based on organizational, and sub-organizational, membership. My initial impression, for example, is that the women did not notice the salience of their gender until Recruit Training; it was not omnipresent during Delayed Entry Training. They also did not realize the extent of difference between themselves and their male peers until they were formally segregated. Thus, there may be facets of the Marine Corps where gender is constrictive. We should tease out where these sub-components are to find better training and staffing solutions that operate more on ability and opportunity and less on blanket categorizations and curbed skill.

Finally, this research suggests that Mexican American women, or at least the ones who choose to serve in the Marine Corps, are forwarding new conceptions of gender; that is, these women do not see themselves as merely following the men, but as actively selecting a professional environment that projects their strength, work ethic, and *machismo* as women. This research should become part of a broader dialogue that considers the changing gender norms of the Hispanic population by looking at Mexican American men and women who choose to serve in other untraditional professions, such as law enforcement. Gender is always active and changing, especially when directly challenged, as was the case for many of the women included here. Research should



address and record these changes and, where necessary, adjust how we, as social scientists, broadly characterize this ethnic group and how we use the finer distinctions available through an intersectional analysis.

**Appendix A: Percent of Hispanic Representation by Service Branch, 1977-2009**

<b>FY</b>	<b>Army</b>	<b>Navy</b>	<b>USMC</b>	<b>USAF</b>	<b>DoD</b>	<b>CLF</b>
<b>1977</b>	3.8	3.1	5.7	3.1	3.8	5.3
<b>1978</b>	4	3	6.1	3.5	3.9	5.5
<b>1979</b>	4.1	3	6.2	3.8	4	5.5
<b>1980</b>	4.5	3	6	3.9	4	5.9
<b>1981</b>	4.5	3.1	5.5	3.8	4	6
<b>1982</b>	4.5	3.2	5.2	3.9	3.9	6
<b>1983</b>	4.4	3.3	5.1	4	4	6
<b>1984</b>	3.9	3.5	5.1	4	4	6
<b>1985</b>	3.9	4	5.2	4	4	7
<b>1986</b>	3.9	4.2	5.2	3.7	4.1	7.3
<b>1987</b>	3.9	4.5	5.6	3.5	4.2	7.8
<b>1988</b>	4	5	6	3.8	4.5	8
<b>1989</b>	4	5.5	7.1	3.8	4.9	8.2
<b>1990</b>	4.2	5.8	7.5	3.8	5	8.4
<b>1991</b>	4.4	6.5	7.5	3.8	5.1	8.5
<b>1992</b>	4.5	7	7.8	3.8	5.5	9
<b>1993</b>	5	7.1	8.6	3.8	5.6	9
<b>1994</b>	5.1	7	9.2	4	5.8	10.5
<b>1995</b>	5.3	7.5	10	4.1	6.4	10.9
<b>1996</b>	6	8	11.2	4.5	6.9	11
<b>1997</b>	6.5	8.5	12	5	7.3	11.8
<b>1998</b>	7.5	9.1	12.5	5	7.8	12
<b>1999</b>	8.1	9.4	13.2	5.3	8	12
<b>2000</b>	9	10	13.5	5.4	8.9	13
<b>2001</b>	9.4	11	14	5.5	9.1	13.4
<b>2002</b>	10.5	10.9	14.6	5.7	9.6	14
<b>2003</b>	10.89	9.2	13.9	6.1	9.9	15
<b>2004</b>	11.3	9.2	14.6	6	9.8	16.3
<b>2005</b>	11.6	8.3	14.5	6	9.8	16.7
<b>2006</b>	11.6	14.1	13.8	5.8	11.2	17.2
<b>2007</b>	11.72	15	13.33	5.6	11.4	17.9
<b>2008</b>	11.9	15.9	13.1	5.5	11.6	17.9
<b>2009</b>	11.9	16.4	13.2	5.2	11.6	18.2
CLF = Civilian Labor Force (Non-institutionalized civilians 18-24 years old)						

SOURCE: Population Representation in the Armed Forces, FY 2001 through 2008; Segal and Segal 2004

