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One of the most heavily studied subfields of family sociology is that of racial disparities in family formation trends. While divergent black–white patterns in divorce are well documented, their underlying causal factors are not well understood. Debates on whether such differences are due to socioeconomic compositional differences, cultural differences, or some degree of each continue to surface in the literature. In this article, I use the U.S. military as an institutional counterfactual to larger society because, I argue, it isolates many of the conditions commonly cited in the literature to explain race differences in divorce trends. Using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), I find that, unlike their civilian counterparts, African American military enlistees have low divorce rates, even lower, it seems, than their fellow enlisted Caucasians. Keywords: divorce, family dissolution trends, race, racial disparities, military.

Perhaps one of the most heavily studied subfields of family sociology is that of racial disparities in family formation trends. While divergent black–white patterns in marriage, divorce, and nonmarital childbearing are well documented, their underlying causal factors are not as well understood. Debates on whether such differences are due to socioeconomic compositional differences, cultural differences, or some degree of each continue to surface in the literature. Previous research has taken advantage of the counterfactual power of the military environment to re-evaluate such approaches to race differences in family formation, finding that even after extensive controls for possible positive selection into the military, the well-documented racial disparity in marriage likelihood disappears completely (Lundquist 2004b). In using the military as a counterfactual to larger society, my research is among the only black–white comparative family studies that have shown an insignificant coefficient for the race term. This article extends that mode of inquiry by shifting the outcome focus from marital formation among young people to that of marital dissolution. I find similar patterns for divorce as for marriage. Compared to their civilian counterparts, young African American enlistees have low divorce rates, even lower, it seems, than enlisted Caucasians.

Black rates of marital dissolution in civilian society are more than twice that of whites (Fields and Casper 2001; Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan 1995), and the stabilization of the divorce rate that has been observed since 1980 appears to apply almost exclusively to whites (Sweeney and Phillips 2004). I argue that the military moderates the structural disadvantages of being African American in society and, just as I have found that the black–white marriage gap disappears in the military context, so, too, I speculate, might the gap in divorce.

Many explanations of race differences in U.S. society are countered in the military environment. Before describing the counteractive effects of military service, I briefly review explanations for difference in the sociological literature.

Literature Review

Societal Racial Disparities

At first pass, compositional difference in socioeconomic status between blacks and whites is the most obvious causal mechanism for the unique family patterns of African Americans compared to those of whites. From an economic perspective, marriage is most advantageous and stable above a minimal threshold of income and within a climate of stable employment (Anderson 1990; Edin 2000; Newman 1999; Stack 1975; Wilson 1987, 1996). Yet findings show that racial differentials diminish only slightly upon the inclusion of socioeconomic controls (Billy, Landale, and McLaughlin 1986; Cherlin 1998; Lichter, Graefe, and Brown 2003; Mare and Winship 1991; Sweet and Bumpass 1987; Teachman 1986, 2002; White 1990). Decompositions of race difference in divorce even in the presence of detailed economic and demographic control variables have never been able to account for more than 20 to 30 percent of the racial disparity (Phillips and Sweeney forthcoming; Tzeng and Mare 1995). This has led to alternative explanations.

Some social scientists postulate a role for normative differences that stem alternately from cultural origins and/or historical adaptation in explaining race differences in family structures. Such discussions center on high levels of African American female independence and an emphasis on extended and fictive kin reliance over the nuclear family, all of which lessen the need for marriage and lower exit costs. The alleged sources of these characteristics often fall into two opposing camps, one which points to vestigial Western African kinship norms and the other which points to a culture of poverty stemming from the institution of slavery and its legacy (Bledsoe 1980; DuBois [1908] 1969; Frazier [1939] 2001; Littlejohn-Blake and Darling 1993; Moynihan 1965; Patterson 1998; Price 1999; Sudarkasa 1981). But because the issue is explaining an effect that will not go away, the normative arguments, while often invoked by default, have not been empirically evaluated. This is hardly surprising given that culture is a multidimensional and often contested status, one that does not lend itself easily to conversion into any one quantifiable variable.

Despite being based on residual evidence, normative differences are often accepted as a major explanation for racial difference. Two other factors are seldom considered. First, how thoroughly are economic compositional effects being measured? Second, can we attribute any of the residual in racial disparities to indirect effects of racism?

Investigations into racial disparities for other outcomes have shown that limiting analyses to white and black individuals with similar incomes or education levels does not fully eliminate the effect of socioeconomic differences (Conley 1999; Witte and Henderson 2004). Neither do conventional socioeconomic controls address the repercussions of racial segregation in neighborhoods. Often accounting only for socioeconomic status and not residential race composition, the literature on family difference ignores the fact that even well-off blacks are subject to segregated conditions, translating into unequal access to high-quality goods and services, poor school systems and neighborhood resources, limited social capital, and exposure to high crime and unemployment rates (Massey and Denton 1993). Measurements of wealth, debt, and segregation are often left out of analyses not because researchers ignore them but because they are seldom available in secondary datasets.

Neither economic nor normative theories adequately address the experience of racism and how it might affect family functioning. The role of discrimination is a virtual lacuna in the family literature. Variables measuring income and education level abound in the study of race effects but these inadequately capture direct and spillover effects of being black in a

white society. When racial discrimination is invoked, it is often in the abstract as a historical factor leading to a variety of disorganized outcomes. The experience of racial discrimination likely redounds not only on socioeconomic mobility but also on overall mental well-being. Few family sociologists who study divorce deny the emotional fallout of impoverishment and the destabilizing toll that poverty can take on relationships. But racism is seldom discussed in the same way. Chronic stress throughout the life span has been found to contribute to a buildup of allostatic load, which may lead to or seriously exacerbate medical conditions. Allostasis appears to be much more extreme in individuals who have been forced to endure detrimental psychosocial or physical conditions throughout their lifetimes (Massey 2004; McEwan 2000). It would not be unreasonable to extrapolate these implications to the cumulative experience of African Americans, who are disproportionately exposed not just to the stressors of poverty but also to discrimination. But how might one go about defining and measuring something known to be prevalent yet at the same time is so invisible?

Using the Military to Address Weaknesses in the Literature

I cannot suggest a remedy to these measurement problems in studying race; however, I can turn to a context where the inability to control for such factors matters less. The U.S. military is a counterfactual alternative to civilian life for African Americans. It is the only U.S. institution where minority populations are sizeable, where sustained interracial interaction permeates both workplaces and living places, where interracial marriage is frequent, and where economic stability and benefits are high for those who lack a college education. Most divorce analyses focus on economic inequality and unemployment as the primary means through which African Americans experience higher levels of marital instability. The socioeconomic variant in the military context is a fundamental way in which military life tempers race stratification of larger society.

