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**A Mixed-Methods Analysis of Embeddedness and Affiliation in the U.S. Marine Corps
Reserve**

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**A Mixed-Methods Analysis of Embeddedness and Affiliation in the U.S. Marine
Corps Reserve**

Despite years of research, much remains unknown about the drivers of retention and turnover in specific contexts and, with very few exceptions, scholars have not focused on the Reserves. This study contributes to an understanding of the drivers of retention and turnover in specific contexts by exploring what drives affiliation (retention) and turnover in the USMC Reserves. This study utilizes an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design, analyzing qualitative interview data and quantitative survey data to identify important drivers of affiliation among USMC Reservists and develop a context-specific predictive model, which is then tested. Results support the model and provide an underlying logic consistent with the embeddedness construct. Together, the qualitative and quantitative phases of this study determine primary drivers of affiliation and turnover among USMC Reservists and extend understanding and conceptualization of embeddedness to the context of the USMCR.

Keywords: Turnover; retention; embeddedness; Reserve; role-conflict; U.S. Marine Corps

A Mixed-Methods Analysis of Embeddedness and Affiliation in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve

The U.S. military seeks to recruit and to retain the most qualified personnel. The U.S. Marine Corps Reserve (USMCR), in particular, is concerned with maintaining a combat-proven and highly-trained Reserve force to supplement the active duty component of the U.S. Marine Corps (U.S. Marine Corps, 2010). Because the USMCR is prohibited from accepting lateral transfers into the service, retention is of great concern. Despite years of research, however, much remains unknown about the drivers of retention and turnover in specific contexts (Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Eberly, 2008; Holtom, Smith, Lindsay, & Burton, 2014; Maertz & Griffeth, 2004). Further, although considerable research has explored retention and turnover in the military context, with very few exceptions (e.g., Lakhani & Fugita, 1993; Wiggins, Evans, Luchman, & Gibson, 2014), scholars have not focused on the Reserves.

USMCR forces regularly augment active duty operations both at home and abroad. USMCR reservists must balance greater time and work demands than many civilians, and arguably, more than many active duty Marines (Sanchez et al., 2004). As the active duty Marine Corps shrinks in size and budget, but not operations, much of the day-to-day administrative and logistical support work has shifted to the USMCR. This increase in workload and change in work type represents a significant departure from the USMCR's traditional duties of training and augmenting deployments. The USMCR, a part-time force, has had to adjust its operations and accommodate additional stressors to meet the full-time force's accelerated work timelines (Bliese & Stetz, 2007; Defense Science Board, 2007).

Although USMCR reservists routinely operate in support of active duty marines, the inter-force relationship between the active duty and reserve components remains complex.

Moreover, as reservists move through life stages, family life demands likely increase, and as reservists' civilian careers advance, so do civilian work demands. Reservists' USMCR duties may, therefore, increasingly intrude on their professional and personal lives. These stressors likely contribute to low retention rates and manning shortfalls within the USMCR community, especially among those who have completed their initial commitments and are no longer obligated to serve (Hosek, Kavanagh, & Miller, 2006; Stetz, Castro, & Bliese, 2007). The USMCR currently uses monetary incentives to counteract these factors and encourage reservists' continued affiliation (National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2005). Many reservists, however, have non-military sources of income, suggesting that monetary incentives may provide limited benefit. A better understanding of the non-monetary and attitude-driven factors influencing affiliation among USMC reservists is required to inform future policy decisions. Research in this context is, however, extremely limited.

The limited studies of affiliation and turnover in the military reserves suggest that personal attitudes, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment all play significant roles in explaining workers' decisions to stay with or leave a military organization. Research has found that reservists enjoy higher job satisfaction than active duty personnel (Sanchez, Bray, Vincus, & Bann, 2004). Wiggins et al. (2014) found that positive attitudes towards the military and positive job satisfaction, especially when coupled with social and family support, increase a service member's commitment to the military and the likelihood of their affiliation with the Reserve. Similarly, Lakhani and Fugita (1993) found a positive relationship between spousal support and a service member's decision to continue affiliation in the Reserve.

The characteristics and studies described above support the argument that the USMCR provides a valuable context for the study of affiliation and turnover. The U.S. military has come

to rely on prior service enlistments (i.e., Reserves) and the Reserves of all branches have failed to meet their manpower authorizations at least once in recent years (Hosek et al., 2006; Wiggins et al., 2014). Thus, a better understanding of the drivers of affiliation is required to inform future policy decisions. Additionally, the USMCR is a complex and understudied context that warrants greater attention and understanding.