**Appendix B: Percent of Total Accessions of Hispanics by Branch**

<b>FY</b>	<b>Army</b>	<b>Navy</b>	<b>USMC</b>	<b>USAF</b>	<b>DoD</b>	<b>CLF*</b>
<b>2001</b>	4.5	9.4	5.4	4.9	6.1	15.6
<b>2002</b>	4.8	9.3	5.4	5.1	6	15.6
<b>2003</b>	10.7	14.6	13.2	8.1	11.5	17.3
<b>2004</b>	12.6	15.1	16.1	9.5	13.2	17.7
<b>2005</b>	12.2	16.1	16.3	10.1	13.9	17.6
<b>2006</b>	11.6	16.3	15.6	11.2	13.3	17.5
<b>2007</b>	11.3	16.6	16.3	11	13.5	17.8
<b>2008</b>	11.7	21.4	17.3	13.8	15.3	17.8

SOURCE: Population Representation in the Armed Forces, FY 2001 through 2008

**Appendix C: Percent of Hispanic vs. African-American Women (Enlisted Accessions) by Service Branch**

FY	Army		Navy		USMC		USAF		DoD	
	Hispanic	Black	Hispanic	Black	Hispanic	Black	Hispanic	Black	Hispanic	Black
2001	10.9	35.7	13.3	26.5	16.9	16.7	7.4	25.4	11.1	29.5
2002	13.3	28.3	13.7	21.2	16	13.7	8.3	21.9	12.2	23.8
2003	12.7	27.1	15.4	22.8	17.6	12.9	9.2	18.6	12.7	22.9
2004	14.8	24.4	18	24.4	19.6	12.4	12.9	19.3	15.5	22.2
2005	14.4	20.7	18.4	23.9	19.2	12.5	12.2	19.4	15.5	20.5
2006	13.3	22.2	19.1	23.2	19.9	13.8	13	20.1	15.2	21.2
2007	13	22.5	19.1	24.6	21.6	15	12.7	21.1	15.3	21.9
2008	13.4	24.9	22.4	26.4	22.5	16.6	15.1	23.2	17	24.2

SOURCE: Population Representation in the Armed Forces, FY 2001 through 2008

**Appendix D: Percent of Hispanic vs. African-American Men (Enlisted Accessions)  
by Service Branch**

FY	Army		Navy		USMC		USAF		DoD	
	Hispanic	Black	Hispanic	Black	Hispanic	Black	Hispanic	Black	Hispanic	Black
2001	11.1	18.9	12.5	19.7	14.4	11.8	6.8	15.9	11.4	17.3
2002	11.2	14.6	12.1	17.1	13.6	9.7	6.9	13.6	11.1	14
2003	10.3	13.3	12.8	18.3	14.4	8.8	7.8	18.6	11.2	13.4
2004	12.3	12.1	16.1	18.8	17.4	8	10.3	13.3	13.9	13
2005	11.7	10.2	15.7	17.8	16	7.3	10.6	12.9	13.6	11.7
2006	11.2	10.7	15.6	15.8	15.3	7.1	10.6	13	12.9	13.7
2007	11	10.9	16	16	15.9	8.7	10.5	14.3	13.1	12
2008	11.4	12.8	20.7	17.5	16.9	9.5	13.4	15.2	15	13.3

SOURCE: Population Representation in the Armed Forces, FY 2001 through 2008

## **Appendix E: Sample Email to Student Veteran Groups**

To the Student Veterans at [Name of college or university],

Like you, I'm a student veteran. I served in the Air Force from 2000-2006. Currently, I am pursuing my Ph.D. in military sociology at the University of Maryland. I'm writing my dissertation on Mexican Americans in the U.S. Marine Corps and am looking at their motivations for service, why they selected the Marine Corps, and their overall experiences while in the military.

To answer these questions, I need to talk to Marines. Specifically, I am looking for **Mexican American Marines (men and women) who have been on active duty any time after 9/11/01 to interview by telephone.** The interviews will take about 30-45 minutes. All names will be kept confidential and interviews will be summarized and quoted in ways that protect the participant's identity.

With that said, I hope you will consider participating in my project. I think it's important for student veterans to support each other in our studies and to provide community when possible. I also think it's important to share our story, especially since we have contributed so much to our nation's military.