Most obviously, enlistees in the military are universally employed, a structural counter to national rates where blacks experience unemployment at twice that of whites (U. S. Department of Labor). Moreover, the quality of employment in the military is arguably superior for many. For those without a college degree, as is the case for 80 percent of today's African American soldiers upon joining the U.S. military, military service has become what manufacturing jobs were to blacks in the mid-twentieth century. Relative to low-wage service economy work, military service provides steady pay, advancement opportunity, and job training. It also provides a college education for many who cannot afford it on their own terms in the civilian world. The constellation of military benefits, which include full healthcare coverage, childcare provision, retirement, and, not least, free housing, is rarely found in civilian employment much less in a low-skilled labor market. As a result, each branch of the military has had an overrepresentation of African Americans in its enlisted ranks for the past 25 years (U.S. Department of Defense 1999). This is particularly true for the Army, the largest service branch, averaging almost triple the civilian population proportion of African Americans since 1978.

An extension of this disproportionately high composition of employed blacks is that unions taking place in the military may be advantaged by an improved marriage market for African American females. In contrast to civilian marriage markets where black females outnumber black males, in the military males greatly outnumber females. It is commonly argued that a contributing factor to more divorce among African Americans stems from the skewed gender ratio, where a higher occurrence of incongruous spousal matches leads to higher rates of marital instability (Bumpass, Martin, and Sweet 1991; Guttentag and Secord 1983; Teachman 2003). To the extent that the marriage market is contained to the military environment, enlisted African American women arguably have a larger pool of employed, high school-educated mates from which to choose. If endogamous marriages among African Americans are more

common in the military, where spouses are more evenly matched on factors like age and education, divorce rates may be lower.

However, the economic bridging effect of the military, although rare, is not altogether absent in civilian society. So why do the armed forces deserve special attention? In civilian society, adding controls for socioeconomic status fails to explain much of the racial disparity in marital dissolution (Billy et al. 1986; Teachman 1986, 2002; White 1990). I argue that socioeconomic equality is more consummate in the military universe, extending beyond equal pay to a concentration of equal *resources*. As a total institution, race desegregation in the military is not limited to a purely occupational setting but carries across the spectrum of day-to-day life. Perhaps the most obvious departure from civilian life in this respect is residential desegregation. On-base housing and barracks are ethnically heterogeneous, and by virtue of shared proximity, residents of all races enjoy uniform access to high-quality hospitals and healthcare services, banking, public transportation, gyms, shopping outlets, etc. To a lesser degree, even those living off-base benefit from the military's historical and ongoing attention to off-base desegregation (Hershfield 1985; Sutton 1971; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1963). Today metropolitan areas with large off-base military populations have the lowest levels of neighborhood racial segregation in the country (Farley and Frey 1994). In addition, many military bases are located outside of northern urban centers where racial stratification and the isolation of inner-city life are substantially mitigated.[1] As such black soldiers are uniquely situated to take advantage of better-funded and higher-quality resources such as local school systems, which are often spatially inaccessible from civilian African American neighborhoods.

Coupled with the military's more all-encompassing racial equality in equal pay and equal living is perhaps a greater overall sense of inclusiveness that bridges social relations among the races. In various surveys, both blacks and whites report that racial relations in the military, while not perfect, are substantially improved from civilian life, and military whites are more likely to list a black person among their close, personal friends than in similar surveys among civilians (Moskos and Butler 1996; Scarville et al. 1997). And racial intermarriage is uncommonly high in the military. A recent study using census data found that the rise in interracial marriage over the past thirty years is largely due to trends in the U.S. military. White male soldiers are three times more likely than white civilians to marry a black female; white female soldiers are over seven times more likely to marry interracially than their civilian counterparts (Farley 1999). (Unfortunately, the data used in the following analyses do not provide information on spouse's race to gauge the role of interracial marriage.)

The stabilizing socioeconomic effect of military service, along with a markedly reduced climate of racial stratification, combines to create a distinct reality for African Americans that may be elusive in civilian life. Herein lays the military's experimental utility. While I hesitate to refer to the military as a social laboratory, there is little question that it provides an alternative rule system to the way we normally understand social stratification. One important way that racial stratification for African Americans has manifested itself in U.S. society is through high rates of marital instability. Because the military can be used as a vehicle to turn the normal rules of social stratification on their heads, it is an important comparative context in which to test theories of race differentials in divorce. I theorize that the well-known black–white gap in divorce rates stems not from divergent preferences or cultural orientations as many of the normative theories would suggest, but rather from different sets of constraints faced by each group in civilian life. It follows that if those constraints can be minimized in some alternative setting, in this case, the military, racial differences in divorce rates should also diminish.

As a side note, this analysis will also improve upon past work I have done on racial differences in the propensity to marry. In previous work I argued that the disappearance of the marriage race gap was driven by the superior economic and social opportunities offered by

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1. After the South, military bases are most heavily concentrated in the West, namely California.

military service, particularly for those who would ordinarily have put off marriage. However, I was not able to rule out the possibility of perverse incentives associated with military service (marriage in the military is a way out of the barracks for first-year junior enlistees and married personnel receive an additional living allowance). If my previous findings on marriage were driven in part by perverse incentives, then these current analyses should show that divorce rates are comparatively high in the military regardless of race. To the extent that material incentives unite couples who would not otherwise have married, military marriages may be built on weak foundations and marital instability may therefore be quite prevalent.

Divorce in the Military

It is possible that even if marital stress is significantly diminished for African Americans in the military relative to that experienced in larger society, other characteristics of military marriage exert a counteractive effect. Knowledge on divorce trends specific to the military is sparse due to data limitations. However, Segal (1986) has described the spheres of military life and family life as greedy institutions in constant competition against one another. Requirements spanning from frequent geographic relocations, extended family separations, and, at times, grave occupational risks, expose military families to a unique set of stressors. In addition to the adjustment difficulties of changing residence on a regular basis, periodic relocations also subject spouses to unstable employment trajectories; according to one study, employed military spouses earn 40 percent less than comparable civilian spouses for this reason (Payne, Warner, and Little 1992). Because of these demands, it is common belief in the military that divorce rates are unusually high, particularly during times of war when stresses afflicting military families are exacerbated. In a small-scale military survey, a majority of Army personnel believed divorce rates to be much higher in the military than in the civilian world.[2] And, indeed, according to some studies they are. Divorce rates among the Marines, for example, are reportedly higher than the national average, with 32 percent of marriages among Marines between the ages of 18 and 25 ending in divorce (Carlborg 2001). Yet analyses gauging the risk of divorce for men who serve during wartime do not find elevated rates of divorce. Men serving during the Vietnam War era, even those deployed into combat, did not have a heightened risk of subsequent divorce (Call and Teachman 1996). Neither did those serving in the first Persian Gulf War; however, deployed female soldiers did experience increased marital dissolution (Angrist and Johnson 2000). The Pentagon has begun to sponsor family support programs such as "Building Strong and Ready Families" and "Deployment Cycle Support" (Oliviero 2005). In an effort to reduce family instability rising from disruption to spouse's career and children's schooling, it also implemented "homesteading" policy reform, increasing the period between relocations to approximately six years (Ricks 2004). These recent measures taken by the military suggest that reports of hardship by military families are widespread.

