THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Solidarity in Service:
a Study on Military Motivation

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Author's note to the reader: the data in this interview includes descriptions of corporal violence, sexual assault, and violence against animals, reported by participants during their interviews. I have chosen to include this information in the thesis to accurately depict the experience of the participants that took part in these interviews, and how their experiences shaped their motivations while serving in the U.S. military. Due to the nature of the testimony, I have chosen to omit graphic details that do not provide benefit to the study.

Abstract

Sociology often neglects the impact of modern society for motivating military service members. Previous studies often bifurcate the motivations of military service into two camps: institutional motives reflecting group identity and external motivations impacted by social, structural, and economic factors outside of the military. This bifurcation of military motivations often places civil society and the military in opposing relations to each other, while neglecting how the military utilizes both forms of motivation to sustain manning requirements.

This thesis utilizes fifteen semi-structured interviews of Active Duty, Guard, and veteran military service members to understand why they chose to serve and how their motivations are impacted by experiences while serving. Participants all reported a wide range of factors across three dominant motivational themes: *institutional*, *occupational*, and *personal*., Contrasting from the traditional literature that prioritizes institutional forms of military motivation, I argue that post conscription service members rely on a combination of *institutional*, *occupational*, and *personal* motivations when deciding to join the military, and throughout their service. Although institutional and occupational motivations are still important for service members, personal motivations were the most important and recurring theme among all participants. Negative motivations were also prevalent among almost all participants and may be more impactful than institutional and personal motivations, resulting in service members choosing to exit the military at the end of their service contract. The results of this study may contribute to the advancement of sociological knowledge on the military, which could also benefit broader sociological studies on institutions and labor in modern society.

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Introduction

The Department of Defense is the largest employer in the United States with over three million employees and an annual budget of over $600 Billion across six service branches (Taylor 2015; U.S. DOD 2022). According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, there are approximately nineteen million veterans in the United States today—from World War Two to present—comprising almost ten percent of the U.S. population (Schaeffer 2021). Despite its size, cost, and impact, the military remains understudied in sociology, particularly in understanding the experiences of its service members and how it shapes their worldview and motivations to serve.

U.S. military servicemembers have faced continual strain following over twenty years of the "War on Terror" and its latent effects on troops and their families during and after service (The White House 2021). Continual deployments, poor quality of life, and lack of institutional oversight have resulted in myriad incidents including environmental health crises, murder and sexual assault cases, the emergence of alleged war crimes among special operations personnel, and an escalated suicide rate among active-duty service members and veterans, which total over twenty cases a day (Carter et al. 2015, 13-20; Cole 2022, 149-151; 157; 297-300; Levada 2020; Shkolnikova, 2022). Despite these issues, the military remains at the periphery of sociology, perhaps due to the limited access and inherent danger for researchers studying service members, but also the ethical implications of historical collaboration between sociologists and the Department of Defense to preserve and expand empire (Eulriet 2010, 59-61; Steinmetz 2013, xii-xvi; 1-4). The purpose of this study is to understand what factors motivate service members to join the military, but more importantly, how the military impacts the perceptions and motivations of its members through their unique and shared experience.

Military sociology as a subdiscipline has traditionally focused on the institutional, cultural, and post structural dynamics of service. Central to the discipline, Morris Janowitz and Charles Moskos analyzed the military organization at the atomic level, focusing on how institutional factors such as unit cohesion, shapes the experience of soldiers (Moskos 1984 420-422; Shils and Janowitz 1948, 281-286; Eulriet 2010, 62). Michel Foucault's emphasis on bodily discipline and its effect on martial behavior remain relevant to studying combat effectiveness, despite his neglect of the agency possessed by service members (Smith 2018, 275-278). August Hollingshead has brought forth the cultural significance of war as a "quasi-holy endeavor," with its militarizing impact on the socialization of youth in society (1946, 439-444). Meanwhile, contemporary studies introduce a novel focus on the influence of personal motivations as key to soldiers today (Hedlund 2011, 182-186; Helmus et al. 2018, 65-70).

This thesis explores what motivates citizens to serve in the all-volunteer military and how their experience, while serving, impacts their motivation to perform, continue, or end their service. Utilizing fifteen semi-structured interviews of military service members and veterans post conscription, this thesis will answer these questions by tracing participants' experiences prior to their service, and while commissioned or enlisted in the United States military. Drawing from the work of Todd Helmus et al., Erik Hedlund, and James Griffith on military motivation, I hypothesize that military service members still positively respond to institutional motivations centered on service and patriotism, while balancing these institutional affects with occupational motives that center on the nature, experience, and benefits of working in the military (Helmus et al. 2018, 27-32; Hedlund 2011, 180-182; Griffith 2008, 130-135). I also draw from Phillip Smith's study of agency, discipline, and combat effectiveness, to posit that service members carry personal reasons for joining the military that are not related to the institution or the military

as a vocation (2008, 278-291). While military service members are not a monolith and carry different forms of motivation with them into and during their service, I posit that modern service members place greater emphasis on personal motivations, which could influence their decisions to stay or later separate at the end of their service obligation.

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Literature Review

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Motivations to Join and Serve:

This section reviews the existing literature on the motivations for military service, as well as the factors that impact motivation for service members while serving. Literature on military motivation is divided into three dominant themes: *institutional*, *occupational*, and *personal* motivations. Institutional motivations reflect the shared identity and values of citizens and service branches, grounded in national identity, patriotism, discipline, rank hierarchy, and shared folkways held within the military organization and society (Siebold 2001, 149). Occupational motivations reflect how service members can be motivated by the nature and social environment of their vocation (Griffith 2008, 235; Helmus et al. 2018, 35-41; Hedlund 2011, 182). Personal motivations reflect the individual ambitions and desires of service members (Hedlund 2011, 182-186; Woodruff, Kelty, and Segal 2006, 359). Citizens and service members may draw from one or multiple forms of motivation when choosing to join the military, or during their service.

Institutional Motivations[1]:

Military service members may be influenced by institutional motivations related to the desire to serve and work in a military occupation. During the conscription era lasting until the early 1970s, military service members often reported patriotism and a call to duty as a primary

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[1] Based on Guy Siebold's understanding of the military institution as "a system of roles based on shared beliefs, norms, structures, functions, and behavior" (2001, 149). I reject Erving Goffman's framework of the military as a "'total institution,' separating service members from civil society" because modern and even conscription soldiers still interact with civilian members and institutions of society, despite their distinction (Helmus et al. 2018, 5).

reason for serving (Woodruff, Kelly, and Segal, 2006, 355-356). Key to institutional motivation is a shared morality centered on civic participation, patriotism, and a desire to serve, combined with a core belief system of hierarchical and masculinized relations (Woodruff, Kelly, and Segal 2006, 355-356; 360; 362; Mankowski, Tower, and Brandt 2015, 315-317; Rossdale 2019, 54-56; Christensen and Kyed 2022, 2-3; and Siebold 2001, 149-150). These motives tend to be other oriented, emphasizing meaning and altruism to the group or nation over the individual needs and desires of service members (Moskos 1984, 420-421; Siebold 2001, 142-144). Building cohesion through rituals and shared beliefs may be an important dynamic for analyzing the institutional motivation of military service members.

Military sociology traditionally places cohesion, shared national identity, and *espirit de corps* as central to military motivation and efficacy (Moskos 1984, 421; Pawiński and Chamy 2019, 297-299; Shils and Janowitz 1948, 281). For first term Army soldiers, socializing with unit members through training, work, and outside-work leisure activities serve to establish critical support networks for their mental health and well-being (Helmus et al. 2018, 86-90). Through institutional motives, martial responses to international conflict and issues dominate the beliefs of service members, reflecting the broader ideology of their civil society that prioritizes war over diplomacy (Hollingshead 1947, 439; Moskos 1984, 420-422). For example, while studying the combat motivations of Nazi soldiers during the Second World War, Edward Shils and Morris Janowitz found that unit or "primary group" cohesion was the strongest factor in troop motivation and their ability to fight (1948, 281). Junior soldiers tend to identify their unit at the smallest level (the squad), and place higher value on the camaraderie they experience with peers and leadership, which serves to also fulfill the personal needs of these service members (Shils and Janowitz 1948, 284; Helmus et al. 2018, 65-70). Soldiers draw their motivation and cohesion

through shared unit experience and a strong connection to their group, which is bolstered by their

national or ethnic identity (Shils and Janowitz 1948, 287).

Nationalism and the state may, however, be overemphasized in understanding

institutional military motivation. Institutional motivation also reflects the ritualized culture and

performances of military units and service branches. During the Second World War, Indian and

colonized imperial soldiers fighting for the British army were not motivated by nationalism or

ideological allegiance to England (Barkawi 2017, 3; 6-10; 160). Instead, Tarak Barkawi argues

that rituals such as close-order drill, training, and customs served to build group identity,

reinforce hierarchy, and raise the combat effectiveness of these soldiers (2017, 172-176). The

military is also unique from other occupational institutions in the reverence it holds towards its

shared and distinct language[2], customs, and courtesies (Hollingshed 1946, 439-441;

Military.com, 2022). Shared language and customs foster group solidarity based on similarities

and differences between squad members, units, occupations, and branches. These customs and

forms of solidarity can position military against civilian identity.

Institutional motives may impact performance and service length of military members.

West Point cadets that hold a desire to become an officer in the Army, enjoy military work, or

want to serve their country[3] are more likely to graduate and commission as officers than cadets

with extra-institutional motivations[4] such as pay or benefits (Wrzesniewski et al. 2014, 10990-

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[2] Note to reader: The military is filled with unique Acronyms, terms, expressions, and occupations shared across the military and unique to each service branch down to the occupation or unit. I will try to define or describe most of these as they appear in the interviews. However, my explanations may be limited based on room available and my knowledge (I will not be providing a citation for every acronym or military term). For a small example of terms used in the Army, see (Military.com 2022, "The Army Has a Vocabulary All Its Own").

[3] Wrzesniewski et al. divides motives as "internal/instrumental" with internal motives including institutional and extra institutional motives (2014, 10990-10993). For my analysis, I'll be focusing on the distinction between institutional and personal motives as highlighted in Griffith (2008, 230-232).

[4] Institutional motivations are centered on the military as an institution and civic identity that reflects military ideals. Personal or extra-institutional motives, such as pecuniary benefits, may stem from institutions but are not unique or exclusive to military service.

10994). These cadets also tended to remain in service longer than their counterparts (2014,

10992-10993). In his study on the motivation of National Guard soldiers, James Griffith finds

that soldiers who hold institutional motivations are more likely to stay in their guard units (2008,

230). Guard soldiers that hold high levels of institutional motivation tend to "believe in their

mission and country and show up to work so they do not disappoint their family and friends"

(2008, 230-231). These results indicate that institutional motives are important for service

members, for both short and long periods of time, and may be compounded by personal

motivations such as family approval.

Leadership may be another strong form of institutional motivation. In "The Sociology of

Combat," Charles Moskos highlights Anthony Kellett's argument that "good old-fashioned

leadership and discipline" has a stronger role in combat effectiveness than military sociologists

often recognize (1984, 421-422). For first term soldiers, leadership is the strongest form of

support[5], as junior enlisted rely upon the structure, experience, and authority of their senior

personnel to assist them through occupation and life difficulties (Moskos 1984, 421-422; Helmus

et al. 2018, 91-93). Strong forms of leadership ensure that subordinate service members

recognize their duties and expectations within the broader process of military operations while

still feeling connected to their unit (Barkawi 2017, 10, 182). If the military represents a fraternal[6]

institution, then leadership may reflect both a formal (religious) and familial (communal) figure,

that galvanizes or diminishes motivation based on the style and quality of interaction with its

subordinates.

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[5]Todd Helmus et al. find that peer relationships are second to leadership indicating that support from coworkers and supervisors weigh heavily on the morale and well-being of junior enlisted service members (2018, 91).

[6] Todd Helmus et al. demonstrates that soldiers often view camaraderie in terms of a family relationship with their fellow service members (2018, 67).