If interested or if you want to hear more, **you can email me through my school address ([kdeangelis@socy.umd.edu](mailto:kdeangelis@socy.umd.edu)) or through my personal email ([karin.deangelis@gmail.com](mailto:karin.deangelis@gmail.com)).** **You can also find me on Facebook (search for Karin Modesto DeAngelis).** Once we are in contact, I can explain the details of the study further and you can decide then if you want to participate. You also can contact my advisor (Professor David Segal, [dsegal@socy.umd.edu](mailto:dsegal@socy.umd.edu), 301-405-6439) if you have further questions about the study's validity or about procedures for protecting one's identity. Finally, you can find more information about me on the Department of Sociology's webpage, which is available through this link: <http://www.bsos.umd.edu/socy/grad/gradstudents.html>

Thank you and I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Karin (Modesto) De Angelis  
Ph.D. Candidate  
University of Maryland  
College Park, MD

## Appendix F: Sample Email to Respondents

Dear [ \_\_\_\_\_ ],

[The first paragraph will be personalized to each individual and will specify how I found their name and contact information.] As you may know, I am a Ph.D. student in Sociology at the University of Maryland and I am writing my dissertation on Mexican Americans in the U.S. Marine Corps.

The basic premise of my research is this: The Marine Corps has been very successful (and more successful than the other service branches) in recruiting and retaining Mexican Americans. This trend differs from the representation of African Americans, who are concentrated in the Army, and it is especially unique in that it applies to Mexican American men and women. For my dissertation, I am interested in the experiences and characteristics that are associated with the decision to serve in the Marine Corps for Mexican Americans. I also want to hear about your experiences while in the service.

To answer these questions, I need to talk to Marines. Specifically, I am seeking volunteers to interview who have served in the Marine Corps on active duty at any time since 9/11/01 or currently are serving. I am interested in your motivations for service, why you selected the Marine Corps, and your overall experiences while in the military. The interviews will take about an hour and will be completed by telephone. Your name will be kept confidential and interviews will be summarized and quoted in ways that protect your identity.

I hope you will consider allowing me to interview you. I'm a military veteran myself (Air Force) and am also a Mexican American. I have several family members, including my brother and father, who also have served in the military. I think it's important to share our story, especially since we have contributed so much to our nation's military.

If you are interested in participating in this project, please call me at 301-464-2577 or email me directly at [kdeangelis@socy.umd.edu](mailto:kdeangelis@socy.umd.edu) to discuss the details and possibly set up a time for the interview. You also can contact my advisor (Professor David Segal, [dsegal@socy.umd.edu](mailto:dsegal@socy.umd.edu), 301-405-6439) if you further questions about the study's validity or about procedures for protecting your identity. Finally, you can find more information about me on the Department of Sociology's webpage, which is available through this link: <http://www.bsos.umd.edu/socy/grad/gradstudents.html>

Thank you and I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Karin (Modesto) De Angelis  
Ph.D. Candidate  
University of Maryland  
College Park, MD

**Appendix G: Consent Form**

<b>Project Title</b>	<b>Mexican American Men and Women in the U.S. Marine Corps</b>
<b>Purpose of the Study</b>	This is a research project being conducted by Karin De Angelis, under the supervision of Professor David R. Segal, at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you have self-identified as a Mexican American Marine. The purpose of this research project is to understand your decision to join the military, why you chose the Marine Corps as your branch of service, and your overall military experience.
<b>Procedures</b>	The procedures involve individual in-depth interviews as the primary research method. You will be asked to participate in a minimum of one interview. During the interview, you will be asked to respond to questions posed by the researcher focusing on your decision to serve in the Marine Corps and your experiences while in the service. You may be contacted for follow-up questions to clarify information.
<b>Potential Risks and Discomforts</b>	There are no known risks associated with participating in this research project.
<b>Potential Benefits</b>	This research is not designed to help you personally. The results will help the investigator learn more about Mexican American Marines and may be shared with other researchers who study social representation in the military.
<b>Confidentiality</b>	We will keep your personal information confidential. All information will be reported anonymously and no individual will be identified in the report at any time. Excerpts from the interviews will be used in the written report of this study, but your name will not be used. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law. This research project involves making a digital recording of your interview to help the researchers in transcribing the interview. Access to the digital recordings is limited to the principal and student investigator. Digital recordings will be destroyed within a year of publishing the final report. Please select one of the following conditions: <input type="checkbox"/> I agree to be digitally recorded during my participation in this study. <input type="checkbox"/> I do not agree to be digitally recorded during my participation in this study.
<b>Right to Withdraw and Questions</b>	Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may