We contribute to an understanding of the drivers of retention and turnover in specific contexts by exploring what drives affiliation (retention) and turnover in the USMC Reserves. Our investigation employs an exploratory, sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009) utilizing qualitative (semi-structured interviews) followed by quantitative (survey) data. Although relatively uncommon, mixed designs allow researchers to both develop and test models within a single study and have been used effectively for this purpose in recent research (c.f. Wolters et al., 2014). We identify important drivers of affiliation among USMC Reservists and develop a context-specific predictive model, which we then test. Our results support the model and provide an underlying logic consistent with the embeddedness construct (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001). Together, the two phases of this study determine primary drivers of affiliation and turnover among USMC Reservists and extend our understanding and conceptualization of embeddedness to the context of the USMCR.

This paper is organized as follows. First, we present the overall research design. We then present the method, analysis, and findings of Phase 1, through which we identified key drivers of affiliation and turnover and developed a predictive model explaining affiliation among the USMC Reservists we interviewed. Then, we enfold the model in the related literature to develop hypotheses and measures, and we present the methods, analysis, and findings of Phase 2. We

conclude by discussing the theoretical and practical implications of the findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations for further research.

Research Design

The research utilizes an exploratory, mixed-methods, sequential design. A mixed-methods approach enables confirmation and corroboration of results through triangulation (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). In the qualitative phase of the study (Phase 1), we employ an inductive, grounded approach to identify drivers of retention (affiliation) among USMC Reservists and develop a context-specific predictive model. Consistent with the inductive, grounded approach of Phase 1, we did not begin Phase 1 with a specific theory or hypotheses in mind, but did allow our familiarity with extant literature to sensitize us to likely important constructs (Eisenhardt, 1989). We integrated the qualitative exploration of Phase 1 with the quantitative test of Phase 2 (Creswell & Clark, 2011) by enfolding the Phase 1 findings with extant literature to develop hypotheses and measures, which then guided the Phase 2 data collection and analysis.

Phase 1—Qualitative Study

Data and Methods

We conducted six semi-structured telephone interviews with four former and two current USMC Reservists. Reservists were purposefully selected (Licolin & Guba, 1989) to include a variety of Reserve career paths and affiliation decisions. Because we were interested in the experiences of both reservists who had re-affiliated and those who had left the USMCR, we used a snowball sampling technique to identify participants, asking known contacts to recommend others. This technique allows researchers to access participants who would be difficult to locate otherwise (those who were no longer reservists). Participants were evenly divided between those

who had served exclusively in the Reserves and those had transferred from the regular component. Participants had served in the Reserves for between three and 22 years, as officers and enlisted, in the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR), and as non-obligors. We asked reservists to describe how they came to affiliate in the Reserve, how their experience in the Reserve met or did not meet their expectations, how being in the Reserve affected finances and other roles (i.e., family and civilian job), and how they came to leave the Reserve. Interviews lasted from 45 to 90 minutes and were recorded and transcribed, resulting in a total of 49 pages of transcribed text.

We employed a grounded, comparative approach to analyze the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Eisenhardt, 1989). Three of the researchers read and coded each transcript to identify themes and patterns related to the decision to affiliate with the reserves. The researchers began with categories suggested by extant literature (e.g., personal attitudes, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, spousal support, monetary incentives) and added categories as they identified additional themes. The three researchers then conducted a between-case analysis, comparing successive pairs of the cases to further extend and refine the categories. The initial codes were reduced to eight second-order categories (intra-unit relationships, inter-unit relationships, identity, military activities, impact on career, impact on family, monetary incentives and education). The larger group of researchers then worked together to group the second-order categories into themes (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013).

Exploratory Analysis

Our analysis suggests three key drivers of affiliation decisions among the reservists we interviewed: relationships, meaning, and role conflict. The presence of positive relationships contributed to affiliation, while the absence or reduction of such relationships contributed to turnover. The interviews suggested that a sense of meaning contributed to affiliation, while the

absence or reduction of meaning contributed to turnover. Finally, the extent to which filling one's reservist role enhanced or conflicted with the fulfillment of other life roles contributed to affiliation and turnover. The perception that the reserve role enhanced one's civilian career contributed to affiliation, but increasing conflict between civilian and reserve roles contributed to turnover. Similarly, increasing family demands and family-role conflict contributed to turnover.