Military sociology too often focuses on institutional forms of motivation. Institutional motives often don't account for the "folkways from civilian life that people bring into their service," and the occupational, personal, or environmental circumstances that influence people to serve in the military post conscription (Griffith 2008, 230-232; Hedlund 2011, 183-186; Helmus et al. 2018, 27; 38; and 67; Smith 2008, 278; Woodruff, Kelty, and Segal 2006, 359-360). Participants may draw from institutional motivations when deciding to join the military and while serving. However, institutional motives may not supersede other forms of motivation for post-conscription service members. Personal or occupational motives could supplant or complement institutional forms of motivation while serving.

Personal and Occupational Motivations:

The modern military has shifted its modus operandi to focusing on the personal and career aspirations of its service members in its recruitment[7] (Bailey 2009, 74-80; 87; 236-260; Brown 2012, 142-143). Key to this shift are the opportunities and benefits the military provides each service member over service as civic duty (Brown 2012, 58-60; Cox 2021). The military utilizes its focus on the individual to build cohesion based on shared self-interests such as financial and educational resources, adventure, life experience, and vocational training through a hierarchical division of labor (Bailey 2009, 74-80; 87; 236-260; Woodruff and Kelty 2006, 359; Rossdale 2019, 56). In place of institutional motives, post conscript service members may rely upon the military's occupational and financial benefits to fulfill their needs and desires.

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[7] Except for USMC recruiting—with a common emphasis on group identity and status as a Marine—U.S. Army and other armed service branches have adopted a neoliberal model of recruiting, with an emphasis on how the military can fulfill personal ambitions and needs for those that join. This style of recruiting varies by branch, theme, and time with some branches returning to a focus on the branch of service as "A Global Force for Good" in the Navy, from its previous "Accelerate Your Life" messaging after 9/11 (Bailey, 2009, 58-60; 85-88; 249-250; Brown 2012, 105-116). Adventure, personal and occupational growth, and technical superiority remain common themes in these recruiting advertisements (Brown 2012, 57-62).

Prospective service members might turn to the military to navigate socioeconomic or racialized disadvantages they face. Propensity to serve in the military is inversely correlated to unemployment and economic opportunities in the civilian sector (JAMRS 2021, 7-12; Mankowski et al. 2015, 178). The demographics of those that serve in the military are positively defined by socioeconomic class, with most service members coming from upper-middle to lower economic class backgrounds (Lutz 2008, 167; Mankowski et al. 2015, 178). Most military service members are white, however, the tendency to have served in the military is equal across racial demographics (2008, 178). Additionally, Black service members tend to remain in service longer than their white counterparts, which may reflect their access to career opportunities and benefits in the military that are more difficult to attain in the civilian sector (Mankowski et al. 2015, 184).

Although there are myriad reasons people choose to serve, a 2020 DOD[8] youth survey on the propensity to enlist found "financial and educational benefits" as the strongest reasons targeted youth aged 16-21 would consider enlisting (JAMRS 2021, 13; see also Krebs and Ralston 2022, 26). In addition, healthcare, retirement, and cost of living benefits also rank highly in the motivations of prospective and active service members (Ibid., 13; Helmus et al. 2018, 27; Woodruff, Kelty, and Segal 2006, 359). For service members that plan on leaving after their first term, the military offers educational funding—the Montgomery and Post 9/11 GI Bills—and technical occupational training and experience that may increase propensity to serve for those that are not motivated by institutional factors. These benefits may motivate the participants in this study, particularly Post 9/11 service members and veterans that are seeking to improve their financial or occupational opportunities through service.

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[8] Department of Defense

The family can also be a strong motivating factor in deciding to enlist and as a reason for staying in the military. According to Helmus et al., family support is one of the strongest motivating factors in influencing first term soldiers to enlist (2018, 21-24; 58). Having a family member that previously served can also increase the propensity to join the military (2018, 22). Service members often cite family members as a key form of support for their mental health and well-being (Helmus et al. 2018, 21-24). Moreover, military service members may choose to stay in the military for access to low-cost family healthcare, education, housing, grocery, leave[9] and other benefits afforded to them. Although military life is difficult on service members and their families, the benefits and support available may impact their decisions to extend their service length.

The military provides a unique opportunity for service members to escape their home environment and conditions prior to service. Service members often cite adventure, travel, and the ability to leave home as a strong motivation for wanting to join the military and while serving (Franke and Boemckn 2011, 736; Hedlund 2011, 183-184; Helmus et al. 2018, 27-32; Woodruff, Kelty and Segal 2006, 360). Armed service members often travel domestically and abroad for training and to complete mission assignments. For Swedish soldiers conducting peacekeeping operations, the opportunity to travel to different exotic locations and meet people in foreign countries is a strong motivating factor (Hedlund 2011, 184-185). An emphasis on travel and experience may reflect the individual nature of motivation in participants, presenting new opportunities they couldn't have due to their economic class position.

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[9] Leave is the military term that represents vacation time an active-duty service member acquires during their service. Every month, service members gain 2.5 days of leave up to 30 days a year. Leave time can also carry over to the following year, though it's up to the service member's command how long they will grant them leave for.

Armed service members may draw motivation from the nature of their job and their

social environment with fellow service members and their community. Although work relations

and the experience of military life reflects institutional motives, these factors may also

demonstrate occupational self-interest over altruism or national solidarity (Barkawi 2017, 6;

Hedlund 2011, 182). Service members reference the ability to do the work they chose as a

positive motivating factor (Helmus et al. 2018, 35-41; Hedlund 2011, 182). In addition, military

service can offer meaning for those that join to participate in something "larger than

themselves," reflecting a postmodern culture of personal experience and growth (Hedlund 2011,

182-183). This emphasis on relationships and cultural experience is novel, albeit important for

many service members (2011, 184-185). I anticipate that some participants may cite personal

growth, experiencing new cultures and occupations as important factors in their motivation while

serving.

For participants that express personal motivations to join the military, I posit that these

motivations will remain strong for participants, despite the impact of institutional motivations

and their shared identity as service members. Service members may develop new forms of

institutional motivation during their service. However, institutional motivations may either

complement or conflict with a participant's personal or occupational interests, compelling them

to change commands, occupations, or exit the military. The military experience can also function

as a negative form of motivation for participants, which could lead service members to rely on

personal over institutional forms of motivation and result in them choosing to leave the military.

Factors that Negatively Impact Motivation:

In addition to the positive forms of motivation service members experience, the military

also holds myriad negative characteristics that can greatly reduce a service member's motivation

or lower their propensity to serve. Perhaps the most obvious negative factor is the risk of death or

physical and psychological harm that is a potential effect of military service (JAMRS OPA 2021,

14). Casualties in the military may decrease or increase motivations in service members and

units, based on the unit's ability to sustain unit cohesion and control the emotional response for

retribution (Shils and Janowitz, 1948, 281; Barkawi 2017, 10-11; 159-160). The military as an

institution possesses the state's international capacity for enacting violence for political or

national interests, and although most military occupations are not combat oriented, occupational

hazards are ubiquitous to many occupations. Physical, mental, or emotional harm, or the

potential for this harm may factor negatively on the motivation of participants.

As in civilian occupations, personal hardships and difficulties may be detrimental to the

motivation of military service members, especially if they do not receive the support needed to

navigate these hardships. Military service by its nature is arduous, which is compounded by any

personal or family problems a service member may experience while serving. Service members

often spend long periods of time away from family and friends, and their work hours and

demands can place extreme strain on their well-being. Longer and more frequent training cycles

and deployments, and poor quality of life conditions for service members have frequently been

cited in the recent uptick of depression and suicides for Naval shipboard service members

(Carter et al. 2016, 19-21; Pawiński and Chami 2019, 300; Shkolnikova 2022; Ursano et al.

2018, 596-604). Service members are socialized to process and function in austere environments

and dangerous conditions, and the bureaucratic structure of military service can result in

leadership overlooking the issues and well-being of its troops (Barkawi 2017, 164-165; Carter et

al. 2016; Goldich 2011, 63; Shkolnikova 2022; Ursano et al. 2018, 596-605). Participants may

express personal or family hardships, and a low quality of life as reason for their negative

motivation while serving.

The military by and large is a masculinized institution culturally and structurally (Brown

2012, 18-40; 56; Christensen and Kyed 2022, 1-3; Goldich 2011, 63; 66-68; Rossdale 2019, 56).

These characteristics may reduce the motivation of female and non-heterosexual service

members, especially if they are victims of violence while serving (Brown 2012, 18-40; Goldich

2011, 66-68; Rossdale 2019, 56). All military service branches have a longstanding issue with

corporal and sexual violence against female service members, service members of color, and

queer service members (Myers 2022; Stafford et al 2021; Stern and Strand 2021, 3-4; 8). Most

salient is the recent murder of Army Specialist[10] Vanessa Guillen by a male service member on

Fort Hood, Texas in 2018 (Levada 2020). Despite the Department of Defense's purported efforts

to increase investigation and prevention of sexual assault, cases continue to rise across all service

branches (Myers 2022). Although the military has recently addressed sexual and racialized

violence within its ranks, the issue remains a problem and could likely impact the motivation of

service members.

The military as an institution relies on its hierarchical structure through its chain of

command, which at times can function as a bureaucratic obstacle to service members. Service

members repeatedly state that military bureaucracy—in the form of complicated paperwork and

processes, remedial tasks, boredom, and poor leadership—is one of the most disliked aspects of

their experience serving (Helmus et al 2018, xiv; 42; 44; 69-72; 104). The rigid adherence to the

chain of command, traditions and frivolous work, and the inability to circumnavigate these forms

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[10] Specialist is the Army enlisted rank for the E-4 paygrade.

of control can prove to be burdensome for servicemembers. I posit that bureaucratic obstacles will be a commonly cited frustration, that negatively affects motivation.

Although leadership may provide support and motivation for service members, poor leadership might have a greater impact on service members. Service members often cite poor leadership as one of the things they dislike about their unit or service, which may exacerbate any hardships or difficulties they endure (Helmus et al. 2018, 68-72). Poor leadership not only negatively affects the cohesion and effectiveness of the unit, but it can also impact the professional and personal well-being of its members, which can pressure them to exit the military (2018, 68-72; Pawiński and Chami 2019, 304-305; 309). Combined with bureaucratic obstacles, I expect this to be a dominant theme in negative motivations reported by participants.

Although unit disintegration is less common in the modern military—due to advancements in communication technology, the division of labor for post conscript soldiers, regular command rotation for service members, and more frequent unit rotation in combat deployments—it remains a potential negative motivation for service members (Shils and Janowitz 1948, 281-284). While studying the combat motivations of Nazi soldiers during World War Two, Edward Shils and Morris Janowitz found that primary group cohesion was prone to disintegration due to unit isolation, heavy casualties, and break down of motivation due to low levels of a "hard core," which instilled *gemeinschaft* and prevented politically divisive communication among unit members (1948, 281-287). The aggregate of poor leadership, bureaucratic obstacles, hardships, casualties, and frequent issues with assault and crime within a unit can greatly contribute to its disintegration.

A divergence between expectations and the actual experience of military service may be another negative motive. According to Helmus et al., junior Army soldiers often reference the

difference in their expectations from their experience as a negative factor of their service (2018,

46-48). Boredom, bureaucratic obstacles, not being able to do the job they signed up for, and

busywork can also decrease motivation (Ibid., 42-47; 68-72). For some service members, the

burnout from toxic culture, poor leadership and living conditions, push service members to

pursue a different occupation or unit (Ibid., 56-59; 69; 71-73). For other soldiers, their

experience in the military may dissuade them from continuing after their present term. I posit

that participants may cite this divergence of expectations as a negative motivating factor that

could lead to their separation from the military.

Data and Methods

To analyze the motivations of military service members, I conducted fifteen cross-

sectional, semi-structured interviews of active-duty service members and veterans. Interviews

were selected to achieve greater depth and nuance of the participants' reasons for joining the

military as well as how their experiences while serving impacted their motivation. Participants

were selected from all military service branches except for U.S Coast Guard and Space Force.

All participants served post conscription. Participants also held different occupations and were

assigned to different work environments, with participants divided by service branch and

occupational environment: air, land, and sea duty. Three participants served in a combat

occupation, while five participants served in combat or armed security operations as a secondary

aspect to their service.