	<p>choose not to take part. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</p>	
<b>Participant Rights</b>	<p>This research is being conducted by Karin De Angelis of the Sociology Department at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Karin De Angelis at: <a href="mailto:kdeangelis@socy.umd.edu">kdeangelis@socy.umd.edu</a>, 2112 Art-Sociology Building, College Park, Maryland, 20742, (301) 464-2577 or her advisor Dr. David R. Segal, <a href="mailto:dsegal@socy.umd.edu">dsegal@socy.umd.edu</a>.</p> <p>If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research related injury, please contact:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: <a href="mailto:irb@umd.edu">irb@umd.edu</a> Telephone: 301-405-0678</p> <p>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</p>	
<b>Statement of Consent</b>	<p>Your signature and/or recorded verbal agreement indicate that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.</p> <p>If you agree to participate, please verbally express agreement. Your agreement will be recorded.</p>	
<b>Signature and Date</b>	<p><b>NAME OF SUBJECT</b> [orally given]</p>	
	<p><b>SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT</b></p>	
	<p><b>DATE</b> [orally given]</p>	

## Appendix H: Interview Script and Questions

### Interview Script [To be read directly to respondent]:

“Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research on Mexican American Marines. My name is Karin Modesto De Angelis and I am a graduate student at the University of Maryland. This research will help me write my dissertation and complete my Ph.D. requirements. For this interview, I am interested in your decision to serve in the Marine Corps and your experiences while in the Corps.

Before we get started, I would like to review the informed consent form with you and answer any questions you may have.

[If previous contact over email]: I sent the consent form to you over email. Did you receive it? Did you have a chance to read it?

[If yes] Because you have already read this, I am not going to read the entire form to you. However, I do want to review the sections on confidentiality and your rights. [Review sections on confidentiality, right to withdraw, and participant rights.]

[If no] It is important that you know about the purpose of this study and your rights as a participant. I will review the form with you now. [Review entire consent form with respondent.]

[If no previous contact]: It is important that you know about the purpose of this study and your rights as a participant. I will review the form with you now. [Review entire consent form with respondent.] I can also email or mail this form to you if you would like to see it for yourself.

Now, that we have reviewed the consent form, I need to ask you a few questions:

- Are you at least 18 years of age?
- Has the research been explained to you?
- Have your questions been fully answered?
- Are you freely and voluntarily choosing to participate in this research project?

Once again, your identity will be kept confidential. My advisor and I will be the only people with access to it.

I also would like to record our conversation. This allows me to focus on our conversation without having to write everything you say or rely on my memory. At your request, I can provide you a copy of the interview in a week or two. I also can turn off the recorder at any time.

- Do you [agree/do not agree] to be recorded during our conversation today?



- Grandfather's country of birth: 1.) 2.)

**B. Military Demographic Variables:**

11. (Circle one) Veteran/Retiree/Currently serving

- [For all]: Date of entry:

- [For veterans/retirees]: Date of exit:

12. Highest rank achieved:

13. MOS:

14. Deployments (Location/duration):

**C. Additional Notes:**

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

-----BEGINNING OF QUESTIONS-----

### **Group I: Background Information**

1. **KEY:** First, I am interested in where you came from before you joined the Marine Corps. Could you tell me about your family and about the community where you grew up?

- **PROBE:** Who lived in your home when you were growing up?

#### **FOLLOW-UPS:**

- Did your parents live together?
- Were they married?
- Did you have any brothers or sisters and if so, how many?
- What type of work did your parents do?
- What type of education did your parents have?
- Did you grow up with other family members besides your parents and siblings nearby?

- **PROBE:** How did your family end up in their community?

#### **FOLLOW-UPS:**

- Where were you born?
  - Were you born in the United States?
  - Where were your parents born?
  - When did you become a U.S. citizen?
2. **KEY:** Thank you for sharing information on your family. Next, I would like to ask a few more questions about your background and what you are doing now. Could you tell me how you currently spend your day? I am interested in knowing if you work for pay, if you are working at home, and/or if you are going to school.

- **PROBE:** What type of work do you do?

**FOLLOW-UP:** I know we haven't talked about your military service yet, but is this work similar to what you did in the Marine Corps?

- **PROBE:** Could you tell me about the type of schooling you have completed?

**FOLLOW-UP:** How does this compare to the education other family members have received?

- **PROBE:** Could you tell me about where you currently live and with whom?

**FOLLOW-UPS:**

- How did you end up in this community?

- What is your marital status?