Relationships. Our analysis suggests that intra-unit and inter-unit relationships influenced reservists' affiliation and turnover decisions. We use the term *intra-unit* relationships to reflect the relationships among fellow members of a reserve unit. In contrast, *inter-unit* relations represent relationships between reservists and members of other organizational units, principally the inspector/instructor (I&I) staff. The I&I staff are active duty support personnel responsible for assisting and instructing reserve units.

Intra-unit relationships positively influenced reservists' desire to affiliate. All participants mentioned the draw of relationships with their colleagues. One noted, for example, "One of the coolest things about it is you were able to get to know guys and their families and hang out with them, go to drill." Another noted similarly, "You know, the best part about being in the Reserves ... was the dudes that I met there and the times we spent in the field." One reservist struggling with the affiliation decision explained the pull of his relationships: "You don't want to be the weak link that gives up. ... I'm trying to decide how much longer can I do this ... you know, before I have to kind of cut and run. ... I don't want to be the weak link."

As further support of the importance of relationships, reservists noted that as colleagues left, their own desires to affiliate decreased and the lack of these important relationships contributed to turnover. For example, one explained, "Well, I'm with a group of my buddies today, I'll stick around, but if it's all fresh faces, I don't know if I'll stay around with them." And

similarly, one reservist who did not re-affiliate noted, “You know ... one of the factors that might have kept me in was if a lot of those other guys would have stayed in too.”

Inter-unit relationships were most frequently a source of frustration. This frustration seemed to increase as reservists advanced in the USMCR and job demands increased. As one explained, “You know, I don’t know how many times I reached out to [DET] commanders or to some of the staff NCOs at various locations and asked them to do something for me on the FMCR side, just to hear, ‘Hey, sir, I’m swamped.’” Another explained, “The I&I side had a lot of underlying animosity,” while another described the relationship between the I&I and the reservists as “absolutely toxic.”

All reservists who had ended their affiliation noted feeling less respected, or feeling they were perceived to be lesser Marines by those outside of their Reserve units. For example, one explained, “I think a lot of the guys [active duty] ... their initial impression sometimes is that the reservists are kind of a little less worthy.” Another noted, “They [active duty] consider the reservists to be less of Marines than they are.” More pointedly, another said, “The active duty guys just—they treated the reservists like [expletive].” One reservist explained the effect this had on his decision to end affiliation: “If I had felt like I got the respect that I rated as a staff sergeant in the Marines, the experience that I had and everything, I’d probably keep going.”

Meaning. Our analysis suggested that a sense of meaning, derived from identification with the Marines and opportunities to participate in military work and training, contributed to continued affiliation. Most of the interviewees noted that individuals stay in the Marines because “they liked being Marines” or “like the idea of being part of the Marine Corps.” The reservists noted that pride in being a Marine contributed to affiliation, as explained by one reservist: “There’s also, of course, the intangible side, the pride, the honor that goes with service.” Those

who had left the Reserve attributed the affiliation decisions of their colleagues who stayed in the reserves to the importance of being a Marine to those individuals.

Reservists also derived a sense of meaning from opportunities to be engaged in military work and training. For example, one reservist explained his decision to join the Reserves: “I didn’t have a career in mind but I wanted to do something that was meaningful.” Another explained his decision to affiliate, saying, “I knew there was going to be a war and I didn’t want to miss it, so I joined the reserves ... so I wouldn’t miss the war and I didn’t.”

Similarly, reservists attributed reduced opportunities for military work to contributing to turnover. As one explained, “No one’s deploying or anything. I mean, that’s the game and that’s ... kind of [what you] want to go experience.” And further, “you know, they get three years into it and then it [the war] just shuts off and it’s like, ‘My motivation’s gone. What am I doing here?’”

Reservists described military training as personally rewarding and fun. As one explained, “I got to do what I wanted to do with the Marines and get that training.” Similarly, reservists attributed reduced opportunities for military training as contributing to turnover. As one explained, “I kind of see guys, that want to go do things and then we’re lacking the money for it, so they’re not getting what they expected.” A lack of training also contributed to reservists’ perceptions that they would not be able to properly complete their duties and responsibilities: “You guys are giving us new gear, but you’re not giving us any training on how to use it, so it’s pressuring when you tell me, hey, set up the, you know, high performance [wave phone] network. Well, I don’t know how to use the damn radio that uses it, so how do you expect me to use that?” This frustration reduced reservists’ perceptions of their ability to be engaged in purposeful work and their sense of meaning.