Data

The following analyses employ data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY). A national probability sample initially surveyed in 1979, it included a subsample of military active-duty personnel (enlisted only, not officers) serving in one of the four branches, ages 17 to 21 as of September 30, 1978 ($n = 1,280$). The sampling design of the NLSY is multistaged,

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2. This was a non-random survey with a total sample size of 61. I collected the surveys in September 2003 at an annual Army conference held in Lansdowne, VA.

consisting of stratified random samples with a small degree of nonresponse.[3] I use the constructed weights, strata, and proportional-sampling units provided by the NLSY in estimating descriptive data but not multivariate data.[4] Funding cuts in 1985 resulted in the loss of almost all of the original military cases. Thus, the analysis is constrained to a five-year time period and respondents are followed only as far as their early to mid-twenties (ages 23 to 27 in the final year). For this reason the NLSY coverage period is dated. However, the comparative advantage of the NLSY dataset lies in its longitudinal survey design and the fact that it provides the only available information on family formation patterns for substantial numbers of *both* civilians and military personnel for direct comparison. One advantage to the early NLSY period observed in this paper, however, is that it captures the time period when U.S. divorce rates reached their absolute peak (Casper and Bianchi 2002; Goldstein 1999). It also covers the era in which urban poverty was intensifying and becoming more spatially concentrated among African Americans.

It should also be emphasized that the young age of the respondents necessarily constrains all analyses to divorces of young adults occurring within the initial years of relatively early-occurring marriages. This drawback is somewhat mitigated by the fact that unusually large proportions of enlisted men and women marry at early ages and because half of all U.S. divorces occur in the early years of marriage (Kreider 2005).

Methods

Event history techniques are especially useful for increasing the precision of measurements of divorce risk factors because they allow for time-varying and time-fixed covariates throughout a specific time period, while also censoring those marriages that survive to the final interview year (Allison 1995). I use discrete-time, maximum likelihood event history analyses with the NLSY data, which closely approximate continuous-time hazard rate models and can be estimated using standard logistic regression. I limit the total sample to those in a marital union and predict the logistic likelihood of marital dissolution during the five-year period, a binary outcome of 1 or 0. The analysis for each individual begins upon marriage or the first interview year for those already married upon sample formation.[5] I create marriage-years for each unit year of observation in order to capture variation in time-sensitive characteristics, for a total of 12,747 marriage-years. I measure divorce risk in terms of marital duration.

Permanent attrition is rare in the NLSY, but movement between military and civilian status is frequent. Upon term-of-service completion, many respondents moved from the military sample to the civilian sample. Much less frequently, respondents who were originally interviewed in the civilian sample eventually enlisted. This cross-over attrition is taken into account by

3. In 1984, the final year before the military sample was dropped, the NLSY retention rate was 95 percent. Except for those who permanently drop from the NLSY sample, missing data are minimal. The longitudinal nature of the NLSY data collection assures that marital status, the dependent variable, can be determined even for missed interview years. Some covariates, however, were not collected annually, and missing data cannot be determined in such cases. Fortunately, the frequency of missing data on these variables is quite low. Religious frequency, number of siblings, and residence at age 14 are all missing at less than 1 percent. AFQT scores and mother's level of education were the only two covariates with a higher proportion of missing information at 7 and 5 percent, respectively. Rather than dropping these cases, I imputed missing data based on the information contributed by all independent variables where cases were not missing. The missing variables are not correlated with the dependent variables; however, both AFQT and mother's education level are significantly correlated with sample status (military personnel are more likely to be missing AFQT and less likely to be missing mother's education level).

4. This is in keeping with most NLSY studies that discard weights for multivariate analyses but employ them for accurate representation of descriptive data. See Winship and Radbill 1994 for a discussion of the merits of unweighted versus weighted regression analysis.

5. Since their risk of divorce leading up to 1979 cannot be measured, these cases are left censored. I construct the marriage duration variable to take into account the number of years they have been married leading up to sample formation.

censoring military members from the models upon their exit from the service and by also censoring the few civilians who enlisted with the military during the time period. (In additional analyses not shown here, I relax censorship and measure the likelihood of divorce *following* exits from the military in an attempt to account for the role of selectivity into the military. I report those findings in the results section.)

Results

Descriptive Analyses

Table 1 shows weighted bivariate distributions of variables describing married individuals upon the first interview year (the sample size is twice that depicted in Table 1 once those who marry over the following five years are entered into the analysis; however, in order to present weighted data, only one cross-sectional year could be used here).[6] These distributions are broken down by race across each column. Statistically significant differences at or below the .05 level within and across each of the four columns are indicated in footnotes.

The variables include demographic characteristics, socioeconomic status, and spousal information, all of which are generally associated with marital stability and also control for positive selection of African Americans into military service. While most are common covariates used in divorce analyses, I provide a brief rationale for inclusion of the lesser known correlates below. Demographic controls include gender, age, age at marriage, duration of marriage, marital history, presence of children, childhood characteristics, such as residence and parental structure, the Rotter scale, the Conservative Family Values scale, and level of religiosity. Young ages at marriage are associated with higher divorce rates because early marriages are increasingly rare, taking place during non-normative and less stable life stages (White 1990). The parental structure covariate controls for the intergenerational transfer of marital instability, where adults whose own parents divorced or never married are more likely themselves to divorce (Amato and DeBoer 2001; White 1990).

The Rotter measures one's locus of internal or external control. It ranges from 4 to 16, and the lower the score, the higher the degree of internal orientation, a measure of one's perceived control over one's own life. This scale tends to be racially correlated, with African Americans scoring higher than whites on average (Porter and Washington 1993). The Conservative Family Values variable, a Likert scale measuring attitudinal variation toward traditional family values, ranges from 7 to 28 by degree of conservatism. Traditionalist orientations are associated with less open attitudes toward divorce, and may also be correlated with the ideological orientation of those who enlist with the military. Strong religious orientation and church attendance are negatively associated with divorce; particularly religious individuals are less likely to elect marital exit as a remedy to marital duress (Hackstaff 1999).

