

Binghamton University

The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB)

Research Days Posters 2021

Division of Research

2021

Motivation to Serve: What Drives People to Serve in the United States Military

Nicol Haywood

Binghamton University--SUNY

Follow this and additional works at: https://orb.binghamton.edu/research_days_posters_2021

Recommended Citation

Haywood, Nicol, "Motivation to Serve: What Drives People to Serve in the United States Military" (2021). *Research Days Posters 2021*. 77.

https://orb.binghamton.edu/research_days_posters_2021/77

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Division of Research at The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). It has been accepted for inclusion in Research Days Posters 2021 by an authorized administrator of The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). For more information, please contact ORB@binghamton.edu.

Motivation to Serve: What Drives People to Serve in the United States Military

Background

The Department of Defense (DOD) must convince several hundred thousand people to join the military each year while, at the same time, retain thousands of personnel to sustain its active duty, reserve, and National Guard forces (Stewart, 2005). While some research endeavors have been conducted into the reasons people join the military (e.g., Woodruff et al., 2017), less is known as to the motives that people choose to leave or continue to serve in the military (e.g., Woodruff, 2017).

Research Questions

- What are the reasons that lead to the formation of an individual’s decision to serve?
- Are there any reasons that compel people to stay in the military rather than leave, or leave rather than stay?

Methods

- Participants were selected through means of a convenience sample. All participants have a connection to me or my family in some way.
- Participants range in age from roughly 22 years old to 71 years old, with more of the younger participants still currently serving.
- Two of the participants are officers: one from the Army, and the other Navy.
- Each branch, along with the Army National Guard had representation from at least one enlisted member, with the Air Force having had two enlisted members interviewed.
- Data was collected by conducting interviews with ten individuals who served in the U.S. military.
- The interviews were analyzed to understand similarities and/or differences in how participants formulated their decision to join, their decision to stay or leave, and how this decision may have shifted during their time in the military.

Acknowledgements

This project would not be possible without the help from Dr. Amber Simpson, Mr. James Haywood, and all the people who gave their time to assist with this project.

Category: Joining Motivation-What fueled the participant’s initial desire to serve

Code	Definition	Example
Desire	A long standing desire to serve.	“I’ve always known that I was, like, from like, as far back as I can remember. I knew that I was going to be in the military.”- SGT USMC
Draft	The draft told those selected where they were going and when.	“I turned 19 in March. I got my draft notice in April, and I was being drafted into the Marine Corps in May. Wow, that was my incentive to get into the Coast Guard.”- PO2 USCG
See the world	That was an old slogan that used the travelling aspect of the military to help get people to enlist.	“I was right out of high school and wanted to one that kind of see the world and experience something different, and serve my country, serve our country.”- Maj Gil USARMY “So my motivation for joining the military and maybe a particular revolves back to recruiting commercial had time, which was “join the navy, see the world”.”-Cdr USN
Patriotism	A strong sense to serve, often associated with another event that inspires it.	“... it was right, it was after the Gulf War. So when I was a teenager, the Gulf War was like, you know, I was I was, I was, like, 16, when the gulf war happened. And that was, you know, something that wanting to be part of service, you know, and then, when the Global War on Terrorism had, I was in college, and I'll never forget that day, I was actually in constitutional law, when that happened. And felt obligated to, to be a part of it and help my brothers and sisters in arms.”- Maj USARMY “So I wanted to be in infantry. And you know, there was a war going on at the time. 1991 was Desert Storm. So, you know, it was a pretty patriotic time to go into the service and I wanted to fight.”-Cpl Army National Guard
Do something	People tend to join because they don’t know what they want to do yet, or they need something to do.	“Um, my main thought process was I wanted to learn something that I can do things on the outside or as a civilian. And I really wasn't looking forward to going to college, I didn't have a way that I knew I have to pay for college. And I honestly didn't know what I wanted to do.”- Sgt USAF “I actually decided after September 11. And so the next couple of years to follow. I just saw people repeatedly going back, right. And I wasn't married, and I didn't have a family at the time. I didn't have any children. And I just told my friends like going back repeatedly and coming back just completely jacked. I thought how unfair of me to just sit here and do nothing. And I don't have a family. Anyway, somebody should do something. They're like, well, I guess that should be me. So there I am.”-Ssgt USAF



Category: Service Motivation-Motives to either continue with military service, or exit.