Role Conflict. Our analysis suggests that difficulties balancing the demands of the Reserve with civilian jobs and family responsibilities also contributed to turnover. Although some reservists perceived some benefit to their civilian careers from their reserve duties, these seemed to diminish as the reservists advanced in the Reserve and their civilian careers. For example, noting the benefits of his early Reserve experience, one explained, “I was able to kind of find out what I wanted to do basically for the rest of my life,” and another, similarly, said, “You can really find your niche in the world.” But, describing subsequent transitions, one explained, “If I was in right now, there’s no way I could do it. My civilian job is different and I’m just too busy. ... It wouldn’t work.”

The reservists we interviewed described difficulties balancing their Reserve and civilian duties. For example, many reservists received military-related phone calls and emails throughout the day while at their civilian jobs. As one explained, “you get emails and phone calls throughout the day at your civilian job saying, ‘Hey, you need to do this stuff today for the Marine Corps.’” One reservist noted the negative impact of the time he devoted to the Reserve role on his civilian career: “It [the Reserve] definitely affected my civilian career. I feel like I spent too much time making my Marine Corps career the focus of my efforts in my life in general ... and I regret it.”

Reservists similarly explained that Reserve demands created conflict at home. One expressed his frustration, “There’s always something. You know, your family wants to do something or your kid has something, it’s always on a drill weekend and it just gets old.” All of the reservists noted that work outside of the drill weekend was required to accomplish their duties, which took time away from family. As one explained, “You know ... the mantra of the Reserve thing being a one weekend a month ... as soon as you’re promoted ... it really takes up a lot more time throughout the week.” Additionally, the reservists we interviewed noted that

drills made it difficult to attend family activities such as birthdays and other special occasions. As one explained, “It was like pulling teeth for them to let me go to my own wedding.”

Reservists did not consider monetary incentives to have a substantial influence on affiliation decisions. One reservist’s comment summarized this sentiment:

So it’s definitely not a financial thing. I mean, to stay in the reserves you’ve just really got to want to be there, and that’s the bottom line, because there’s really no financial benefits or health care benefits. There’s really nothing other than just wanting to be there.

As shown in Table 1, our analysis identified three themes influencing affiliation decisions: relationships, meaning, and role conflict. A fourth theme, compensation was apparent but was not associated with affiliation. We concluded our Phase 1 analysis by enfolded the qualitative findings in extant literature (Eisenhardt, 1989). This step integrated the qualitative and quantitative phases of our research and resulted in a predictive model and hypotheses and is discussed in the following sections.

<<Insert Table 1 about here>>

Integration and Hypotheses Development

At the conclusion of Phase 1, we reviewed extant literature to assess conceptual overlap between our qualitative findings and existing models of turnover. We concluded that there is a strong conceptual fit between our findings and the job embeddedness construct. Embeddedness has received a great deal of recent attention as research has shifted away from understanding why people leave organizations, to understanding why they stay (Holtom et al., 2008). Given that we are primarily concerned with increasing affiliation (i.e., retention) in the USMCR, job

embeddedness' focus on staying offers a particularly salient framework through which to view individuals' motivations to continue serving in the USMCR. Moreover, the step of enfolding our findings in extant literature suggested that the three primary drivers of affiliation uncovered during our exploratory qualitative analysis may represent, or predict, the three tenets of job embeddedness (fit, links, and sacrifice) in this context. Based on the findings of Phase 1, we developed a predictive model of job embeddedness and affiliation specific to the USMCR. In the sections that follow, we review the job embeddedness construct, develop theoretical rationale for specific predictors of embeddedness in the USMCR context, and test our model on a sample of non-obligor reservists for whom affiliation decisions are particularly salient. We then discuss the implications of our findings for theory and practice.