Research participants were acquired using a combination of snowball and purposive

sampling methods. Utilizing my cross-service peer network from serving in the U.S. Navy, I

received assistance from a few of my former service members, communicating and passing along

information about my study to prospective participants. To participate, service members and

veterans had to voluntarily enlist or commission and either have deployed or served in an

occupational unit with inherent safety risks. Participants were selected based on these criteria to

understand how occupational or environmental hazards unique to military service can impact

social cohesion and motivation of service members. Participants were also sampled based on

diversity of occupation and service branch to analyze if shared or discursive themes emerged

based on their military experience and area of operation.

Participants were also sampled using posters at VFW Post 298 in Toledo, Ohio and by

posting on several Facebook military and veteran community group pages. To gain the trust of

VFW members, I spoke to the voting committee for the post and handed out flyers to be passed

around inside the community. Most participants assisted with snowball sampling through these

three channels.

Participants were majority white and male, with Latinos being the second largest

racial/ethnic group (Figure 1). No Black service members and veterans participated in this study

due to time constraints while using snowball sampling. Most participants were veterans and

enlisted, with n=3 being newly commissioned Army officers, and n=1 being a veteran Air Force

officer. Three participants (Air Force n=1, Army n=2) served as both enlisted and officers, with

(Army, n=1) serving in the reserves prior to active duty.

Figure 1 (All three Army officers and the one Air Force officer were prior enlisted before their commission.)

Branch	Army (n=3)	Navy (n=8)	Marines (n=3)	Air Force (n=1)	Total (n=15)
Enlisted	0	8	3	0	11
Officer	3	0	0	1	4
Male	3	5	3	1	12
Female	0	3	0	0	3
White	1	5	1	1	8
Black	0	0	0	0	0
Latino	0	3	1	0	4
Asian	2	0	0	0	2

Most participants served in the U.S. Navy (n=8) during the "Global War on Terror"

period (n= 13) following September 11, 2001, and all participants were enlisted for at least part

of their service (see Figure 1). Two participants served during the Cold War following the

Vietnam conflict. One participant served in the Army National Guard before his commission as

an Active-Duty Army officer. All but one participant reported deploying at least once while

serving, however, all participants served in hazardous duty environments at some point during

their service. Three participants experienced combat while serving: while conducting security

operations in Beirut; conducting drone air combat (Strike) operations in Iraq, Syria, and

Afghanistan; and as a civilian Arabic translator for a Marine infantry unit during Operation Iraqi

Freedom.

Occupations varied within and outside of service branch. Most Navy participants served

on a ship or submarine for all or much of their service. Their occupations included operating

electronic surveillance (CT[11]), radar observation, navigation, and communications equipment

(OS); deck maintenance and boat operations (SN); and firearm maintenance and security

operations (GM). Two Navy participants participated in ground occupations as a corrections

guard and supervisor in Naval Detention Center, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and the other as a

survival equipment and parachute rigger in Naval Special Warfare. Marine participants all served

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[11] CTs or CTTs are *Cryptological Technicians*, monitoring electronic signals for ship self-defense against missile attacks; *Operations Specialists* (OS) monitor radar, communications, navigation, and other forms of sensor equipment to locate and track sub surface, surface, and air craft in the area, aid in safety of movement and navigation, and communicate with tactical leadership and other units in the area to coordinate operations with the strike group (the technical term for the unit of ships that deploy or operate at sea together). Undesignated Seamen or SN *(Deck department)* are junior sailors paygrades (rank) E1-E3 that do not have a job classification, so they work for *Boatswain's Mates* (BM) conducting maintenance on the outside surfaces of the ship, as well as flight and boat operations. *Gunners Mates* (GM) maintain and operate the small arms and crew served weapons on the ship, as well as conduct training and weapon certification for the ship's crew.

in ground occupations, building and repairing communication lines, aircraft maintenance, and

infantry. Army participants all serve as financial officers in training, though all three have prior

enlisted experience in different units and occupations. One Army participant worked as a civilian

Arabic translator for the U.S. Marine Corps during Operations Iraqi/Enduring Freedom, prior to

formerly serving in the military. Last, n =1 Air Force participant served as a (RPA) drone pilot in

the Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan campaigns.

Interviews lasted approximately one to two hours and included questions based on

participants' life and experience prior to and while serving (see Appendix 2). I asked participants

to describe their life experience and motivations for joining the military to establish if their

motivations matched the institutional, occupational, or personal motivations cited in the

literature. Interview question then tracked participants from entry into the military until the

present. For participants that separated from the military, I asked these participants what factors

led to them wanting to leave after their service obligation ended. For the three participants that

are actively serving, I asked them about their future and career aspirations in the military.

To assess the impact of institutional motives, I asked participants how traditions, culture,

rank, and unit cohesion impacted their motivations. When assessing occupational motives, I

asked participants to describe their work and occupational environments, and how they felt about

their jobs and interactions with coworkers. I also asked participants questions related to their

occupational goals and ambitions while serving. To analyze personal motivations, I asked the

participants questions about their personal ambitions to join and while serving, including any

pecuniary or personal benefits they received.

Interview questions followed each participant's experience through the duration of their

service to analyze how motivation might shift or remain for these participants once they

experienced military culture, customs, and lifestyle. I focused on the major events of their

service, as well as the participants' daily life, to determine if and how the institutional effects of

military service affect participants' motivations while they are serving and if these motivations

changed. For participants that stated a strong motivation to serve based on occupational or

personal motives, I asked questions to ascertain if they maintained this motivation throughout

their service, or if their motivation shifted towards their unit, work environment, or identity as a

member of the military.

Interviews were self-transcribed and coded using grounded theory and then by recurring

themes. Participants were categorized by service branch, sex, and racial identities, with codes

reflecting four dominant themes of motivation: institutional, occupational, personal, and

negative. Codes were all organized based on specific stages or experiences of military service to

include: "life before the military", "reason for joining", "Bootcamp/Training", "First Command",

Deployment", "Reason for Leaving or Staying". By structuring the interviews longitudinally, I

could analyze the effects of specific events and environments on the motivation of these

participants.

Results

Life Before the Military:

Participants came from diverse backgrounds and experiences prior to joining the military.

All participants reported to be middle to lower socioeconomic status, and several participants

revealed experiencing economic or familial difficulties prior to their service. Laura, a Navy

veteran and (BM)[12], described the difficulties she faced growing up in a border town of Texas,

with her parents not present: "It's very impoverished. Most of the population is Latino or

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[12] See Appendix 1 for list of terms descriptions.

Mexican American. I was raised with my grandmother and her husband. My family was split.

My brothers grew up in Mexico and my parents were not around." Family issues were present

for several participants prior to the military. Jenn, a Navy veteran (HM), described experiencing

abuse from her parents, and a precarious living environment having to move around to different

locations and live with her grandparents.

Exposure and socialization to the military came in myriad forms, from contact with

veteran family and community members, to military and war movies, books, and shows, to

exposure to war. When asked to describe how he learned about the military prior to serving,

Louis, a Navy veteran stated: "Our neighbor across the street was a gunsmith. He would work on

everybody's guns and stuff like that. I'd always be over there. He was Navy too! Ironically, he

was also a gunner's mate. I was bullshitting with him a lot. I learned a lot of stuff from him." For

Jason, a Navy veteran, his father served as his first exposure to the military: "most of my father's

friends had military experience of one form or another. Often enough, it would be my father's

stories or pictures, or public events that had an influence on it." Rawe, an Army officer described

his experience growing up in Kurdistan as his first exposure to the military:

> I was six or seven years old when I witnessed one of my cousins being taken away from
> our house. At the time, in Iraq, the military service was mandatory. And they had these
> patrols or these cars going around and knocking on everyone's house looking for any
> male that was military aged. They would say hey, you're deserted, or you're not joined,
> you're not with the military, they will take you a lot of times that would be an automatic
> execution or something like that.

Exposure to the military through television shows, movies about war, and books about Navy

SEALs and Marines were impactful for several participants, enticing them to serve.

Motivations to Join:

Wanting to Leave Home to Escape and Improve Life Conditions (n=11):

Most participants expressed a desire to leave their hometown or environment as the primary reason for joining the military. Participants often felt stuck in their lifestyle and utilized the military as an opportunity to escape and improve their conditions. For Kurt, a Navy service member, joining the military was the easiest way to avoid his issues with family members, "It was the easiest way to get out of the house, man. My mom and dad fought all the time. It was just a shitty house to live in. The quickest way out of there was military life."

The military also offered an alternative to college for those that couldn't or didn't want to attend. When I asked Aaron, a Navy veteran, why he joined the military, he responded, "I didn't want to go to college, but I didn't want to be stuck in the same hometown. I didn't know what opportunities existed for me, but I didn't want to play the Monopoly game I was playing." When asked to describe her life prior to the Navy, Amanda stated: "I went straight to college for a semester, then quickly decided that wasn't for me. I left college and worked some dead-end jobs until deciding to enlist." The military served as a reasonable alternative for participants to start over from their previous life conditions and environment.

The military lifestyle also provided an opportunity for new experiences, travel, and a stable form of employment with benefits. When asked what motivated him to join the Marines, George replied, "I wanted to do more and see more. At that point in my life, I was kind of worried about my future. I had vague ideas about what I wanted to do, but nothing carved in stone. But I wanted to join the Marine Corps." Jenn described joining the military to avoid falling into an undesired circumstance: "I was sitting on a bench with my best friend, and we were like 'what are we going to do? If we go to community college out here, we're going to end up getting pregnant and dropping out. That's going to be our lives!'" The ability to leave their

home environment, life conditions, and travel all reflect positive forms of personal motivation for these participants.

Occupational Identity, Group Membership, and Desire to Perform Job (n= 5)

These responses reflect both institutional and occupational motivations for participants. Institutional and occupational motivations also overlap with personal motivations, if a participant's only motivation to serve was to join a specific branch, unit, or occupation.

Several interview participants referenced a desire to achieve group membership or identity with a service branch or occupation they idolized. Marine participants all described a higher ambition to join based on their perceived prestige of the service branch. When I asked Andrew what motivated him to join the Marines, he stated, "I guess it would be the title of Marine, the fulfillment of that alone; honor, courage, commitment: the values the Marine Corps has. I thought the Marines were the best of the best and elite." Mario, a Marine veteran, described his desire to join the infantry based on their perceived toughness and physical nature: "I wanted to be a part of the infantry. The Marines are supposed to be the most physically demanding and toughest of the branches." George, a Marine veteran, also described his fondness of Marine accomplishments and toughness as motivating factors for his enlistment. "I read a bunch of books through high school about the Marine Corps: *Guadalcanal Diary* and books like that about the Marine Corps in the Korean war. What appealed to me was the self-reliance that was inculcated into Marines." Although George also relied on the military as an escape from his life circumstances, his desire to become a Marine was valued equal to his desire to leave his hometown.

Three participants reported a specific occupation or group membership to that occupation as valuable. When I asked Jason, a Navy veteran, and Special Warfare parachute rigger, what

motivated him to serve, he described his desire to become a Navy SEAL for the distinction it

provides:

> So, the combat aspect was important, but some of it was just the kind of cool guy, combat stuff. It was about the kind of distinction that would be provided by becoming a SEAL, with the popularity and reputation they have. It was more about being part of an exclusive group than the job, combat, or even the country. My initial motivations were patriotism rather than nationalism. As I developed later, it was something of a realistic relativism about war. I knew the U.S. was probably bullshitting about this or that, but I accepted those as facts and kept with the ideal of becoming a SEAL because of the distinction it provides.

For Scott, an Air Force, Remote Piloted Aircraft (Drone) pilot, the motivation to become a

fighter pilot began as a childhood ambition that led him to commissioning in the Air Force:

> I always wanted to fly, like fighter jets and stuff like that. It was a childhood goal, but it felt kind of lofty. I looked at the Army National Guard and they were going to put me in Chinooks. Ultimately, I decided that I was going to see what the Air Force has to offer for flying. I didn't know anything about enlisted versus commissioned officer, other than officers are the ones that fly in the Air Force. I got an application and had a bit of a mid-twenties life crisis on what I was doing. So, I went and got a pilot's license. I was really trying to pursue the pilot career.

Most participants did not report occupational identity as a key factor to their motivation.[13]

However, this theme was very important for the participants that did idolize these vocations.