Code	Definition	Example
Saying, “I served.”	Leaving service after one initial contract.	“... like I said, it was it was always like a goal, I guess of mine to be in the military... Yeah, I did my time. I'll move on. And, you know, I'll, I'll serve in other ways.”- SGT USMC
20 year pension	People who serve in the military for 20 years acquire a pension.	“And then next thing I know, before I know, before I just blink, I'm at my 10 year mark, as I'm like I'm halfway to retirement, I might as well finish this.”-MCPO USN
Inconvenience	There comes a point when military service would inconvenience an individual for a number of reasons.	“But it got to be so difficult. The Coast Guard in upstate New York didn't have much of a presence. And they kept moving me farther and farther away. And I probably got tired of driving three hours to drill so.”-PO2 USCG “I plan to get out of the military, find a job, get settled and go to school. And complete my engineering degree... That's part of it. Another part of it is it's pretty hard to have a family a good home life. Because my wife has also been enlisted in the military, she's active duty. So it's, it would be hard for us to have children and provide them with a good life.”-Sgt USAF
Patriotism	A strong sense to serve, often associated with another event that inspires it.	“I think I always wanted to go back. But what really made me decide to what really pushed me over really, kind of was the global war on terrorism.”- Maj USARMY “So that was kind of before and after and going to and then once 911 happened I wanted to get back in but I couldn't because I had a kid.”-Cpl Army National Guard
Benefits	The military offers a number of benefits to its members in the form of financial assistance, insurance, etc.	“So I liked what I did. So I decided in the Navy. If you do a lot of seat time, it's you get what's called shorty. You're an instructor or a teacher. So I volunteered to go be an instructor. I said, I'm just going to do three more years. I'm going to get the instructor side of the house. And I'll go to college while I'm on shore duty. So the Navy paid for my college I'll get the experience of teaching or teach this thing that I really like.”-MCPO USN
Regret not continuing	A number of people say they never should've left the service.	“So, you know, I, I'll tell you, one of my regrets is that I did not extend my service time, because I could have done, you know, I could have extended by one year, two years, three years, depending on what contracts they were offering, what bonuses they were offering, and stuff like that, it's time to say it... I was like, I don't understand why I didn't just stay in. And at that time. I didn't know that you could just go join the reserves. Go. jump right back in as long as you aren't out for too long or stuff like that. But it just ended up being a decision made because my contract was up. Wow. I was like everyone's doing it.”- PFC USARMY

Discussion

- There were two motivations that frequently appeared among participants. The first is that they wanted to do something, but they didn’t know what to do. The other motivation was a sense of patriotism. The sense was either long-standing, or inspired by a global-scale event going on at the time.
- Those who enlisted because they didn’t know what they wanted to do, felt that their life before service didn’t prepare them for what was coming in the military, apart from being physically fit. Those with a long standing sense of patriotism and a desire to serve generally felt that their life before service prepared them well.
- As for motivations to remain in service and those to resign, those seem to be more on an individual case-by-case basis.
- As for the people who choose to remain in the service, they tend to have one of to motives: tough it out for the pension and other benefits, or they have a goal they want to accomplish.
- The most common reason participants had for exiting the service is family reasons.

Implications

- Observing the interests and trends of the future generations to present the many benefits of joining the military in a more appealing way.
- If opinions from those who exited service and those who stayed are acquired, continuing service can be made to be more appealing than exiting.
- By analyzing reasons as to why people choose to join, and then stay or leave the military, the military can adapt their recruitment strategies in hopes of better fulfilling the massive recruitment quotas.
- There is no perfect advertising strategy to present the military in a good enough way to meet every person’s expectations. Each person’s individual circumstances cannot be accounted for.

Limitations

- Some participants are less willing to share than others, and some may not remember everything that ultimately led to their decisions to either join, continue, or exit the service.

References

Woodruff, T. D. (2017). Who Should the Military Recruit? The Effects of Institutional, Occupational, and Self-Enhancement Enlistment Motives on Soldier Identification and Behavior. *Armed Forces & Society, 43*(4), 579-607. doi:10.1177/0095327x17695360

Office, U. (2005, March 16). Military Personnel: Preliminary Observations on Recruiting and Retention Issues within the U.S. Armed Forces. Retrieved October 31, 2020, from <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-05-419T>

Nicol Haywood
Faculty Advisor: Amber Simpson