Embeddedness. Embeddedness entails “the diverse influences that connect a person to a job so that he or she has strong reasons to remain in that job” (Holtom et al., 2014, p. 398). It is composed of (1) the *fit* between a person's job and other important facets of life, (2) the *links* or ties an individual has with coworkers and institutions, and (3) the personal *sacrifices* that would need to be made if an individual were to leave his or her position (Mitchell et al., 2001). As such, the greater the fit, links, and sacrifices associated with one's position, the more embedded an individual is in his or her organization. Previous research has shown that embeddedness reduces the likelihood of voluntary turnover (Crossley, Bennett, Jex, & Burnfield, 2007; DiRenzo & Greenhaus, 2011; Holtom & Inderrieden, 2006; Jiang, Liu, McKay, Lee, & Mitchell, 2012; Lee, Mitchell, Sablynski, Burton, & Holtom, 2004; Mitchell & Lee, 2001), with research conducted in the military context also indicating a positive association between embeddedness and reenlistment (Smith, Holtom, & Mitchell, 2011). As people become more embedded in their

current position, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to leave the organization because they must make great personal sacrifices and break strong ties with coworkers.

In the same vein, we can expect that embeddedness will increase intentions to re-affiliate (i.e., reduce voluntary turnover) in the Reserve. Although serving in the USMCR is not the primary work role in reservists' lives, it is nevertheless a job as individuals are paid for their time and effort. Moreover, it is feasible that the general notion of embeddedness may transcend merely the work role and be a viable framework with which to understand lasting participation in salient non-work roles such as volunteering and other hobbies/interests. Because our exploratory qualitative findings intimate that individuals view their work in the Reserve as both a part-time job and an important hobby/interest, greater embeddedness is likely to encourage decisions to re-affiliate in the Reserve as opposed to opting to leave the organization.

Hypothesis 1: Embeddedness is positively related to intentions to re-affiliate in the USMCR. The exploratory findings from Phase 1 suggest that experiencing extensive role conflict may contribute to individuals' decisions to leave the Reserve. While previous research has commonly investigated role conflict across the work–family interface—that is, work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict (Byron, 2005; Casper, Eby, Bourdeaux, Lockwood, & Lambert, 2007; Greenhaus & Buetell, 1985), therefore addressing *only* the work and family roles—individuals serving in the USMCR are confronted with the added difficulties of functioning effectively in a third, yet very salient, life role (i.e., the Marine role). As such, traditional perspectives of work–family conflict, in which time and job stressors stemming from one's primary occupation impede functioning and effectiveness at home, are incomplete representations of the issues reservists encounter when trying to juggle the competing demands of their lives. Rather, our exploratory findings suggest that the demands of the Marine role can

often spill over into both the civilian work role and the family role to negatively impact the reservist's ability to meet the demands of these roles and reduce his/her satisfaction in these roles as well. As such, the extent to which reservists experience marine-to-family conflict (MFC) and marine-to-civilian work conflict (MWC) is likely to have strong influence on affiliation decisions.

As any or all of these roles increase, incidences of conflict are likely to rise. Career growth in the civilian role will be accompanied by greater job demands and responsibilities. Moreover, many reservists will eventually have children and start families, thereby increasing demands at home as well. As the demands of the family and civilian-work roles increase, the time devoted to these roles necessarily increases and incidences of conflict with the marine role inevitably rise. We suggest that greater incidences of conflict indicate a lack of fit between the marine Reserve role and these important facets of the reservist's life. Given that fit represents one's compatibility with his/her organization (Holtom et al., 2014), role conflict between the marine and both the family and civilian work role are likely to make individuals feel that serving in the Reserve is no longer compatible with their lives. As such, negative spillover from the marine role will reduce perceptions of fit with the USMCR and thereby diminish the extent to which individuals are embedded in the Reserve.

Hypothesis 2: Role conflict is negatively related to embeddedness in the Reserve.

Links represents the second component of embeddedness and consists of the formal and informal connections between the individual and other people and institutions (Holtom et al., 2014).

Within the Reserve context, our preliminary findings suggest that links may be determined by intra-unit relations (with other reservists in the unit) and inter-unit relations (with active duty Marine Corps staff). Active duty staff members serve as representatives of the organization as a

whole. Previous research has noted the influence that perceptions of organizational support have on motivation and turnover decisions (Maertz, Griffeth, Campbell, & Allen, 2007; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Moreover, in much the same way that quality relationships with leaders (e.g., leader–member exchange) may influence commitment to an organization and organizational goals (Bauer, Erdogan, Liden, & Wayne, 2006; Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000; Harris, Kacmar, & Witt, 2005), we can expect the quality of the relationship between reservists and the active duty staff to be a prominent factor in the degree to which individuals feel psychologically tied to the organization.