Two of the three participants later reported still enjoying their military jobs even though they did

not achieve their desired position as a Navy SEAL or manned fighter pilot. These participants

reported feeling mostly satisfied with their tangential occupations as support members or piloting

drone aircraft.

9/11, Patriotism, Politics, and Military Culture (n=4):

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[13] This form of motivation was overwhelmingly concentrated in male participants (n=5), from predominately middle and working-class backgrounds (n=4). One Latino male, Mario, also described this as a key factor for his motivation to serve, though he also described having community members that served as another important factor.

Four participants made explicit reference to the impact of 9/11 on their motivations to serve in the military. For Liam, a Navy veteran whose family resides in Long Island, New York, 9/11 was seminal to his motivation to join the military. "When 9/11 happened, we were all under the assumption that it was a legitimate terrorist attack. Being a New Yorker, joining the military was a point of pride for my city and country." Jason expressed that 9/11 bolstered his motivation to serve through his espousal of national and militarized culture, following the attacks: "I was involved in a youth military organization so there was already a strong attachment to the military and to the nation, but with 9/11, just watching the violence happen brought out an emotional response and following up with the cultural tide and the stereotypes, I didn't question the nationalism that was going on at the time." The effects of 9/11 also impacted younger service members, who reported patriotism as a motive for enlisting. When I asked Andrew if there were any meaningful people, things, or events that made him want to serve, he replied, "I was definitely feeling like joining was a patriotic thing, for sure, especially after 9/11. I was born in '94, so I was only like seven years old at the time. However, I still felt some connection to patriotism."

Two participants also described how culture and their social milieu galvanized their interests to join the military. When I asked Jason to describe how he became interested in the military, he stated, "I grew up watching 80s action movies: (Sylvester) Stallone, Jean Claude Van Damme, Steven Seagal, etc. They really sold me on militarism[14] and motivated me into pursuing these depictions of masculinity though the military." When I asked Aaron if 9/11 played a role in his decision to enlist in the Navy, he stated, "9/11 was also a strong motivating

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[14] Jason is currently a PhD candidate, which may provide clarity on his use of academic terms and his perspective. Several participants held degrees at the time of the interview, though Jason was the only participant pursuing a PhD. Several participants also explicitly remarked on the political or social effects of the war during their time serving.

factor for me. The strong social patriotism movement of that era was influential, though it was

winding down during that point. We had been in Iraq and not found "WMDs" and the reality of

our foreign policy was starting to show through, but I still wanted to join." Although several

participants referenced their milieu and militarism during the interview, most did not explicitly

reference 9/11 or nationalism as significant factors in their decision to join. Instead, these factors

were more often attributed to negative motivations and their dissociation of the political and

ideological rhetoric they encountered at the time. This may be connected to frustrations and

problems they experienced while serving.

Factors Affecting Motivation While Serving:

Institutional:

Participants all cited leadership as an important and polarizing[15] aspect of their service

experience. Good leaders were protectors that worked hard to build and reinforce group cohesion

for ingroup members. I asked Laura, a Navy veteran, about the social and professional dynamics

of her division[16] in Deck department. She replied, "it's interesting because if you get in with this

sort of group, then you can be trained and mentored, and you can be protected. As long as you

stay in this group dynamic, you're going to be protected, and Senior Chief protected us." Some

participants also viewed their leaders as role models for upholding military standards, and

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[15] I will later show in "Negative Motivations" that poor leadership was a more common response for negative motivation than good leadership was to positively motivate its members.

[16] Divisions are subgroups of the departments that make up a ship's crew. Departments tend to be organized by what area and type of labor is being conducted on the ship. Deck department is tasked with maintaining the exterior surfaces and equipment on the ship, while also conducting aircraft landing, small boat operations, pulling into and out of port, anchor duties, and any other operations specific to the type of ship they are on. Deck department is usually divided into divisions that are responsible for specific areas, spaces, and operations on the ship. Division size tends to be larger in Deck department than in other departments, based on the manning requirements and the size and nature of the work environment.

enjoyed their emphasis on discipline, and a "no-nonsense" style of communication. After I asked

Jenn to describe how her leadership impacted her, she replied:

> My Master Chief, he really made me hungry. He was so into the job because he worked
> with the Seabees and in the small boat units. He reminded me of my time working with
> the Marines; he was no bullshit: 'iron your coveralls; get a haircut; what's up dirt bag?
> Have some respect for the dead and dying.' I liked that he was strict. He got me excited
> about my job again telling us how we are corpsmen in the United States Navy. We have
> the most commendation medals, stuff like that. That's the first time I felt pride for my
> job.

Effective leaders also provided personal support and professional mentorship, helping

participants circumnavigate difficulties and pursue their occupational goals. When Scott applied

for commission to become an Air Force pilot, he relied on senior enlisted leadership to navigate

the process:

> When I let my leadership know that I wanted to become a pilot, they really latched onto
> it. The E-8 I was working with, he got me in touch with the commander, and the
> commander treated me on a first name basis. He embraced my initiative there and made
> sure my package was ready, even putting me in touch with the Wing Commander, which
> got me a referral. That was the best leadership I had in the Air Force.

Most participants reported experiencing positive leadership at some point during their service,

which improved their motivation. Positive and supportive leadership created a productive work

environment, and a familial bond for participants and their unit members.

Unit cohesion and camaraderie was also a very important form of motivation for service

members, though most prevalent in combat-oriented occupations, small units, and highly

specialized occupations. When describing his work environment as an RPA[17] pilot, Scott stated

"it was a lot of camaraderie, smoking and joking with your friends, especially if you're not

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[17] RPAs or "Remote Piloted Aircraft", colloquially referred as Drones or Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), are remotely piloted aircraft used to conduct surveillance and attack (strike) operations. According to Scott, RPA is the technical or official term used to describe these aircraft in the Air Force. The proliferation of surveillance and attack droves has been controversial, particularly for its increased use Barack Obama's presidency and the contended veracity of civilian casualty reports for these operations (Scahill, *The Assassination Complex,* 2016, 1-40).

flying. You're sitting in the back watching the screens, bullshitting, especially on mid shifts. We

built friendships. Once you got in the skiff doors, rank was absent. Your job was just as

important as the next person." For Hawre, his experience as an Arabic translator for the Marines

during the second Iraq War compelled him to move to the U.S. and enlist in the Army as a

finance specialist, later commissioning as a finance officer. "It was a very high level of

camaraderie. We did everything together: we ate together, we slept together, we went on patrols

together. I still stay in touch with quite a few of them. They were very supportive, always taking

care of me as much as they could."

For some participants, camaraderie was enmeshed with a competitive culture and the

exclusive nature of the unit. Jason described how his command transfer to Naval Special Warfare

from a Search and Rescue command[18] drastically improved his motivation and *espirit de corps* in

his unit:

> For the first time there was a very deep connection to the identity of the group because
> we were these support members. Instead of the three people I worked with at my previous
> command: we're still doing that in the SEALs logistic teams, but there was a stronger
> sense of connection in that group because it was substantially more exclusive. There was
> more camaraderie, and some more friendly competition, but also rivalry with other parts
> of the division who weren't part of your rating, didn't do your job. It was always a
> competition to see who the best was.

Mario, the infantry Marine, described competition and a desire to train as key motivators

for him and his squad mates. "I would go around and try to learn as much as I could. I actually

found other guys in the unit from my hometown. They would look at my scores and give me

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[18] Commands in this context represent the larger organization a group, unit, or squad is attach to. Commands can
be unit level—a ship or military base—or may be large enough to represent several units, groups, or occupations.
An easier way to think about this is through the Navy SEALs' command structure (It's simpler than other forces).
SEAL Team One is a command consisting of several subgroups (platoons, which are also commands), while Naval
Special Warfare Command overseas all SEAL teams and support elements, as well as other special operations units
such as EOD or SWCC. SEALs can also be assigned to other Naval or outside commands depending on their mission,
who they are working with, and area of operation.

advice on what I could do from being a company shooter to a mortar gunner. They were really

motivating me!" Mario enjoyed the fast-paced operational tempo of his occupation and unit.

However, he also stated that the infantry often used corporal and verbal punishment as a method

of maintaining standards, which later had a negative effect on his well-being: "it was a very

high-pressure environment. Everyone had to have everything cleaned, spit-shined, and kept up to

standards. If they didn't perform, usually they would teach you, but if that didn't work, they

would also try yelling at you or even pushing you, beating you to perform. If there was one weak

man, everyone suffered."

    Participants also reported enjoying their shared experiences with other service members

through training, traditional rituals, recreational activities, and during operations while deployed.

When asked to describe his experience as a Visit, Board, Search and Seizure[19] team member in

the Navy, Louis exclaimed: "I knew the guys that I was on the team with, and I didn't have to

worry about them. We ran drills day in and day out. We were constantly doing tactical team

movements on the ship and practicing communications with our teammates. There was a

camaraderie there. I didn't have to worry because I knew they had my back, and they didn't have

to worry about me." George, a Wireman and communications Marine, exclaimed how his

experiences traveling and his ability to speak Spanish improved his experience: "We were in

Spain for the exercise, which lasted for three days, and I was there for another four days. I was

driving theses officers around and translating. I got to meet some of the Spanish people there.

They brought us wine and we were drinking it out in the countryside."

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[19] VBSS teams are ship's crew members that train and operate as query, physical security, and assault units for small boats in the vicinity of a Naval ship. Originally a mission set assigned for Navy SEALs, VBSS operations have been expanded to Navy ship's crew and Marine units that are attached to a deployed Naval Strike Group. In civilian terms, they function as a quasi-police unit, investigating small boats, gathering intelligence, and conducting low-threat raids, comparable to SWAT police officers.

Military traditions and culture served as a motivating factor for some participants, particularly Navy participants. When I asked Louis to describe any Naval traditions he enjoyed, he stated, "I really enjoyed port visits. Getting that time off the ship to decompress and travel was important. The longest we were out to sea was sixty days. After you're out to sea for longer than forty-five days, you get what's called a "beer-day," where they fly beer out to the ship. We got to drink two while out at sea!" Formal forms of hazing, such as the Navy's "Crossing the Line[20]" was also impactful for Louis, though he was disappointed with the Navy's efforts to reduce the ceremony's difficulty and harsh nature:

> So, for Crossing the Line, in the early days you crawled through tubs full of sludge, get sprayed with fire hoses while crawling around and doing pushups; eat a cherry of a "big boy's belly" and all that stuff. Today, when they spray you with the hose, they don't directly spray you. They put you in a group and spray the house in the air, getting you wet. It wasn't like the stories my grandfather told me during his time in. It was okay, but I was underwhelmed.

A few participants expressed frustration with a shift away from corporal violence as a method of conflict resolution with other service members. When asked about this, one participant explained, "during my first deployment, when I first got to the boat, if you had an issue with somebody you could go into a room, fight each other, go back to work and all was settled. On my second deployment, if you were to agree to fight with someone else, you're both getting in trouble." This participant later replied, "they were trying to cut down on fighting, but also hazing and other forms of violence. However, there were traditions such as "pink bellies[21]'

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[20] "Crossing the Line" or Shellback ceremony, is the U.S. Navy's formal tradition and indoctrination process where a ship's crew crosses the Equator while out to sea. Sailors that haven't crossed the Equator are known as "Wogs" or "Pollywogs" until they complete the hazing process to become "Shellbacks." Ship's crew that are shellbacks manage the ceremony. Sailors that simultaneously cross both the Equator and International Date Line are known as "Golden Shellbacks." Participation in the hazing process is not mandatory, though crew members that abstain may be informally mistreated or criticized by other crew members. U.S. Marines attached to a deployed Navy ship may also participate in the Crossing the Line ceremony.

[21] Pink-belly is an informal form of violent hazing—typically among male service members—where service members restrain and physically slap the bare stomach of another service member until the skin turns pinkish red in color. This form of hazing is comparable to "tacking on Crows or stripes," where after being promoted to the

that still happened outside of the command's knowledge." Although formal traditions were viewed positively, three participants reported frustration about informal hazing processes and the corporal violence involved.