- Do you have children? How many?

3. **KEY:** What are some of the most important goals you have for yourself?

- **PROBE:** How does your military service fit with these goals?

## **Group II: Motivations for Service & Service Branch Selection**

4. In addition to your personal background, I also am interested in your military service history. Can you provide a timeline of your service in the Marine Corps, including your dates of service, your MOS, and whether you had any deployments? We can begin with basic training and end with today/your separation/your retirement.

- **PROBE:** [Veteran] Why did you leave the military? [First term] Do you plan to stay past this term? [Careerist] Why did you decide to make the military a career? When did you make this decision?

**FOLLOW-UP:** What was the highest rank you achieved?

- **PROBE:** How did you get into your particular MOS?

- **PROBE:** Did you have any deployments?

**FOLLOW-UPS:**

- Where were you deployed?
- How long were you there?
- What did you do there?

5. **KEY:** When did you first consider serving in the military?

- **PROBE:** What are some of the benefits of serving in the military?

**FOLLOW-UP:** How are you going to use these benefits?

- **PROBE:** What are some of the drawbacks of serving in the military?

**FOLLOW-UP:** Do these drawbacks change with service branch or MOS?

6. **KEY:** How did you first learn about the Marine Corps?

- **PROBE:** At that time, did you know anything about the other services?

**FOLLOW-UPS:**

- What did you know?
- Did you consider joining any of the other services?

- **PROBE:** Why did you choose to serve in the Marine Corps?

**FOLLOW-UP:** Were the different entrance standards a factor in your decision to serve in the Marine Corps?

- **PROBE:** How did you find a recruiter?

**FOLLOW-UP:** What was your relationship like with your recruiter?

7. **KEY:** Sometimes family members are supportive of one's decision to serve in the military, and other times they are not. How would you describe your family's reaction to your decision?

- **PROBE:** Can you describe how your recruiter interacted with your family?

- **PROBE**: Do you have any other family members who have served in the military? Who and in what way?

- **PROBE**: Did you talk with anyone other than the recruiter about your decision to enlist in the Marine Corps?

**FOLLOW-UPS:**

- What about your friends or a guidance counselor?

- **PROBE**: How would you describe the reactions of other individuals with whom you are close about your decision to join the Marine Corps?

**Group III: Experiences in the Marine Corps**

8. **KEY**: What is it like to be in the Marine Corps?

- **PROBE**: Can you tell me about some of your most positive experiences?

- **PROBE**: Can you tell me about some of your most negative experiences?

**FOLLOW-UPS:**

- Can you tell me more about that particular experience?

- Do you think others had similar experiences?

- How did these experiences shape your decision to [separate/stay in for another term/ make the Marine Corps a career]?

- Were you expecting to experience something like this?

- Did you/have you told others in your unit about this experience? What about your family?

- Could you tell me about your relationship with other members of your unit?

- **PROBE**: What was it like being a Mexican American in the Marine Corps?

**FOLLOW-UP**: Do you think other minority servicemembers feel the same way?



**FOLLOW-UP:** How would you compare being a Mexican American in the Marine Corps to being a Mexican American in [insert current occupation and/or community here]?

- **PROBE:** [For women]: What was it like being a woman in the Marine Corps?

**FOLLOW-UP:** Do you think other women had similar experiences?

**FOLLOW-UP:** How would you compare being a woman in the Marine Corps to being a woman in [insert current occupation and/or community here]?

9. **KEY:** What do you think the experience is like for others [fill in with characteristics different from respondent, such as “women” or “whites”] in the Marine Corps?

10. **KEY:** Overall, how would you rate your experience in the Marine Corps?

**PROBE:** What has this time meant to you?

**FOLLOW-UP:** Where you expecting to experience something like this?

11. **KEY:** Have you talked about your experiences in the military to other Mexican Americans in your community?

- **PROBE:** Can you give me an example of when you have done this?

**FOLLOW-UP:** What did you say to them?

12. **KEY:** Is there anything else you would like to share?

13. **KEY:** Ask about remaining demographic characteristics, if needed.

-----END OF QUESTIONS-----

Thank you for participating in this study and for sharing your story.”

- Turn off the recorder.
- Remind them that the transcript is available to them by request.
- Confirm whether they would be open to a follow-on interview.

- Ask whether they have any friends who may be interested in the study and ask them to pass on my contact information.

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