Socioeconomic status indicators are measured by annual household income (which includes the spouse if she or he is employed), educational attainment of respondent, employment status, scores on the Armed Forces Qualifying Test (AFQT), size of family of origin, and parental education. Economic standing is strongly linked to marital stability and many of the above variables are common measures of socioeconomic status (Cherlin 1992; Oppenheimer 1994). The AFQT is a standardized test of trainability and aptitude that was administered to everyone in the NLSY. This variable is a more nuanced control for schooling, since high school

6. Averages change across the years of interview as new respondents enter the sample upon marriage and old respondents exit the sample upon divorce (i.e., age at marriage, for example, increases); however, the relative differences between subgroups remain largely consistent. One exception is that the significant difference between white civilians and white enlistees in single parenthood background and the difference between black civilians and black enlistees in number of children diminishes in later interview years. It is also notable that the proportion of blacks entering the sample upon marriage increases to 24 percent in 1981 and to 29 percent by the end of the sample period.

Table 1 • *Weighted NLSY Variable Averages and Means of Those Married as of First Interview Year*

	Military Sample		Civilian Sample	
	Black Enlisted	*White Enlisted*	*Black Civilian*	*White Civilian*
	[18%]	[82%]	[9%]	[91%]
Independent Variable				
Male	85%°	87%_	28%~	33%
Age	20.5	20.5	20.3	20.1
Age at marriage	19.5	19.1	18.6	18.5
Rotter score	8.70°	8.35_	9.20~	8.66†
Conservative values	17.5	17.4_	17.2	17.3
High school graduate	98%	90%_	75%~	76%
Attended college	5%	7%	11%~	10%
Mean income (including spouse's if applicable)	$7,907°	$8,570_	$7,320~	$10,209†
25th percentile	11%	11%_	39%~	27%
50th percentile	58%°	39%_	15%~	13%
75th percentile	19%°	34%_	26%~	27%
100th percentile	15%	16%_	19%	34%†
Urban residence, age 14	82%	75%	79%	70%†
Single parent, age 14	42%°	19%_	39%	12%†
Religion in which raised				
Catholic	6%°	25%	10%	28%†
Protestant	86%°	58%	73%~	56%†
Other	7%	11%	14%	12%
No religion	1%°	6%	3%~	4%
Religious attendance				
Never	17%°	35%_	16%	23%†
Infrequently	26%°	37%_	26%	32%†
Two to three times a month	21%°	9%_	17%	12%
Once a week	10%	10%	15%	16%
More than once a week	8%	4%	15%	9%†
AFQT score	39.5°	60.4_	21.2~	51.2†
Mother's education (years)	11°	11.6	10.6	11.2†
Currently enrolled in school full time	n/a	n/a	29%	30%
Currently employed full time	100%	100%	40%	54%†
Previously married (as of sample selection)	.3%	1.0%	1.0%	.7%
Number of children living in household	.23	.43	.81	.44†
Number of siblings	4.9°	3.6	5.0	3.4†
Same spousal education level	78%	71%	63%~	66%
Wife more schooling	8%	9%_	13%~	18%
Husband more schooling	14%°	21%_	24%~	16%†
Same spousal age range	80%	86%_	72%~	76%†
Wife 2+ years older	18%	11%_	7%~	4%†
Husband 5+ years older	2%	3%_	21%~	20%
Spouse in military	10%	12%_	6%	3%†

°significantly different from white soldiers $p < = .05$
_significantly different from civilian whites $p < = .05$
~significantly different from black soldiers $p < = .05$
†significantly different from civilian blacks $p < = .05$
$N = 1,505$ as of 1st interview year (2,944 total)

graduates from disadvantaged inner city school districts receive lower quality schooling than high school graduates from wealthier school districts.

Spousal characteristics include variables indicating whether the wife or the husband differs significantly in their educational attainment or age, and whether the spouse is enlisted with the U.S. military. Couples who differ significantly from one another on important characteristics like age and education are more likely to end their marriages. Although extreme differences on these characteristics predict divorce regardless of gender, the effect may be stronger among specific gender pairings. For example, marriages where the husband is two or more years younger or where husbands have lower educational attainment are more likely to divorce (Teachman 2003). Finally, whether respondent's spouse is in the military controls for exposure to military environment in the case of the civilian subsample, and a possibly doubled effect of military exposure for the enlisted sample.

The doubled percentage of blacks in the military sample compared to the civilian sample reflects both African American overrepresentation in the military service as well as their greater likelihood to marry. Since Table 1 shows only a cross section of the analytical sample that were married as of the first year, the average age shown here is very young—approximately 20—and is similar across the groups.

Gender percentage differences across the military and civilian samples reflect demographic artifacts of female underrepresentation in military service (the gender of the spouse is, of course, indirectly controlled for via the respondent's own sex variable). It should be noted that the skewed African American gender ratio of the civilian world that tends to disfavor black females in the marriage market is reversed in the military. Men far outnumber women in the military, and the gender balance there between black females and males is slightly more favorable than for whites. When the NLSY sample was originally selected black men in the military outnumbered black women in the military by 10 to 1 compared to a white gender ratio of 12 to 1 (U.S. Department of Defense 1999). It is, however, unlikely that the marriage market for enlisted males is limited only to military females, given the porous boundaries of military bases with civilian communities as well as civilian employment on military bases. Indeed, information on spouses, shown at the bottom of Table 1, indicates that only 10 percent of black enlistees and 12 percent of white enlistees are in joint service marriages.

The preponderance of males in the enlisted sample, however, obscures the fact that joint service marriages vary by gender. Not shown in Table 1 is that, among the small number of women in the military sample, 56 percent of black enlisted females and 63 percent of white enlisted females are married to enlisted males. That joint marriages are so prevalent among women serving in the armed forces speaks to the possibility that African American spousal pairings relative to those in the civilian sector may be more even. (The bottom of Table 1 shows spousal homogamy by education and age.) Overall, same level of education and similarity in age is more common among the enlistees than among civilians of either race; however, there is variation by gender within the trend. Compared to black civilian marriages, educational homogamy across spouses increases among blacks in the military sample, where the gap between more highly educated husbands on the one hand and more highly educated wives on the other hand is reduced by 5 and 10 percentage points respectively. But a comparison of white pairings across the civilian and military samples shows that while the prevalence of wives with more education in the military is halved, the prevalence of husbands with higher levels of education increases by 5 percentage points. In terms of age similarities, however, the racial gender patterns are similar in both the civilian and the enlisted sample. For both blacks and whites in the military sample, wives are more than twice as likely to be older than their husbands compared to their civilian counterparts and military husbands in both cases are substantially less likely to be much older than their wives.

On many other measures, married black enlistees more closely resemble married civilian blacks than they do their married white military counterparts. Beginning near the top of Table 1, compared to military and nonmilitary whites, blacks score higher on the Rotter scale.