Moreover, our preliminary findings suggest that relationships with fellow reservists may play an even more integral role. The positive effects of constructive relations with co-workers and perceptions of co-worker support have been well-documented. The expansive literature on teams and team functioning has repeatedly noted that positive relations among team members can engender greater commitment, citizenship behavior, and overall satisfaction (Chen, Sharma, Edinger, Shapiro, & Farh, 2011; Griffeth et al., 2000; Pearce & Herbik, 2004). Furthermore, fellow reservists serve as a support network and a form of social and professional capital that can provide career-related and psychosocial support. Our exploratory findings indicate that reservists often feel a genuine sense of camaraderie and enjoy not only professional relationships, but extensive personal relationships with one another (and their families) as well. These relationships, therefore, create bonds between unit members and both their fellow reservists and the USMCR. As such, the amount and strength of connections with fellow reservists will increase the psychological and social “links” one has with the organization and further embed individuals in the USMCR.

Hypothesis 3: Relations will positively relate to embeddedness in the Reserve. Our exploratory analysis also suggests that a sense of meaning is a primary reason that reservists not only join, but remain tied to the organization. Many reservists derive a great deal of pride in serving in the USMCR and those reservists who strongly identify with the Marine role are very committed to maintaining their affiliation. For these reservists, leaving the USMCR would cause psychological strain as it would entail giving up, or abandoning, a major element of their self-identity. Relatedly, many reservists also find working for the Marine Corps to be very personally fulfilling and meaningful. In this way, we suggest that leaving the Reserve for these individuals would entail great personal sacrifice, the third component of embeddedness.

Sacrifice entails the loss of psychological or material benefits (Holtom et al., 2014). Although our qualitative analysis indicated that material benefits (e.g., financial incentives) play a limited role, affiliation decisions appear to hinge on the psychological benefits that individuals attain by serving in the Reserve. A vast array of research has noted the overwhelming benefits of psychologically meaningful work on individual motivation and work-based outcomes, including engagement with one's work and commitment to the organization (e.g., Dik, Duffy, & Eldridge, 2009; Hackman & Lawler, 1971; Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008; Michaels & Spector, 1982; Mowday & Spencer, 1981). Within the context of the Marine Reserve, our preliminary analysis found that opportunities for meaningful military activities fostered feelings of purpose and significance for reservists. Hence, leaving the Reserve would deprive individuals of these unique and meaningful opportunities that they cannot experience elsewhere. Moreover, research has also shown that identification with one's work creates a psychological attachment to the organization and therefore plays an integral role in career decisions and one's desire to remain with his/her organization (e.g., Abrams, Ando, & Hinkle, 1998; Bothma & Roodt, 2012; Kraimer, Shaffer,

Harrison, & Ren, 2012). Therefore, as previously discussed, leaving the Reserve would force reservists to break this strong psychological attachment and cost them the means in which they enact a primary source of their identity. Conversely, if/when reservists are not provided sufficient opportunities to engage in meaningful exercises or reservists no longer strongly identify with the Marine role, the psychological benefits derived from serving in the USMCR are minimal, and leaving the Reserve entails limited sacrifice. As such, we expect that the more meaning one derives from serving in the Reserve, the more difficult it is for him/her to leave the USMCR.

Hypothesis 4: Meaning will positively relate to embeddedness in the Reserve.

Phase 2—Quantitative Analysis

Data and Method

Sample. Emails were sent to all Selected Marine Corps Reserve (SMCR) unit members inviting them to complete an online survey. Of the 27,195 sent, 1,758 completed surveys were returned, providing a response rate of 6.4%. Because many reservists are under contractual obligation to remain in the reserves for years to come, we then restricted the sample to include only those reservists for whom turnover and affiliation decisions are salient, timely, and plausible. As such, only non-obligor reservists were included in the final sample (N = 570) because non-obligors are no longer required to drill and are afforded the legal opportunity to voluntarily leave the Reserves in the near term.

The final sample is 88% male with a mean age of 36. Approximately 74% of the sample is married or living with a spouse/partner. Officers comprise 37.9% of the sample and 60.1% are from the enlisted ranks, with 5.4% of those being warrant officers.

Measures. *Meaning* was assessed across two dimensions: identity and meaningful training opportunities. Identity was assessed with three items from Kanungo (1982). Items were modified to represent the Marine role. A sample item is “I consider the Marine Reserves to be very central to my existence” ($\alpha = .91$). Three items were created to assess meaningful training opportunities. A sample item is “I currently get to do many enjoyable training exercises in the USMCR” ($\alpha = .73$). Items were assessed on a five-point agreement scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*.