Occupational (11):

Occupational motives were also important for many participants. For Scott, the ability to fly and the technical nature of his vocation was important to him, despite his disappointment that he wasn't flying a manned aircraft. "I liked the job because it was very technical and incorporated things that I enjoyed. I liked being a pilot: talking on radios, having control of important mission sets, safety of flight and all that." George described his enjoyment while deployed as a wireman in the Marines. "You're flying in these helicopters; I'm in the back, strapped in with this open door here and there's this chute going out the side. Inside the helicopter were several donut spools of communications wire. As it (the helicopter) would fly along, the wire would go out of these donuts like a Pez machine. I did that for two weeks. It was great flying around to different locations. It was a lot of fun!" While most participants enjoyed their work environment, others reported feeling frustrated by the presence of social cliques, poor leadership, and a high pressure to perform in their units.

Deployment is the most significant experience of military service. Of the participants (n=14) that deployed or conducted training and operations overseas, five reported their deployments as a positive and motivating experience, despite the hardships and harm they induced. When I asked Amanda how she felt about her deployment in the Navy, she stated, "the twelve-hour shifts, seven days a week, you just got into that groove. You didn't have a lot of

next rank or earning a warfare pin, service members punch the rank or unit pin into the chest or arm of the hazed member, usually resulting in mild to moderate injury. Although formally banned, these extant forms of hazing continue, particularly within enlisted ranks and combat units.

time to think about things outside of your work, so you just think about that. The new

relationships and experiences were also important. I loved being deployed." Andrew also

described his time deployed to Djibouti and Spain as helpful for honing his occupational skills

and work knowledge: "I paid more attention to my job, because we were there for a specific

reason. I'm there to do this job, and that's it. I tried to do everything I could while there. I was

the only one working in my shop, so it was all on me during my first deployment." When I asked

Andrew about his morale while deployed, he stated, "It was actually very good. Even though we

were working twelve on, twelve off, seven days a week, it was honestly kind of nice. The work

hours suck, but you're with your squadron; you're with people that you know care about you.

Everyone hung out together. You get a lot closer to people when you're overseas." Job

satisfaction, work relationships, and traveling were the most prominent themes among

participants that felt positive about their deployment experience. The ability for service members

to focus on their occupation and to build meaningful relationships were also impactful.

　　　　Deployment also offered an increased or reduced workload for some participants, which

aligned with their personal ambition. When I asked Liam about his experience deploying in the

Navy after changing jobs from Deck Seaman to Gunner's Mate, he replied, "I liked the fact that

as far as operations for the ship went, we weren't involved in nearly as many. There were times

while I was working in Deck department where we would have to be out working at three in the

morning, sitting there and waiting for some shit to happen. Unless we were in a warzone, we

didn't have to stand watch.[22] That's what I hated the most. For Jenn, deploying to Iraq with the

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[22] "Watch" is an occupational duty utilized across the military, but perhaps most important to shipboard sailors. Depending on your military occupation, standing watch can be your operational occupation while out at sea. For others, it's a secondary duty to their normal jobs. Standing watch usually involves visual surveillance for other nautical craft or aircraft in the area and operating navigation, radar, or communication equipment (safety of navigation); manning access points to the ship, weapon systems and sensors (security); and observing engineering

Marines offered an opportunity to treat service members with critical injuries, which increased

her job satisfaction:

> When we went to Kuwait and Iraq, I'd never seen a lot of stuff before. We definitely got
> inbounded some crazy shit. I was very young, but I don't remember being scared. I just
> remember being in a tunnel vision, whether it was a three-suture laceration, or a gunshot
> wound. We lost a few people. My coworkers always said I was so calm for my age. I
> would just go tunnel vision. I was very assertive and not afraid to do something. That was
> kind of cool. That's a job.

The opportunity to do the job they signed up for was important to several service members.

However, for most participants, deployment exacerbated negative feelings about their service

through increased workload, poor leadership, work and living conditions, and time spent away

from family.

Occupational motives also overlap with the cultural attributes found in institutional

motives, and lifestyle factors that personally motivated participants. When asked to compare his

experiences in the regular Army to special operations, Ram stated "I was pretty good at my job. I

had great relationships with my peers, subordinates, and bosses. When I transferred to Special

Operations[23] command, "big boy" rules applied. I didn't have much supervision; I didn't have to

wear a uniform or shave, so it was like having a civilian occupation but doing military stuff." For

Jason, the ability to work in an elite unit was its own form of motivation:

> At the time I thought it was the coolest thing I could have done other than becoming a
> Navy SEAL, because of the parachute training and the other kind of air operations that
> we would get into. I got to be a part of the community; the SEAL community that I
> wanted to be a part of. We were the cool guys who worked for the SEALs while everyone
> else worked on ships and did boring stuff. Within the broader occupation, everyone's
> important, but divers and parachuters are the ones with the cool jobs.

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and electrical equipment and spaces, to keep the ship operational and preventing fires or leaks to the ship
(damage control).

[23] Ram was assigned to Army Special Operations Command as a Financial Management Technician (USASOC).

Although culture and occupational motivations overlapped for several participants, not all

participants were motivated by the prestige associated with their occupations. For Kurt, a Navy

CT chief, motivation came from the perceived importance and characteristics of his shore duty

job:

> I got to Hawaii. It wasn't like a traditional shore duty where you show up to work at 8AM and you're home by noon. It was a full-blown job. I had to do reports, analyze radar and break them down. We also worked with a lot of computer systems. They made me a System admin for this system we had, which I loved. They gave me responsibilities and I really started to grow professionally and motivationally. At my old command I didn't want to do anything, but here I was motivated. They created a new IW (Information Warfare) pin, and I was part of the first cohort of people to earn that.

When I asked what made him feel important at this new command, Kurt stated, "I was being

valued. I was in a laboratory behind closed doors because it was so secret. That's why I was so

interested. It was cool. I felt like I was doing something to be the "tip of the spear." Your

products would go out to and help the fleet. It would be their guidance for how they operated."

Kurt also referenced his motivation from his time attached to deployed submarines, where his

training exercises were viewed as essential to their operations.

Participants also reported the nature of their job and work interactions as a benefit to their

morale. When asked to compare her experiences as a corpsman for the Marines and on Navy

ship, Jenn stated:

> On Greenside[24], it was more intense dealing with emergency medicine such as treating sucking chest wounds; like "this is how you do a tracheotomy with a key," that kind of stuff. But here, I learned more. It felt more like a family practice: we were treating upper respiratory issues, skin rashes, cellulitis, etc. We treated everyday nicks and bangs, and mental health. I just dived in. I was so fascinated by it. I volunteered for everything. It was really fascinating.

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[24] "Greenside" is a slang term used to describe working with Marine Corps units. Navy Corpsmen are distinct from medical occupations in other service branches, because they serve as the primary medical occupation for the Navy "blue side" and Marines Corps.

Aaron, an Operations Specialist in the Navy stated, "I was blessed with a large net of people that I interacted with. That had a lot to do with the nature of the job that I had, which was a good personality for me, because I'm good with people. We often had great conversations, and I was able to pull a lot of helpful information from others." When I asked Aaron to describe the social nature of his work environment, he answered, "there are other social circles on the ship; people you meet on the smoke deck or while eating on the mess decks. Maybe you get into playing a game of dominoes every night with people from different jobs and backgrounds. You're all stuck on the ship together out in the ocean, so you can't stay within your echo chamber." Occupational motivations, both positive and negative, were important for all service members, even if they did not plan on staying in the military after their time obligations were met.

Personal:

Personal motivations were the strongest and most recurring themes across participants interviewed. The ability to travel, meet new people and experience culture was important for several participants. When asked about his effort to leave base and meet people while deployed, George stated, "I kept on doing it because I loved it. I loved going to these countries and meeting the people. I never really had any bad experiences, but it was also because I was going to Spanish speaking countries, and I could speak Spanish." For Ram, the ability to travel is one of the reasons he chose to stay in the Army and commission as a financial officer, "I had three different opportunities to get out, but I like the lifestyle of getting new assignments and getting to go to new places. After this (training), I'm going to Italy. I can take my family there and enjoy Europe." For Liam, his ability to travel provided an experience he couldn't receive while living in Detroit. "I'd never been to California before. It was all new to me, man. I remember walking around Bahrain for the first time and that was crazy. Seeing how people lived there felt like I was

in a movie." For Hawre, who left Kurdistan to join the Army, the ability to travel with his family

is something he's looking forward to during his officer career. "We've already been to three

different states and we're going to Germany for my next assignment. That is something unique,

coming from Hawaii and going to Germany. We could never afford that!" Several other

participants also reported that traveling was one of their favorite aspects of military service. For

George and Mario, the ability to experience cultures was equally as important to them as the

places they travelled to.

Service members also utilized the military to improve their educational and professional

opportunities, inside and out of the military. Participants described their leadership and work

relationships as important to them. The fulfillment of doing military work to land an outside

career as a police officer was central to Louis' work motivation as a Gunner's Mate and VBSS

member in the Navy. "I had initially wanted to get out and be a cop, right? So doing this sort of

work was as close to special operations that I could get. Within my first two years, I thought 'I'm

getting the fuck out. I'll do this so I have something to put on my resume.'" When asking Matt

about his long-term goals in the Army, he stated, "I see myself staying in a long time because I'll

already have ten years in while my time obligation's up. I'll be halfway towards retirement. As a

captain, you're making decent money and I plan on taking advantage of the programs they have

for finance. They will send you to Syracuse to get a master's degree in executive public

administration, or an MBA. I plan on weighing my options after I retire."

Although most participants expressed and awareness and value in the educational

benefits they could receive, few participants reported pursuing their education while serving. For

Jason, who suffered a skydiving injury while working with the SEALs, his ability to attend

school full time was an important aspect of his motivation towards the end of his enlistment:

> I came to an agreement with my work. They would let me go to school full time, at a regular college, as long as I completed all my work. That usually took me twenty hours a week, even though it was a full-time job. I basically had to be there half the time and I could spend the rest of the time at school. My future life as an academic rather than as a sailor was my primary motivation. I kept the Navy for income, healthcare, and other benefits.

For Matt and Hawre, going to college while serving was a way for them to advance their career by commissioning as officers while also earning their college degrees.

The military also served as a springboard for social and occupational advancement after service. I asked Louis what motivated him while serving. He stated, "Everything that motivated me was the end goal. Get my four years done and get out so I can go back to normal life. I wanted to go to college, get my degree, and at the time I wanted to join NYPD." For Liam, a Navy veteran, the military was a pathway towards the opportunity to enroll in college: "I didn't really have any connections outside the military. There was really no one to network with. My main goal was to make it out with an honorable discharge and get the money for college." Other participants reported later utilizing the Post 9/11 GI Bill and other benefits to earn their education and even purchase a home, but only two explicitly referenced these benefits as a significant factor in their motivation.

Making rank was also another important motivation for several participants, though less frequently reported than other personal factors. Kurt described his experience making Chief, and then Senior Chief as one of the key motivations for him continuing his service in the Navy:

> The second sub tour was really the driving factor to pick up Senior Chief. Now that I'm a Senior Chief, the driving factor was to make it to twenty (years served). Now I'm at twenty and it's like, 'Do I want to go Master Chief? Do I want to purse that?' Where I'm at right now, the job is not that springboard kind of job to make Master Chief. So, I'm kind of stuck. If it was a command where I feel like I could get to the next rank, I probably would. I probably would push it.

Making rank allowed service members to transfer to occupations they wanted to pursue,

opportunity to live out in town, and pecuniary benefits they could use to support their families

and their lifestyle.

Negative Factors to Motivation:

All participants reported experiencing events that negatively impacted their motivation at

some point during their service. Negative experiences were so impactful for these service

members that twelve participants decided to exit the service following their term of enlistment.

Having problems with leadership was the most common form of negative motivation for all

participants. Poor leadership stunted professional development, exposed service members to

violence, turned coworkers against each other (disintegration of cohesion), and negatively

impacted their personal and social well-being.

Several participants, particularly female participants, reported experiencing harassment

and violence from their leaders or coworkers, and a fear for their safety if they spoke up against

their leaders. When I asked Maria what motivated her to make rank, she stated:

> My main motivation was survival. I knew I had to move up in rank and have a certain
> image for me to continue to survive there knowing that my first experience on the ship
> was having to endure that BM2. I learned quickly and I knew a lot of people were getting
> in trouble for harassment and stuff like that. I knew all these incidents and that I had to be
> quiet about it. That's just the way it was. It wasn't safe to speak up.