Military and nonmilitary married blacks are also more likely than married whites to have grown up in large families situated in urban settings. Regardless of military or civilian status, blacks have lower levels of maternal education and were much more likely to have been raised in single parent households. Higher proportions of both black samples identify as Protestant while larger minorities of whites identify as Catholic. There are no significant differences in religious service attendance among military and civilian blacks. Scores on the AFQT are substantially higher for the white groups than for the black groups, while within race there are significant disparities that favor enlistees.

Other characteristics fall along military/civilian status lines more so than along race lines. Married military whites, for example, have more conservative notions of family than do civilian whites. Yet level of religiosity is notably higher for white civilians than for white soldiers (blacks show higher religiosity in general than whites regardless of civilian or military status).

The 1979 income gap between black and white civilians is four times that of black and white enlistees. While the average military income is lower for white enlistees than white civilians, it is higher for black enlistees than black civilians. Income reported here is wage income, which excludes in-kind military benefits such as on-base housing, etc. Even though the race pay gap is substantially lessened in the military, the white enlisted sample still reports higher earnings by about $650. Income is measured in units of $1,000 in the analyses that follow; however, I also list quartile categories in Table 1 to convey the distributional range. In general, incomes earned by both races are more evenly distributed in the military, with majorities falling in the 50th percentile. Civilian blacks and whites, by contrast, are polarized at either end of the income distribution.

Other similarities among black and white enlistees primarily reflect institutional elements of the military. Military recruitment standards generally require high school degrees (or GEDs), and many enlistees at these ages are replacing or delaying higher education through military service. Therefore, more enlisted members have a high school education than do civilians, but fewer have attended college. Among military members, however, it is notable that 8 percent more blacks graduated from high school than whites, although this relationship is only marginally significant (at $p = .08$). Also as a matter of sample construction, 100 percent of the military sample is employed full time and none are in school on a full-time basis; the majority of civilians is either in college or employed full-time. White civilians are 14 percent more likely to report employment than black civilians. Lastly, civilian blacks are more likely to have children compared to any of the other three groups. Because the first NLSY interview occurred at an early stage of life, very few of the respondents have been previously married. Thus, there are no significant differences across the various samples.

In predicting marital stability, the characteristics of married individuals across the subpopulations of interest in Table 1 paint an inconsistent picture. Based on high school graduation rates there is evidence for positive socioeconomic selection of married military blacks compared to married black civilians. Although AFQT scores for blacks compared to whites are more than 20 points lower across both groups, black military members are notably more select on their AFQT scores than their black civilian counterparts. Even more importantly, they enjoy higher incomes than civilian blacks even without taking in-kind benefits into account. Yet twice as many of the civilian blacks have attended college. On other socioeconomic status measures, such as single parent household origins and family size, civilian and enlisted blacks look similar to one another. And what about positive socioeconomic selection of military blacks compared to military whites? Military blacks and whites in this married sample have close to equal high school graduation and college attendance rates. This suggests that, relative to educational distributions in the civilian world, blacks are just as positively selected into the military as whites. But on all other socioeconomic measures, white enlistees are more socioeconomically advantaged. Twenty-three percent more military whites than military blacks were raised by two parents in smaller family units, their parents had higher levels of completed education, and their AFQT scores are almost twice that of blacks. Finally, black married couples in the military show greater compatibility in terms of education characteristics than both civilians and white enlistees.
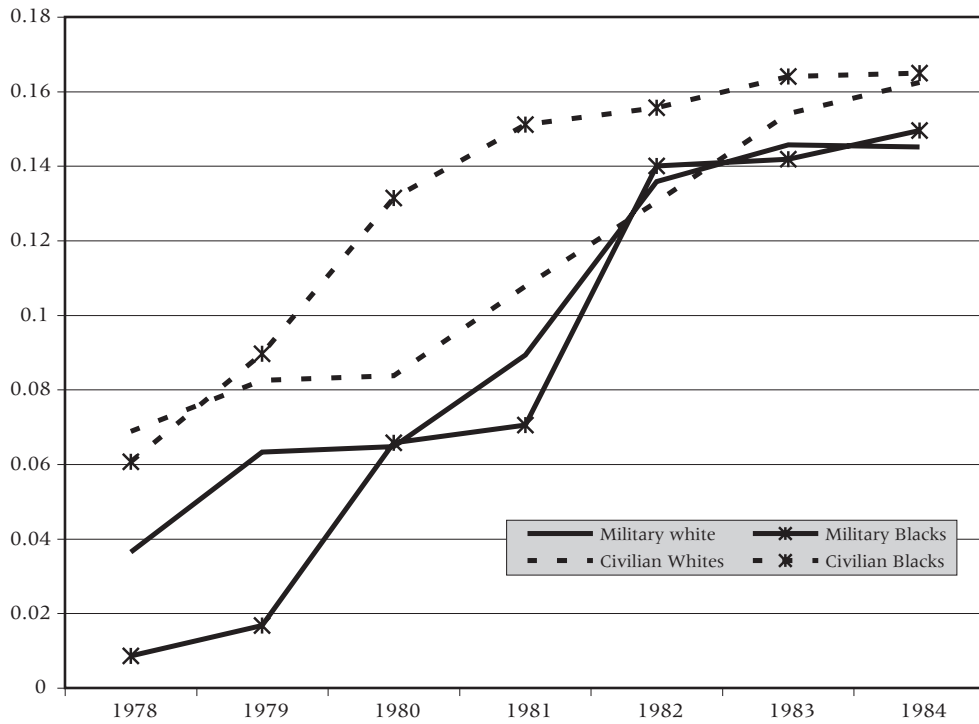
Figure 1 • *NLSY79 Percent of Married Couples Divorced Over Time By Sample Status.*

This suggests greater marital stability. At the same time, however, white and black women in the military tend to be older than their spouses, a predictor of divorce.

To see how compositional differences among the subgroups differentially impact the likelihood of divorce, I graph the proportion of marriages ending over the NLSY sample period. In Figure 1 civilian groups are distinguished from the military groups by dotted lines, while stars distinguish African American trend lines from those of whites. When the NLSY79 samples were selected, marital status already differed among the samples. Military groups were more likely to be married (and less likely to have already experienced a divorce). Over the time period, civilians were more likely to divorce. Black civilians have the highest likelihood of divorce over the time period, although civilian whites have almost caught up with them as of the final interview year. Black enlistees are the least likely to divorce, although the gap with whites narrows substantially by the end of the period. The descriptive data suggest that, despite some variation along the way, military and civilian divorce rates do not look terribly different. Yet they also suggest that the well-known black–white gap in divorce trends for civilians does not cohere in the military sample. In the multivariate analyses that follow, I determine to what extent controlling for the variables listed in Table 1 impacts the descriptive divorce trends noted here.