Relationships was assessed across two dimensions representing “inter-unit” relations with the active duty Marine Corps staff (I&I) and “intra-unit” relations with fellow reservists in their unit. Three item measures were created to address each dimension. A sample inter-unit item is “The I&I staff interacts with me in a professional manner” ($\alpha = .80$), and a sample intra-unit item is “There is a genuine sense of camaraderie among the reservists in my unit” ($\alpha = .88$). Items were assessed on a five-point agreement scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*.

Role conflict was assessed across two dimensions to represent interference/conflict stemming from the Marine Reserve role into both the family and civilian-work roles, respectively. Eight items (four per dimension) were adapted from the scales developed by Netemeyer, Boles, and McMurrian (1996). A sample item for marine-to-family conflict (MFC) is “The demands of my Marine reserves role interfere with my home and family life” ($\alpha = .92$), and a sample item for marine-to-work conflict (MWC) is “The demands of my Marine reserves role interfere with work-related activities” ($\alpha = .91$). Items were assessed on a five-point agreement scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*.

Embeddedness was measured with the seven-item global embeddedness scale (Crossley et al., 2007). The scale was modified to specifically reference the USMCR. A sample item reads

“I am tightly connected to the USMCR” ($\alpha = .90$). Items were assessed on a five-point agreement scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*.

Affiliation was measured with two items created for this study. A sample item is “How likely are you to re-affiliate in the SMCR once your current contract expires?” ($\alpha = .90$). Items were assessed on a five-point agreement scale from 1 = *not at all likely* to 5 = *very likely*.

Control variables. We controlled for a number of demographic variables during analysis. Specifically, rank, age, sex (male = 1, female = 2), and marital status (not married/living with partner = 1, married/living with partner = 2) were used as controls due to their potential impact on the independent and dependent variables in the model.

Analysis and Results

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for the study variables. We used structural equation modeling (SEM) with AMOS 23. The fit statistics examined included (i) chi-square goodness of fit, (ii) RMSEA (Browne & Cudeck, 1993), and (iii) CFI (Bentler, 1980).

<<Insert Table 2 about here>>

Measurement model. We conducted a CFA to assess the structure of the measures. Higher order latent constructs were created for meaning, relationships, and role conflict. Items were loaded onto their respective factors (dimensions) and then the two factors were loaded onto their respective higher order latent construct. The remaining items were loaded onto the appropriate latent constructs for embeddedness and affiliation. This five-factor model fit the data well ($\Delta\chi^2(334) = 1056.7, p < .001$, CFI = .93, RMSEA = .06), and each item’s and factor’s

loading on the appropriate latent construct was significant ($p < .001$). The five-factor model also exhibited significantly better fit when compared against a four-factor model in which the items for embeddedness and affiliation were loaded onto one latent construct ($\Delta\chi^2(4) = 167.7, p < .001$) and a three-factor construct in which the items for the independent variables were loaded onto a single latent construct ($\Delta\chi^2(7) = 365.5, p < .001$), respectively.

Structural equation models. Results of the structural model are summarized in Figure 1. The structural model fits the data well ($\Delta\chi^2(403) = 1103.4, p < .001, CFI = .93, RMSEA = .05$) and analysis of the path coefficients provides support for each of the study's hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 was supported as embeddedness was positively related to intentions to re-affiliate in the Selected Marine Corps Reserve ($\beta = .48, p < .001$). Additionally, hypotheses 2–4 were also supported as role conflict ($\beta = -.16, p < .01$), relationships ($\beta = .12, p < .05$), and meaning ($\beta = .56, p < .001$) were all significantly related to embeddedness. The findings lend support to our suggestion that role conflict, relationships, and meaning represent primary drivers of the fit, links, and sacrifice, respectively, that comprise embeddedness in the United States Marine Corps Reserve and ultimately play integral roles in reservists' affiliation/turnover decisions.

<<Insert Figure 1 about here>>

Discussion

This study investigated the potential drivers of affiliation and turnover in the unique and under-studied context of the United States Marine Corps Reserve. Two studies using two complementary methods were used to both develop theory and test hypotheses. Initially, a qualitative study was conducted to determine the most important factors that may impact

continued affiliation in the USMCR. Then, these findings were compared with prevailing models in the turnover/retention literature, and a conceptual model representing job embeddedness in the USMCR context was developed. Finally, quantitative analysis was conducted using survey data from non-obligor reservists in the SMCR to test the validity of the proposed model. The findings indicated that, indeed, the three primary factors determined by the qualitative analysis—meaning, relationships, and role conflict—were associated with embeddedness in the USMCR, which in turn positively related to re-affiliation intentions.