When I asked her if she could report her supervisor to someone higher in her chain of command,

she stated, "I don't know. His direct leader, he was a BM1; that guy was a motherfucker. You

don't complain to him. He will brutalize you for even complaining. It made me feel like I had

little support. I had to keep my head down, shut up and stay out of trouble. I knew my leadership

was not going to be cool with a new Seaman, especially a female, complaining about a BM."

Although Jenn reported positively about her division Master Chief[25], she reported being victim to sexual assault from her division LPO[26], which severed her trust with her command and the Navy:

> I was sexually assaulted by my LPO, in a foreign country at night when I was sleeping. When I reported it, they didn't believe me. They had to do an investigation, but they also treated me different, and they kept him on the boat for a few weeks, which was traumatizing. After they discovered that he was video taping me, they realized that I was telling the truth. I was sitting there like the damage is done. I no longer felt safe walking around the ship, and I felt very betrayed.

When I asked Jason about his negative experiences working with the SEALs, he described his irritation with his treatment while acting as OPFOR[27] in a training exercise:

> So, they took me into a building…pitch black down into a basement. Then they took my shirt off and put me up against the wall. They zip-tied my hands, put me on my knees, and started interrogating me. The worst is they put me in this chokehold with a knee in my back. As I was pressed against the wall and they were asking me questions, I wasn't even in character anymore because I was shirtless against the concrete, getting choked and chaffing from rubbing against the floor, which hurt a lot. I was pissed, because I already surrendered, and I was someone that worked with them.

Mario, Liam, and Louis also reported feeling negative about the corporal violence they experienced in their units. For Mario, Marine infantry units would often resort to violence as a disciplinary measure, while Liam, Jason, and Louis referenced their negative thoughts about ritual hazing in their units.

Exposure to violence and casualties also negatively impacted several service members through their training and combat experiences. Jason reported experiencing an ideological

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[25] In the Navy, paygrades E-7 to E-9 are given the unique rank and title of "Chief", "Senior Chief", and "Master Chief" Petty Officers. Master Chiefs are the highest enlisted rank in the Navy assigned to boats, and Chiefs serve as the senior enlisted leader for each occupational division. A division may have one or several chiefs depending on its size and how many occupations are within the division. Chiefs wear similar khaki uniforms to officers and have strong influence and power over the processes of the ship, as well as their subordinates.

[26] Leading Petty Officer (LPO) is the senior (or appointed) leader of a Navy division underneath the division Chief Petty Officer. They tend to manage subordinates in the division more closely than report to the Division Chief Petty Officer.

[27] OPFOR or "Opposing Force" is when service members play the role of enemy combatants during a training exercise. The unit that is training is supposed to capture or eliminate OPFOR members during training.

disassociation from his occupation, which was exacerbated by the "Bro culture" of SEAL

members and the psychological trauma suffered during his combat first aid course:

> Combat First Aid was where pigs would be sedated. When we went through the training, pigs were sedated and they (course instructors) would harm the pigs in various ways, then we had to repair the pigs; keep them alive until the session is over, and then they're euthanized. The pigs could easily die during the training. They were teaching us how to perform surgical procedures on the pig, then they would shoot or disembowel them around in the field and send us out to go fix them. That was traumatizing. I was already flirting with vegetarianism for a year prior because of my philosophical interests, but experiencing that harm towards the animal, I went vegetarian.

When I asked Mario about his experience being deployed to Beirut, he stated:

> (When we got to Lebanon, they dropped us into a civil war. No one wore uniforms, everybody was shooting at us. They called it a police action. We were a bunch of dumbasses; 17–20-year-old kids that were patrolling cities, trying to impose our will on them. We would run convoys to protect diplomats to and from the airport.
>
> People were getting killed every day; people were getting bombed. Our first casualty was a kid from my hometown. Today they call it an IED. We had got shot at for so long, that it became humorous. It was like a sick joke. People went crazy. It's like you wanted to go home. Black Marines were saying it's a white man's operation, why would we want to take part in this? I never personally believed that though.)

For Scott, the psychological effects of combat were compounded by his proximity to the civilian world:

> When you walk into the skiff, you're in the War Room, where it's all going on. Just a short walk out of the skiff, you're in the normal building and there could be a spouse in there cooking pasta for the midnight crew, or on occasions there's kids running down the hallways. It's like, "oh, I just killed three insurgents and now just trying to get some food or a can of coke out of the snack room, and there's kids running around playing?" That was a weird dynamic. It's kind of hard to turn it off and on like that.

Louis also reported experiencing frustration and stress due to a VBSS team member accidentally

shooting himself while conducting small boat approach operations in the Arabian Gulf.

Furthermore, Aaron reported experiencing psychological distress after a detainee died from a

heart attack while he was serving as a prison guard at Guantanamo Bay Prison Facility. For

participants that experienced combat or other traumatic events, these negative effects were

exacerbated by poor or unsupportive leadership and experiencing bureaucracy that prevented

them from attaining the help they needed.

Participants also reported frustration dealing with bureaucracy both within and outside of

their command. Laura described difficulty knowing the process when she wanted to file a formal

complaint against her supervisor, "I knew where to go to file a complaint, but you don't really

know, before you do it, what the steps of the process are. Also, from what I saw, there wasn't an

actual way to formalize a complaint outside of your department. So, you're still going to have to

confide in your department to do the right thing." When Jason was injured during a skydiving

exercise, his chain of command mishandled his treatment. "It was on a Friday, and they gave me

Monday off and told me not to worry about coming in. The x-ray didn't initially show any

fractures, so they thought I just strained my back. I went back to work and about two months

later my back seized up while packing a parachute. I had x-rays done again and they said my

compression fracture had healed fine. That's when I knew I broke my back on the jump. That

really annoyed me about the military, the structure and institution." For Scott, the paternalistic

treatment while living in the barracks motivated him to get married so he could live with his then

girlfriend without being harassed by his girlfriend's chain of command. When asking Louis

about his frustration after the VBSS shooting incident, he exclaimed:

> I got into an argument with the XO[28]. He wanted us all packed into the center of the boat,
> and with our weapons inside the cabin to not look intimidating to the boats we were
> approaching. I told him it's not only a bad idea, it goes against all the safety protocol we
> were taught during training. He said, 'I don't care, you're going to do it!' So that led to
> the VBSS team member shooting himself in the leg, which almost hit me. The bullet
> went under my feet while we were in the cabin.

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[28] XO is the Executive Officer, which is the second in command underneath the Commanding Officer at a military
command.

All but two participants reported frustration from navigating bureaucracy as a key to their decrease in motivation.

Last,[29] over six participants reported experiencing issues with their coworkers as a significant constraint on their motivation. When I asked Liam about his work interactions with his new division as a GM, he stated, "some of the people there weren't welcoming, but others were. There were social cliques within the division and department that affected the occupational environment. So, it was a mixed response." When I asked about the social relationships in Deck Department, Maria replied, "it's a sense of pride for Boatswains Mates. If you're not one of their own, they pretty much write you off. You take the BM3 test and stay in Deck Department, or you leave Deck and you're considered an outsider. They shitcan you." After Amanda mentioned the presence of social cliques, she later described the homogeneity in her division. "There was a lot of similarity between everyone. I think that's why they had their own cliques." Not everyone mentioned social exclusion as an obstacle or negatively impacting their motivation. Aaron reported enjoying his interactions with different occupations and divisions while on his first ship, though he later described a story where cliques within the leadership of his division caused extreme professional and personal harm to his career and motivation.

Reasons For Separating or Continuing Serving:

There were several other factors that negatively impacted the motivation of participants during their service. Participants often referenced multiple events and circumstances for their desire to exit the military. The most frequently cited reasons for leaving the military were either burnout—long working hours, deployments, and difficult work conditions—or frustration with

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[29] Participants reported several other significant factors that decreased their motivation including burnout, losing purpose in their work, disappointment in their chain of command, ideological break away from militarism, partial treatment and punishment, "pointless" busy work, "culture shock", and boredom at times when they couldn't perform their chosen jobs. Due to project length, I have included only the most frequently mentioned themes.

leadership and the desire to escape military bureaucracy. Several participants also reported

feeling they had experienced all they needed from their service, and therefore, no longer desired

to stay in. Despite their desire to exit the military, most participants (n=14) reported viewing

their service as meaningful to them and were happy with their decision to join.

Participants that decided to stay in tended to view their experience in a more optimistic

light, highlighting the ways the military can help their career and family through pay, travel and

life experience, and benefits. At the time of the interview, three participants (the Army officers)

intended to stay in service for the time being and had plans to continue unto retirement. These

participants also held higher views towards their service, based on career and personal

opportunities.

Discussion

Reasons for Joining:

The results of this thesis show three recurring forms of motivation for military service

members across occupations, units, service branches, and the identities and backgrounds of

participants. Participants most frequently reported *personal motives* as key to their decision to

join. The ability to improve their life and job opportunities was meaningful to almost all

participants. Since the end of the draft, military service branches have advertised service as an

opportunity for citizens to improve their lives through vocational skills, as well as pecuniary and

educational benefits (Bailey 2009, 58-60; 85-88; 249-250; Brown 2012, 105-116). Although

military recruiters may prioritize candidates from higher class backgrounds, it can take

advantage of lower SES prospects, because it will always serve as an alternative to their current

circumstances and an opportunity to improve their class status through educational and pecuniary

benefits.

Participants emphasized the role their environment played in motivating them to join the military. The desire to leave their hometown, family, or environment was the most frequently cited reason participants chose to serve. The military is unique as an occupation in that it allows its most junior members the opportunity to travel for work as intrinsic to its operations. Prospective service members can choose to leave for basic training as soon as their enlistment paperwork and background checks are processed. For several participants, the ability to leave abusive or dangerous environments was especially important to their motivation to join. Almost all participants felt that the military served their interests to leave home and provide the opportunities they felt they were missing.

Participants also reported the ability to travel as once of their key interests in serving. Service branches like the Navy have historically placed emphasis on its traditions and experiencing adventure through travel as intrinsic to Navy life (Brown 2012, 105-116). Service members all reported feeling positively about their ability to travel and experience different cultures. The data in this study confirms Helmus et al. (2018) and Hedlund's (2011) studies that demonstrate the importance of personal motivations for military service.

Contrary to most of the literature on military motivation, *institutional motives* were the second most common reason participants decided to join the military. Several participants referenced service in the military as a noble and honorable pursuit. All Marine participants emphasized the brand of the Marines as tough, resilient, and committed to a core set of values that they admired. Service members also referenced the impact militarism had on their beliefs and identities, through their consumption of movies, books, and the stories told to them by family and community members that served. To these participants, the military was held in high

regard, and serving provided meaning and inclusion to being part of something greater than themselves.

Several participants were also impacted by 9/11, which increased their interest to serve their country. Like the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, 9/11 consolidated nationalism and civic identity with militarism through the appeal for retribution (Ackerman 2021, xii-xvi; 13-24). The symbolic and ideological significance of these attacks were highlighted by participants describing their milieu and the cultural significance of the War on Terror. For Jason, who was already entrenched in militarism through his participation in JROTC,[30] 9/11 bolstered his motivation to become a Navy SEAL. For Louis, 9/11 threatened his well-being as a New Yorker, and service in the military offered a way to go after those responsible for the attacks and reaffirm his national and city identity. The most interesting aspect of this event was its impact on service members long after 2001. The effects of 9/11 continued for participants that reported patriotism and 9/11 as key to their motivation, despite being in elementary school[31] during the event.

Occupational motives were the least frequently cited reason for joining the military. Three participants stated wanting to serve in specific occupations: a fighter pilot, Navy SEAL, and infantry Marine as their motivations to join. For these service members, the military occupation they pursued was its own motivation, and they attributed some to most of their satisfaction on their ability to acquire or work alongside these occupations. Most participants reported their job choice as a secondary motivation, while also choosing their service branch

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[30] JROTC is comparable to university ROTC programs, for minors ages 12-18. Youth that join a JROTC organization wear military uniforms and participate in ritualized training and exercises, simulating military service. Participating in JROTC not only fuses youth identity with militarism, but it also serves as a recruiting method. Youth that participate in JROTC can earn the rank of E-3 if they choose to enlist as an adult. I participated in the "Sea Cadets," a Navy JROTC program, prior to my enlistment in the Navy.