Multivariate Analyses

Using multivariate event history analysis, I predict the logistic likelihood of divorce for civilians and soldiers across a series of nested models. Column A in Table 2 estimates the

Table 2 • Event History Maximum Likelihood Logistic Regression: Predicting Divorce for Enlisted Versus Civilians

| | Enlisted Sample (n = 2,183) | | | | | | Civilian Sample (n = 10,541) | | | |
| | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3 | | Model 1 | | Model 2 | |
Independent Variable	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Race (omitted: white)	**-.5211**	**.3301**	**-.7549**	**.3913***	**-.3273**	**.4210**	**.2684**	**.1555 +**	**.0253**	**.1815**
Sex (omitted male)	.2727	.2552	.7152	.4136 +	.6573	.4131	.1917	.1316	.1488	.1612
Age at marriage	-.2308	.0788**	-.1448	.0885 +	-.1433	.0891	-.1272	.0338***	-.0290	.0361
Number of children in household	-.7679	.1905***	-.7354	.1933***	-.7405	.1932***	-.5170	.0808***	-.5782	.0809***
Previously married (b4 1979)	.1176	1.0775	.2188	1.1118	.1781	1.1188	-.3551	.5956	-.4758	.6080
Duration (years in union)	1.1274	.2624***	1.3313	.2791***	1.3271	.2803***	1.1696	.1322***	1.3608	.1315***
Duration squared	-.0899	.0291**	-.1057	.0306***	-.1052	.0307***	-.1016	.0134***	-.1145	.0135***
Rural residence, age 14	-.1546	.2893	-.2268	.3028	-.2068	.3036	-.0762	.1324	-.0781	.1367
Religious attendance frequency	-.0688	.0837	-.0297	.0885	-.0277	.0890	-.1003	.0367**	-.0660	.0379 +
Raised catholic (omitted: Protestant)	-.5939	.3037*	-.6095	.3199 +	-.5771	.3202 +	.0085	.1473	.0096	.1516
Raised no religion (")	-1.0244	.7640	-.8405	.7682	-.8484	.7689	-.0221	.2962	-.1105	.3025
Raised other religion (")	-.6023	.4514	-.5831	.4703	-.5616	.4718	.0764	.1730	-.0295	.1792
Conservative values score	-.0105	.0533	-.0049	.0564	-.0036	.0564	-.0116	.0172	-.0288	.0171 +
Rotter score	.0990	.0571 +	.0501	.0641	.0514	.0638	.0413	.0282	.0244	.0291
AFQT score			-.0021	.0063	-.0024	.0063			.0024	.0030
Number of siblings			.0321	.0452	.0294	.0455			.0159	.0256
Single parent, age 14			.2141	.3028	.2259	.3041			.1926	.1440
Mother's education			.0207	.0560	.0215	.0566			-.0003	.0258
No high School degree (omitted: HSgrad)			.6735	.6554	.6593	.6556			.3390	.1647
College degree (omitted: HSgrad)			.1137	.3918	.0465	.3932			-.1709	.1807
Currently enrolled in school			n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a			-.8127	.3585*
Currently employed			n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a			-.1336	.1322
Income			-.0677	.0195***	-.0648	.0197***			-.0817	.0082***
Wife more schooling			.1992	.4501	.2665	.4521			.3542	.1585 *
Husband more schooling			.8429	.3932 *	.8507	.3948*			.3178	.1659 +
Spouse in military			.2097	.3189	.4336	.3353			.0636	.2830
Wife 2+ years older			.1725	.4895	.1081	.4888			.3242	.2625
Husband 5+ years older			.6315	.3435 +	.5855	.3471 +			.2579	.1475 +
Race* spouse in military interaction					**-2.0054**	**1.0906 +**				
Intercept	-.8109	2.0609	-2.3988	2.6192	-3.1388	2.6074	-3.7223	.9857 ***	-4.7165	1.1227***
Log likelihood	-317.5		-304.9		-302.4		-1350.9		-1289.9	

+p < .10 *p < .05 p < .01 ***p < .001

logistic likelihood of divorce for the enlisted sample and column B estimates the same for the civilian sample. Each column contains a reduced form model comprised of basic demographic independent variables and a full model with additional variables controlling for differences in socioeconomic factors and spousal characteristics. The primary independent variable of interest across each nested model is race and it is highlighted across the top of the table.[7]

When controlling only for demographic factors, Model 1 shows a negative effect of military blacks' propensity to divorce compared to military whites, which is just beyond the marginally significant cut off point (at $p > |Z| = .11$). By contrast, civilian blacks have a 30 percent greater probability (exp{.268}) of divorce than civilian whites, confirming the consistent black–white divorce gap found in other studies. Comparing coefficients across the reduced form models shows that, aside from race, variables have similar effects on the likelihood of divorce for each subpopulation. Later age at marriage is negatively associated with marital dissolution for both military and civilian populations, although the effect is stronger for enlistees. The presence of children in the marriage has a depressant effect on divorce for each, but again more so for the military population. The strongest predictor of divorce for the two models is duration of marriage. Each additional year of marriage translates into a three-fold rise in the probability of divorce, although the squared term indicates that this risk declines over time. There are only a few differences in divorce likelihood predictors in the two samples. For the military group, a Catholic religious affiliation is negatively related to divorce, whereas religious group affiliation has no effect among civilians. An increase in the Rotter score (indicating a low internal locus of control) mildly heightens the risk of divorce in the military but not in civilian society. And while high levels of religious service attendance are negatively correlated with divorce for civilians, they are not for enlistees.

The second models in columns A and B introduce socioeconomic and spouse variables into the analyses. The transition from the reduced to the full form model affects the race coefficients in strikingly different ways across the civilian and military populations. In the presence of socioeconomic and spouse controls, the negative effect for blacks on divorce attains non-marginal significance, with military blacks 53 percent (exp {-.755}) less likely to divorce over the period than military whites. The opposite occurs for the civilian model, where the positive association between African Americans and divorce declines in magnitude and loses statistical significance once socioeconomic and spouse indicators are taken into account. This change from military Model 1 to Model 2 suggests that socioeconomic status and spouse characteristics suppress the negative effect of being African American on the likelihood of divorce in the military. In other words, it appears that if enlisted blacks made the same incomes as enlisted whites and had similar levels of spousal endogamy, they would be less likely than whites to divorce. This suggests that the comparatively low likelihood of divorce for African American soldiers shown in Model 2 is due not to positive socioeconomic selection or superior spousal pairings (on those measures that I can account for using available NLSY variables); buy rather, their lower propensity for divorce is *in spite of* those selection effects.