This study makes a number of important contributions to the literature. First, it offers an expanded conceptualization and application of the embeddedness framework to the context of the military Reserve. Limited research has addressed embeddedness within the military context (e.g., Holtom et al., 2014), and very few studies of any kind have specifically focused on the Reserves (Wiggins et al., 2014; Lakhani & Fugita, 1993). This study simultaneously addresses both of these shortcomings in the literature. Additionally, via a mixed-methods approach, this study developed a predictive model that has immediate practical application in the USMCR. A sense of meaning from serving in the Reserve, the relationships developed in the Reserve, and the extent of role conflict stemming from the Reserve were found to be primary drivers of embeddedness and affiliation decisions. These three factors are uniquely salient to the Reserve context and therefore not only enhance our understanding of embeddedness and affiliation decisions in this context, but also shed light on the value and applicability of the embeddedness framework to organizations other than simply one's primary job. We suggest that one of the greatest attributes of the embeddedness framework may lie in its generalizability and its capacity to provide a useful framework with which to study affiliation and attrition in multiple contexts. There is tremendous potential for future research to expand the embeddedness framework by

applying it to conceptualizations of turnover in a variety of extramural organizations and pursuits such as volunteer work, community organizations, religious/spiritual affiliations, hobbies, and so forth. Understanding the specificities and nuances of its application across contexts offers numerous avenues for continued research.

Our qualitative research suggested, and our quantitative analysis supported, two-dimensional conceptualizations for each of the three primary drivers of embeddedness and turnover. Our model suggests that, within the USMCR, *meaning* consists of identity and opportunities for military activities, *relationships* consists of both those with active duty staff and those with fellow reservists, and *role conflict* consists of interference from the marine role with both the family and civilian work role. As such, we have provided a deeper understanding of the composition of the drivers of embeddedness within the USMCR. Nevertheless, it is likely that our two-dimensional conceptualizations are incomplete. It is plausible that other factors contribute to a sense of meaning and purpose from serving in the USMCR, just as there may be other salient relationships or potential sources of conflict not represented in this study. Future research should consider taking an exclusive examination of each of the three key factors presented in our model in an effort to uncover other underlying contributors to meaning, relationships, and role conflict in the USMCR.

Finally, in addition to extending the application of embeddedness beyond one's primary vocation and furthering our understanding of affiliation and turnover in the Reserve context, this research highlights the value of examining the influence of salient third roles and activities (i.e., those other than the primary work or family) in people's lives. While most work examining the interplay between life roles has been limited to two domains—work and family—scholars have called for research to address the influence of various other important roles and domains

(Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Etzion, Eden, & Lapidot, 1998; Kossek, Ruderman, Braddy, & Hannum, 2012; Mojza, Lorenz, Sonnentag, & Binnewies, 2010). Answering this call, this study examines role conflict originating in the Reserve domain. Interesting future research may build on our findings in a number of ways. First, scholars might investigate role conflict with regard to other salient roles, such as second jobs and various extramural organizations, in a similar fashion as discussed above regarding embeddedness. Additionally, very interesting research might incorporate salient third roles, such as serving in the Reserve, into the emerging research on boundary management (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2000; Hecht & Allen, 2009; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). This remains a promising, yet unexplored area for future research.

Despite the important contributions of this study, several limitations should be noted. The interviews were exploratory in nature. We interviewed six reservists and relied on a snowball sample. While this data provided an initial understanding to ground the subsequent quantitative analysis, future inquires involving more reservists, purposefully selected, could provide a more nuanced understanding of the relationships we identified. Additionally, despite the strong sample size, the quantitative analysis was conducted on cross-sectional, self-report data which limits our ability to make causal inferences regarding the proposed relationships and presents some concerns over common method. Future research should attempt to use either longitudinal designs and/or objective measures of turnover to replicate our findings with added validity. Ultimately, this research makes several important contributions to both theory and practice. The unique context provides an “extreme” case which is particularly useful for qualitative research and served to illuminate salient factors in the affiliation decisions of USMC reservists. Additionally, the quantitative analysis provides added support for the validity of the model and extends our understanding of embeddedness to the Reserve context.

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