[31] Expanding the sample here to include service members that weren't alive on 9/11/2001 could add an interesting comparison for nationalism and patriotism themes.

based on who they interacted with first, or what branch they were able to join if another branch denied them entry.

For participants serving in the Navy, several reported entering the military without an occupation assigned to them upon their enlistment. These service members reported experiencing frustration and hardships while working as an undesignated seaman on their ship. Job choice as a motivation was delayed until they decided what occupation they wanted to pursue for the remainder of their service. For most participants, their choice of service branch was determined by what recruiter they interacted with first, and the nature of the branch they would be committing too. Most participants held preference on their style of service, whether performing in technical work such as a radar operator in the Navy, a pilot in the Air Force, or in physical labor such as an infantry soldier in the Marines.

These motives confirm the literature that soldiers are often motivated by different factors pertaining to their needs, desires, and beliefs (Griffith 2008, 238-250; Helmus et al 2018, 27; Hedlund 2011, 182-184). For participants that held stronger beliefs towards their nation and civic duty, institutional motives were particularly important for their service. However, most participants utilized the military to improve their life and pursue work that was personally and professionally meaningful to them. Participants also shared similar motivations to join despite their service branch, identity, and the period of their recruitment. Shared personal and occupational motives demonstrate how the military has remained relevant in modern society through its focus on benefits and vocational opportunities. Meanwhile, institutional motives reflect the extant impact of nationalism and militarism in compelling young adults to serve.

Motivations While Serving:

While serving, participants reported all three motives as important to their experience. However, motivations changed in nature and preference, with participants navigating the circumstances and relationships they encountered through their service. While institutional and personal motives remained prevalent for many service members, occupational motives increased as participants performed their jobs. Motivational subthemes remained present for most participants, however, new subthemes emerged based on participants' shared and unique experiences.

For most participants, institutional motives evolved to include unit cohesion, with an emphasis on the quality of their leaders, military structure and standards, and shared identity across occupations, units, and service branches. Leadership was pivotal to building unity within the group, while also fostering the personal and professional development of these participants. Most participants felt positive about one or several of their leaders. However, low quality leadership also hindered motivation for these service members. Poor leaders turned unit members against each other, exacerbated frustration, and served as a bureaucratic roadblock to professional and personal development. Several participants reported experiencing partial and punitive treatment, harassment, and violence from their leaders.

Institutional themes discussed in this thesis parallel the findings in several previous studies that myriad factors influence motivation in the military (Griffith 2008, 240-250; Helmus et al. 2018, 27; Hedlund 2011, 182-184). Participants expressed the importance of espirit de corps, ritualized traditions and training, and unit identity and culture as important aspects to their motivation. For Jenn, Jason, Andrew, and Mario, the unique characteristics of their service branch and occupational unit bolstered motivation through its culture, brand, and performative standards, projecting both Marines and Naval Special Warfare (SEALs) as "elite" warfighters.

Participants all described rank hierarchy as a key component to their organizational structure, however, in close-knit units, rank was supplanted by a fraternal identity among unit members. Scott enjoyed this collaborative environment while flying drone operations in a skiff with both enlisted and officer coworkers. Participants also reported strong cross-occupational interactions and relationships with other service members at their command. These subthemes reflect institutional motives that continue to motivate service members when effectively utilized.

Occupational motives also increased motivation for participants while serving. Several participants expressed a high level of satisfaction and attention towards performing their job. The ability for service members to professionally develop through meritocracy and a supportive work environment was also important for these service members. Military occupations vary in nature and levels of technical and physical aptitude. For service members that wanted to perform in physical environments, the nature of their work as infantry, special operations, and gunner's mates helped cultivate their motivations. Meanwhile, other participants cited the technical and intellectual nature of their job in finance, Naval operations, and piloting as important to their interests. Occupational motivation was also compounded by the ambition of participants to take on new responsibilities, challenges, and earn rank, which increased their pay, treatment, and occupational opportunities.

Another key feature of occupational motives was the intensity and excitement intrinsic to each vocation. Participants enjoyed the thrill of jumping out of airplanes; piloting aircraft; sailing in the ocean; flying in helicopters; and while conducting armed counter insurgency operations on a fast-moving small boat in the Arabian Gulf. For Jenn, the intensity of her job as a medic for deployed Marines galvanized her desire to learn more about her job and take on more duties and opportunities for her career advancement.

Although traditional literature tends to focus on institutional motives, the results of this study affirm the findings of more recent studies that occupational and personal motives are also an important aspect to military motivation (Griffith 2008, 235; 251; Hedlund 2011, 183; Helmus et al. 2018, 27; 67-75). Job satisfaction in the military might compare to civilian occupations, where work interactions, pay and benefits, excitement, and feeling important can increase service members' morale, increasing their likelihood of reenlistment. All three forms of motivation are important for military service members today.

Last, personal motives remained a strong and consistent form of motivation for almost all participants. Pecuniary benefits, healthcare, and job security was a strong motivator for several participants that decided to stay in the military and even commissioning as an officer to advance their pay and benefits. Participants also feel positive about the educational and professional opportunities they received through their service, which reflects their early motivations to join the military. Travel and adventure were strong forms of motivation for most participants that deployed, and the ability to experience culture and improve their lives was at the forefront of all forms of motivation. These forms of motivation may also intersect with institutional and occupational motives, as service members learned to enjoy their occupation or identify with their service as they complete their service.

Personal motives are a recent form of motivation that is being included in the modus operandi of the military today (Hedlund, 2011, 182-184; Helmus et al. 2018, 27). Beth Bailey argues that since the end of conscription, the military has modernized in its recruiting efforts to reflect broader changes in civil society (2009, ix-x). Service members today are motivated by their unique desires, which they view the military as capable of satisfying. Participants tended to prioritize personal motives over group motives, seeking to grow from their military experience

through personal interactions with other group members, traveling, and finding meaningful work. These personal forms of motivation are likely the consequence of preexisting beliefs and folkways that service members carry with them from civilian life into the military (Smith 2008, 278). Almost all participants reported personal motives as very important to their reason to stay or exit the military. If participants felt their needs and expectations weren't being met, they decided to separate as soon as they could.

Despite these positive forms of motivation, participants also reported experiencing several negative events and factors that greatly reduced their motivation to serve. Most forms of negative motivation were enmeshed with both institutional and personal motives, as poor leaders and low unit cohesion increased the hardship and difficulties these participants faced. Several participants reported the role social cliques had on reducing their motivation, though this could be controlled through better leadership that fosters a cohesive work environment and professional development for subordinates.

The most concerning cause for negative motivation was the presence of gendered and sexualized violence that two out of three female participants reported experiencing. Despite the progress the military has made in gender integration, sexual and gendered violence continues to proliferate throughout the ranks. The military has recently addressed these issues, but reported cases continue to increase, which may be due to victims feeling safe to report their attacks (Myers 2022). However, it may also be the case that cases are increasing, in which case, the measures taken thus far are insufficient.

Participants also expressed frustration and difficulty with navigating bureaucracy while in the military. The military as an institution adheres to a rigid hierarchical rank structure, while also dividing its labor to different commands, units, occupations, and members. Service members

not only obey their direct supervisors, but also a wide array of other authority members based on rank and position at their command. Almost all participants reported experiencing bureaucracy of one form or another during their service. These participants also reported feeling frustrated and having difficulty circumnavigating their circumstances inside and out of their units. For Aaron, this took presenting his entire unit chain of command to his ship's captain to demonstrate that his LPO and Chief unfairly punished him, which later led to a larger investigation on mistreatment and leadership problems at his command. Job satisfaction and pecuniary or health benefits were not enough for most participants to compensate for these negative institutional effects; with most participants choosing to leave after their terms of enlistment ended.

The results found in this study suggest that military service members are impacted by both institutional and personal motives to join and while serving in the military. When I asked what motivated participants to join the military, almost half of the participants cited institutional motives such as nationalism, civic participation and duty, militarism, and an appeal towards the unique identity and ethos of their service branch and unit. Several participants also viewed military service as the logical means to demonstrate and consolidate their national identity. Many participants entered their service with an optimistic view towards the military and their nation, disseminated to them through friends, family, books, movies, and community members.

However, while institutional motives positively impacted several service members, most participants expressed personal and occupational motives as the most important reason they joined. For post 9/11 service members, military service offered an escape from their social environment and the opportunity to acquire the vocational skills and education needed to advance in the civilian sector after their service. Participants that chose to remain in the military often expressed pecuniary and family benefits as an important factor in their decision. All

participants came from modest, poor to middle-class backgrounds, and most participants that chose to serve past their first term expressed their benefits and occupational and financial stability as an important reason for their decision.

While serving in the military, most participants expressed overlapping factors that increased their motivation. Leadership as a strong determinant to motivation while serving reflects the institutional motives present for all service members. These participants also felt strongly about the camaraderie they had built with their coworkers and other service members in their unit and across their command. Unit cohesion was a strong motivating factor for almost all service members, but particularly those that served in close-knit, combat occupations. Applying mechanical solidarity to these forms of motivation can help sociologists understand how the military sustains its institutional hold on service members and its appeal to prospective applicants. This may be particularly beneficial when comparing the military to other institutions and occupations with a distinct shared identity and culture.

Participants in this study also reported personal and occupational motivations as the most important aspects to their motivation while serving. This thesis demonstrates that most military service members still carry their preconstructed identity, beliefs, and behavior into the military, despite the military's effort to train the individual out of them. When asking what motivated these service members, many participants expressed an interest in performing their chosen occupation. Most participants stated that they enjoyed traveling while deployed, and the unique and exciting experiences they received exclusive to their occupation in the military. Participants also reported personal and professional advancement as important to them, citing the financial and social benefits they received when making rank, earning a position, and preparing for life after the military.

This unique overlap of motivations highlights that the military does not exclusively align with institutional or personal motives. Instead, military service members can and do rely on multiple forms of solidarity to motivate them. While understanding this may be beneficial for recruiters or the military, this study does not serve to increase the recruitment or retention of these service branches. Instead, military motivation can provide sociologists with broader applications to understand how nationalism, militarism, and the division of labor impact civic participation in society. Future studies can focus on the military or connect to a broader analysis of occupational motivation and how it is shaped by workers' experiences.

Limitations

The following study offers a nuanced albeit limited depiction of how military service can impact the motivation of its service members. The results of this study are not representative across occupational and social identities of service members. Due to time constraints during sampling, I was unable to interview African American service members, whose perspectives and motivations would have been invaluable to this thesis. The study also lacked gender diversity and representation across service branches, which could have bolstered the understanding of how military service impacts female members. Although participants shared several forms of positive and negative motivation across service branches and occupations, this study did not interview enough combat veterans—across occupations—to make a meaningful comparison for how combat affects service members.

Another limitation of the study was the potential for bias for myself and my participants in the information shared during interviews, and the themes I drew from these interviews and disclosed in this thesis. Veterans may misremember specific details while sharing their experience, especially if they have been separated for a while. Although I share a common

identity with participants as a military veteran, my service identity may create an outsider bias

while interacting with participants from other service branches and occupations (Higate and

Cameron 2006, 227-228). It is also possible that my identity as a veteran may have led me to not

probe participants based off an assumed or shared understanding of their statements (Ibid., 227).

My identity as a white male veteran may have impacted the response of female and non-white

participants, and my identity as a graduate student may also have impacted the response of some

participants, though I believe this is less likely given my veteran identity and low institutional

authority. These potential biases could be controlled by multiple interviewers with similar social

identities as the participant in future studies.

During the interview, transcription, and coding processes, I constructed the interview to

follow the participant's experience from before they decided to join, until after they separated

from service (some participants are still actively serving). While this framework provides better

context of how military experience impacts the motivation of these participants, the limited space

of this study placed me in a position to prioritize themes by recurring frequency and expressed

importance. As a result of this framework, I omitted other experiences and motivations that

would have provided a much more holistic answer to my research question.