Blacks in the civilian sample have more negative socioeconomic indicators than blacks in the military sample, and this is indicated by their greater divorce likelihood before such factors are controlled. Prior to accounting for socioeconomic variables (Model 1), black civilians are 27 percent more likely to divorce than white civilians. Afterward (Model 2), their divorce likelihood is reduced significantly and the standard error increases in size so as to make any prior differences between blacks and whites nonsignificant. This contrasts with other findings on black–white divorce disparities, which consistently find reduced but still significant effects

7. Because separate models are estimated here for military and civilian groups, I conducted formal tests of significance for coefficients across the models. The coefficient for race is significantly different beyond the .05 level across Models 1 and 2. Previous research, which pools together civilian and military samples, shows that there are significant differences in divorce between the military and civilian subgroups (Lundquist forthcoming).

of race even in the face of socioeconomic status controls (Billy et al. 1986; Teachman 1986, 2002; White 1990). While I do not have an immediate explanation for this departure, I speculate that it may relate to structural characteristics of the NLSY observation period, such as its relatively short duration and early ages of marriage.

Elsewhere, a few coefficients are of note upon transitioning from the short to the long form model. In the military sample, but not the civilian sample, enlisted females are (marginally) more likely than males to divorce. This is in keeping with research finding that deployed females were more likely to divorce than males during the first Iraqi war (Angrist and Johnson 2000), and suggests that the demands of military service, whether during wartime or not, exact a greater toll on women's families, perhaps as a result of differing gender role expectations. It is unclear how this may vary by race. There is no interaction effect between sex and race; however, the sample of enlisted females may be too small to accurately test such an effect.

As in most analyses of divorce, higher incomes are negatively correlated with divorce in both the military and the civilian samples. Each $1,000 increase in income is associated with a 7 percent reduction in the odds of divorce regardless of sub-sample. Lack of spousal endogamy is also linked to divorce in both sub-samples. Marriages where the husband has a higher educational degree than the spouse is positively correlated with divorce. This relationship is found across both subsamples, but is substantially stronger among the enlistees. The reverse scenario, where the wife has a higher educational degree than her spouse, is linked to divorce among civilians but not among the military members. Similarly, in both sub-samples the risk of divorce increases when the husband is substantially older than the respondent, but this does not appear to be the case when the wife is older.

Given their consistent significance in most other divorce analyses, the lack of significant correlation for any socioeconomic variables beyond income, such as education level and employment status, is puzzling. It is likely that socioeconomic influences are more likely to manifest themselves over the long term. Since marriages formed during this panel period are early and followed for only five years, it is possible that their influence in the short term is less consequential. (Upon testing for multicollinearity, I find only midrange correlations among education level, income, AFQT scores, and single parent household at age 14.)

Recent analyses have found that conventional risk factors for divorce may vary by race and should not always be assumed constant. For example, age at marriage has a stronger effect on marital instability for whites than blacks (Sweeney and Phillips 2004), and higher education and intact two-parent family histories reduce the risk of divorce for whites but not for blacks (Phillips and Sweeney forthcoming). To test for this, and also to gauge whether any such variation contributed to the nonsignificant effect of some of the Model 2 variables, I test a series of race interactions. There are no significant race interactions in the civilian sample; however, I find marginal evidence for racial variation in the risk of divorce among the enlisted sample based on whether the respondent's spouse was also enlisted in the military. This effect is shown in the final set of columns in section A, labeled Model 3.

The interaction between race and whether the spouse is also in the military indicates that, compared to the omitted category (white couples where only the respondent is enlisted), white joint-service couples are 40 percent more likely to divorce.[8] The comparative odds of divorce for black couples is very low, especially for black joint-service marriages. Black couples with only one member in the military are 28 percent less likely to divorce than whites in the omitted category, and black joint service couples are 87 percent less likely to divorce than whites in the omitted category. Thus, not only are African Americans enlisted in the military less likely to divorce than their white counterparts, but being married to a spouse who is also in the service works in the opposite direction for each race. Joint service marriages lead to a higher divorce rate for whites but to a lower divorce rate for blacks.

8. Note that the interaction coefficient is statistically significant while neither of the main effects is. This sometimes occurs when the interaction effect is marginally significant and the slopes of the main effects are of opposite signs.

Discussion

The purpose of these analyses was to test whether the disappearance of racial disparities found in previous marriage analyses applies also to divorce in the military. Before controlling for socioeconomic status and partner characteristics, the racial disparity in divorce also disappears in the military compared to in the civilian world. The outcomes are unexpected, however, upon running the full model. While racial disparities in military divorce probabilities indeed emerge, they take the opposite form of those in the civilian world. The race differential is reversed—military blacks behave more like civilian whites and military whites behave more like civilian blacks. While this is an interesting reversal in known trends, most important is the finding that blacks in the military have altogether different divorce patterns than civilian blacks even in the presence of multivariate controls for selection. Of tangential note, any speculation that high divorce rates would reflect short-term marriage incentives peculiar to military culture is less credible in the context of a low likelihood of divorce for blacks but a high likelihood of divorce for whites. There is little reason to believe that white soldiers are more likely to abuse military benefits than black soldiers.

Most of the variables that explain divorce among civilians also explain it among enlisted members. The few differences that exist are marginally significant. One exception, however, relates to disparities in spousal pairings. Among civilians, but not enlistees, the wife's greater schooling increases the likelihood of divorce. There may be something about the military that mitigates the risk of divorce when women are more highly educated than their spouses. On the other hand, the lack of significance in the enlisted sample may be a compositional effect, since it is comparatively rare for enlisted wives to have higher levels of education than civilian wives (see Table 1).

Overall, though, the models are not able to explain *why* divorce is so much lower for African American soldiers than for African American civilians. I speculate that this may be evidence for the *opposite* residual effect that is often found for the race variable in civilian-specific analyses. Without NLSY variables for racial segregation in the military versus the civilian world, and without NLSY variables capturing less measurable effects of racial equality in the military versus civilian world, military-civilian status itself becomes a proxy for these dimensions. In addition, if divorce rates were lower than average for all members of the military, it would be harder to make the case that the effect is race specific, for it could also be attributed to some institutional effect of military service itself. But the fact that enlisted blacks have low divorce rates and enlisted whites high divorce rates points to something more taking place. The underlying explanation, I submit, points instead to the different set of realities that blacks face in larger society compared to those faced by whites. That divorce rates are especially low for African American couples who both serve in the military (the interaction shown in Model 3) perhaps underscores this fact. When both individuals in an African American marriage are exposed to the military environment, the stabilizing effect for black couples seems to be magnified.

On a generalized level, I speculate that stresses associated with military service are difficult on the family, which would conceivably drive up divorce rates in the military relative to the civilian world. While this may be the explanation for white soldiers, this does not appear to be the case for African American soldiers. How to explain this contradiction? It is possible that African American enlisted couples are willing to endure greater levels of marital stress in exchange for the greater socioeconomic gains they receive relative to the civilian world. It is also possible that the stresses of military marriage may not be so different, or perhaps lessened, from those experienced in black civilian society.