Most participants did not go into depth about their basic training or early job training,

although being asked about it. This could be due to a memory bias since most participants in this

study are veterans. The effects of these trainings could also be measured in how service members

respond to institutional motives, as these trainings serve to socialize and inculcate military

norms, mores, and folkways into its members. Future studies should further explore these

significant points of service.

This study may be improved for depth by focusing on the members of one unit or focusing on one occupation for a more detailed and rich analysis of the motivations and unit interaction among its members. Such analysis is often displayed in memoirs and autoethnographies of military service units, which have quickly increased following the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan after 9/11(Finkel 2009; Kassabian 2018). Utilizing a larger analysis of the crew of a US Navy Ship, an infantry squad, or a flight crew/airwing in the Air Force could provide a unique perspective on the structural relations and motivations of these members, especially if the unit experiences any significant events that could alter their morale or cohesion. Juxtaposing these perceptions at the unit level may also highlight how work interactions impact unit cohesion, further testing the application of organic or mechanical solidarity in the military.

Conclusion

Military sociologists have historically placed too much emphasis on the significance of institutional factors to understand why military members fight today. Soldiers during the time of conscription fit more neatly into categories that emphasized nationalism and civic duty, rituals and discipline, cohesion, and disintegration. These frameworks on military motivation are still helpful albeit only in relation to the other forms of motivations military service members have today.

This thesis set out to contextualize these changes to military service by understanding why people chose to join the military and how their experience while serving shaped and impacted their motivations to serve. By utilizing interview methods to ascertain these details across each participant's term of service, I was able to draw out three dominant themes, *institutional*, *occupational*, and *personal* motivations. Participants that reported experiencing institutional motivation often expressed feeling compelled to serve through their shared

experiences and relations with other service members in their unit and service branch. Subthemes

such as altruism, order, discipline, duty, and shared identity proliferated through these

participants' responses. Leadership was the dominant and recurring theme for these motives, and

service members relied on their training and shared experiences to foster and affirm cohesion

within their unit. These motives often expressed a masculinized ideal type of military service

where violence, discipline, and hierarchical social structuring were inculcated into military

folkways. As Jenn succinctly states when describing her experience working with Marines,

"Rank is God" in institutional relations and motives.

Participants also described occupational motivations as powerful incentives to join and

while serving. Several participants focused on learning and job performance, and a strong work

ethic as their motivations while serving. For other participants, the military offered an

opportunity for them to pursue their vocation of choice. Work interactions and professional

advancement were dominant themes throughout the study. Participants often felt a sense of pride

or accomplishment in completing tasks relevant to their chosen job, and even described feelings

of fulfillment taking on tasks they viewed as meaningful. As a vocation, the military offered

vocational skills, benefits, and educational opportunities they took into their civilian lives

following their service.

Despite the socialization processes of the military, personal motives remained important

for almost all service members. Service members did not lose their individual identity after

joining the military and this reflected in their ambitions and motivations while serving. Several

participants joined the military to travel and experience culture and people they would not have

the ability to before joining. Pecuniary and vocational motivations were very important to several

service members, who joined the military to boost their capabilities of acquiring a better job or

lifestyle. The results of this thesis suggest that future research on military service consider these

multiple forms of motivation and how service members' experiences shape their motivations and

performance.

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Appendices

Appendix One: List of Terms and Acronyms

Navy:

Occupations:

Navy enlisted occupations are called "rates."

Undesignated Seaman: E-3 and below sailor assigned to Deck Department onboard a ship. Works under the Boatswain's Mates to conduct maintenance on the ship's external spaces. Also stands lookout watches and works as physical labor in shipboard operations while out to sea.

(BM) Boatswain's Mate: works on exterior spaces of a Navy ship and conducts and oversees shipboard operations (flight crew, boat launch, etc.)

(CT/CTT) Cryptologic Technician (Technical): also works in ships and submarines' (CIC), conducting equipment maintenance and monitoring radar and intelligence signatures. Also operates a ship's missile and submarine defense countermeasures.

(GM) Gunners Mate: performs maintenance, training, and qualifications on command firearms and security. Also conducts and oversees ship's crew served weapons watches while deployed.

(HM) Corpsman: enlisted medic (can be assigned to Marine units as Marines do not have a formal medical occupation)

(OS) Operations Specialist: works in the ship's Combat Information Center (CIC), monitoring and tracking (sub)surface and air contacts while operating radars and other sensor inputs. Also utilizes communications and intelligence equipment and information in shipboard operations. Acts as a secondary navigation occupation for the ship. Aids in tactical and operational control of the ship by disseminating information and recommending a course of action to officers and external units. Can also conduct air traffic control and fire missile systems on some ship platforms.

(PR) Parachute Rigger: maintains and packs emergency and survival equipment for the command they are assigned to. Responsible for packing and readying parachutes for aircrews and airborne qualified units. Can be jump qualified and therefore, coordinate and conduct skydiving operations. Functions as a member of a logistic and operational support team for outside units if attached.

Units and Duties:

SEALs (Sea, Air, and Land): Navy Special Warfare unit.

(IA) Individual Augmentee: in laments terms, this is when Sailors take orders to support ground combat and security units in other service branches. In this interview, one participant took an IA billet to serve as a security guard at Guantanamo Bay Prison, which is maintained by the Navy.

Orders: the administrative paperwork that assigns you to fill an occupational vacancy at a specific command. When you change commands, you get assigned orders to that command based on your rank and occupation. Not to be confused with the lawful command from a superior.

Fleet Marine (Green Side): Navy Corpsmen attached to Marine units. These corpsmen serve in both combat and support units. "Blue Side" Corpsmen are assigned to Naval units.

VBSS (Visit, Board, Search, and Seizure): maritime boarding teams that approach, intercept, inspect, and board boats in the area. Used to conduct counterpiracy, counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, customs, and counter smuggling operations. Traditionally, a duty of Navy Special Operations units, now also conducted by ship's crew members, Coast Guard and Marines.

Ranks, Traditions, and Warfare Pins:

Enlisted Paygrades: E1-E9:
E1: Seaman Recruit (SR); E2: Seaman Apprentice (SA); E3: Seaman (SN);

E4 and above (Non-Commissioned Officers):
E4: Petty Officer 3rd Class (PO3); E5: Petty Officer Second Class (PO2); E6: Petty Officer First Class (PO1)

E7 and above (Chief Petty Officers: senior enlisted):
E7: Chief Petty Officer (CPO); E8: Senior Chief Petty Officer (CSPO); E-9: Master Chief Petty Officer (CMPO)

Sailors are addressed by rate and rank. For example, a E-5 Operations Specialist is known as an Operations Specialist 2nd Class, or (OS2). A E9 Operations Specialist is known as an Operations Specialist Senior Chief or (OSCS).

Crossing the Line Ceremony: formal tradition when a Navy ship crosses the Equator. Sailors that haven't crossed the Equator are labeled "Wogs" and go through a ritualized hazing process until they are granted the title of "Shellback." Sailors that simultaneously cross at both the Equator and International Date Line are labeled "Golden Shellbacks," and "Emerald Shellbacks" if they cross at the Equator and Prime Meridian.

Shellbacks are granted social and cultural capital at their commands, usually in the form of respect for their experience and seniority. "Saltiness" is an informal but ubiquitous slang term to describe how experienced a sailor is. Experience is weighted high in military service and can impact treatment from others.

Enlisted Surface Warfare Specialist (ESWS): the enlisted surface warfare qualification pin and qualification. Sailors learn about all the operations onboard a ship and then are tested on their knowledge. Traditionally, it symbolizes that the sailor is competent and could aid in fighting the ship outside of their specific occupation. However, realistically it serves as a resume bullet for rank advancement, or a disqualification from reenlistment if the sailor doesn't earn the pin after a

certain period.

Jump Wings: earned after a service member is qualified to conduct airborne skydiving operations.

Information Warfare (IW): warfare pin designated for occupations that conduct intelligence operations.

Army (All Officers):

Units:
Texas National Guard: State funded and controlled reserve unit.
Finance Corps: occupation and unit that handles financial operations for a larger command or unit.

Air Force:

RPA: Remote Piloted Aircraft; informally labeled as drones

Appendix Two: Thesis Interview Guide

*Note, the interview guide is dynamic and may change depending on the response of interview participants.

1. Please tell me about yourself?
   ● Age?
   ● Occupation?
   ● Residence/Community?
   ● Religious?
   ● Space for additional probes

2. What was life like for you before you joined the military?
   ● What did you do for work?
   ● Community/social networks: friends, family etc. (measure strong vs weak social ties)?
   ● Financial stability prior to service?
   ● Space for additional probes

2B. What motivated you to join the military?
   ● Family or friends who served?
   ● Financial, college or job opportunities?
   ● Patriotism or nationalism?
   ● Community?
   ● Commercials or military advertisements?
   ● Other media

3. Please tell me about your military service?
   ● What branch, unit, and occupation?
     * (follow up) What made you choose this (military) occupation?
   ● Can you tell me about your friends during your service?
     * friends at or outside of the division, department, command?
     * did they spend time or make meaningful relationships with civilians?
     * what did they do together (nothing illegal shall be disclosed)?
   ● What was the atmosphere at your command like?
   ● How did different units, squads, fireteams, divisions, and departments interact with each other at your command?
     *cross-social relationships between different occupations?

4. How long did (or have) you serve(d)?
   ● If reenlisted, what motivated you to reenlist?
   ● Considered or served in reserve/guard units after or instead of active duty?
   ● What was bootcamp and training like?

5. Can you describe your deployment experience?
   ● Where did you deploy?
   ● When did you deploy?

- What was your primary occupation/mission while deployed?

6. Can you tell me about a time where you experienced hardship while not deployed?
    - During training?
    - At your command (stateside)?
    - With family or friends (if comfortable disclosing)?
    - Quality of life?
    - Command structure or individuals in your unit?
    - Other?

7. How did you overcome this difficulty?
    - Command support?
    - Friends?
    - Unit cohesion?
    - other

8. Can you tell me about a time you experienced difficulty or frustration while deployed?
    - Command?
    - Operation?
    - Separation from family/friends?
    - Homesick?
    - The injury or death of a fellow service member?
    - Time in theater/extended deployment?
    - Environment (area of operation)?
    - Environment: other (experienced heavy combat, long work hours, difficulty of job etc.)?

9. How did you overcome this difficulty?
    - Command support?
    - Friends?
    - Unit cohesion?
    - other

10. Can you describe what your working relationship was like with other members of your unit?
    - Personal relationships?
    - Location of friend groups?
    - Similarity and differences between service members?
    - Relationships between your unit and other units?

11. How was the background of other service members in your unit compared to you?
    - Did you feel connected to their backgrounds and life experience?
    - Shared interests?
    - Shared education level?

12. Can you describe an event while serving where you had to effectively problem solve or work with other members of your unit?
    - A time when members of your unit or at the command didn't work together?

13. What motivated you while deployed and stateside?
   ● Family?
   ● Unit members?
   ● Career aspirations?
   ● Education?
   ● Physical fitness?
   ● Other

14. What did you do to relax or blow off steam while serving (both deployed and non-deployed)?
   ● Social outings with unit members?
   ● Partying or drinking?
   ● Exercise?
   ● Traveling or attending events: sports, movies, concerts etc.?
   ● other

15. What is something you think movies, media, or civilians misunderstand how military service?

16. How do you feel about your military service now?
   ● Regrets?
   ● Prideful moments or experiences?
   ● other

17. How is your relationship with your former or current service members, now?

18. How often do you speak or see to others from your unit?

19. Can you think of any other information related to your service that hasn't been discussed during this interview?

This concludes the interview.

Appendix Three: Recruiting Flyer

Did you serve in the U.S. Military and would like to discuss your experience while serving?

I am conducting an interview study on what motivated military service members and veterans to join and while serving. Research will be used towards completion of a graduate thesis at the University of Chicago. If you are interested, please contact the email address listed below. A financial incentive may be included with participation in the study.

Person to Contact: Stan Kowalinski, sociology student and student veteran at University of Chicago, Master of Arts Program in the Social Sciences
Email: srkow@uchicago.edu

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MAPSS
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