Both Caucasians and African Americans might be more likely to assess their marital well-being in the context of the marital quality of their civilian counterparts rather than one another's. To the extent that civilian society continues to lack many opportunities for African Americans today relative to the military environment, one could theorize that military blacks experience military life quite differently than whites do. It is therefore arguable that African American
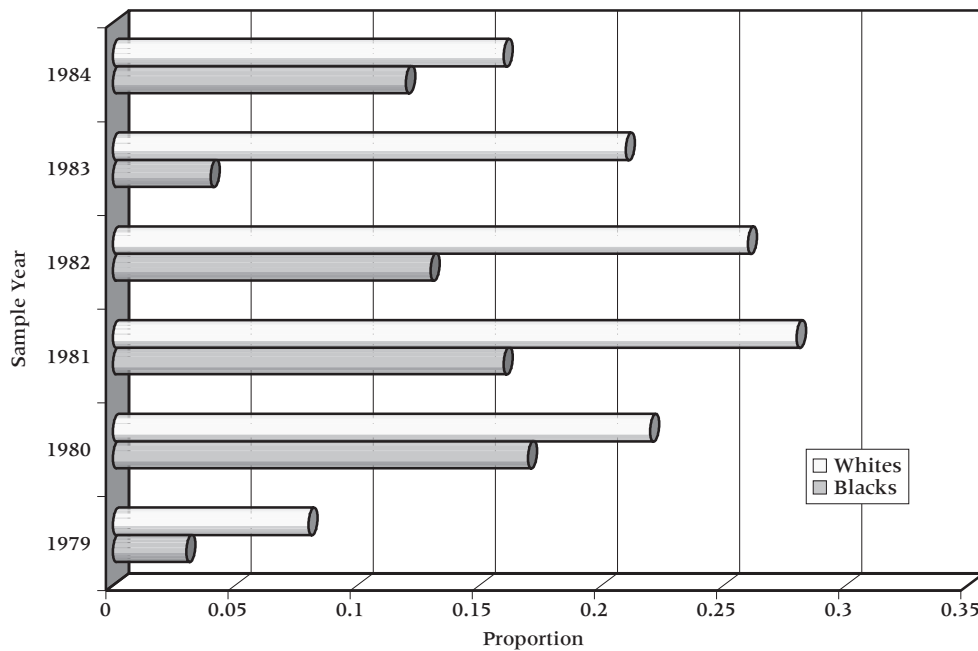
Figure 2 • *NLSY: Annual Proportions of Black Married Member Exits Compared to White Married Member Exits*

marriages in the military are less vulnerable to military-specific hardships than white military marriages, and may be advantaged when compared to African American civilian marriages.

One possible indicator of this is that African American married individuals are more likely to remain in the military than are white married individuals. Figure 2 shows that among those discharging from military service in the NLSY sample, blacks are disproportionately underrepresented. In the first two years of service, 5 percent more married whites than married blacks exit service. Given that most of the soldiers in the NLSY sample had just begun their term of service, early discharges are likely due to involuntary separations rather than decisions not to re-enlist upon term completion. After that, the difference increases by 12 percent and then 13 percent, and peaks at 17 percent. This discrepancy in military exits seems to confirm that, relative to opportunities in the civilian world, the military is more appealing to married blacks than to married whites.[9] If white couples are more sensitive to military-specific marital stresses, they may be more likely to either dissolve their marriage or exit the military (or both).[10] One might also speculate that black couples would be more apt to tolerate marital hardships associated with military service because the civilian alternative is less attractive. It has been reported elsewhere that black enlisted couples are less likely than whites to report military-family conflict (Bourg and Segal 1999). While presumably families of both races are

9. This relationship also holds in the case of unmarried discharge rates. African American soldiers are generally more likely than white soldiers to remain in the military and, accordingly, are more apt than whites to make military service a long-term career.
10. Yet, as addressed in a later section, separate analyses measuring divorce rates of whites following discharge from the military show that divorce rates were just as high. This suggests that high divorce rates for whites who remain in the military are not simply an artifact of out-selection.

exposed to equal degrees of military-family conflict, there may be a racial difference in thresholds of tolerated conflict that is grounded in relative comparisons to the civilian experience.

In a separate analysis using recent Pentagon data, I find strong evidence for just such a relative deprivation argument, which may implicitly explain why in this analysis enlisted black couples are less likely to divorce than enlisted whites. Across indicators ranging from promotional opportunities, neighborhood safety and quality, family benefits, and overall satisfaction and quality of life, African American military members and African American spouses are much more likely than white military members and spouses to say that conditions are superior in the military compared to civilian society (Lundquist 2004b). This pattern stands in marked contrast to civilian surveys such as the General Social Survey (GSS), where African Americans are consistently *less* satisfied than whites along all such measures (Hughes and Thomas 1998; Thomas and Hughes 1986). If black couples are more satisfied overall than white couples with these aspects of military life, it is probable that their marriages encounter less stress. Rather than indicating a superior setting for blacks than for whites in the military, this instead illuminates the continued position of disadvantage for blacks relative to whites in the civilian world. The opposite pattern of responses in the GSS among black and white civilians supports such a contention. The life of a military enlistee is not, by conventional standards, a widely idealized position. That African Americans would evaluate life more positively, and perhaps as a result experience greater marital stability, in what many would consider a regimented, and perhaps undesirable lifestyle, speaks less to the nature of military service and more to the stalled state of race conditions in U.S. society.

Conclusion

I have argued that specific conditions of military service for African Americans counter those described in the family literature for why differences persist in divorce patterns between blacks and whites in U.S. society. Results from the NLSY, showing unusually low divorce rates for African Americans, provide evidence for this claim. These results demonstrate that the societal black–white gap in divorce trends is not just narrowed, but reversed between civilian and military spheres. African American marriages in the military appear to enjoy greater levels of stability than civilian African American marriages. Moreover, African American marriages in the military are more stable than those of their white counterparts.

What explains these patterns? Unfortunately, I can do no more than speculate. The findings in this paper support the contention that higher-than-average black divorce rates in U.S. society stem largely from structural circumstances of racial stratification, which appear to be dramatically lessened in military life. Black military personnel may be more likely to positively compare their experiences to those of black civilians, while their fellow white soldiers negatively compare conditions of military life to that of white civilians. While compelling, such causal conclusions are not definitive, and the role of selection bias deserves mention as an alternative explanation for the results found here.

It is possible that black enlistees are highly selective compared to their civilian counterparts in ways that extend beyond the independent controls. Given the descriptive data showing that enlisted blacks have greater high school completion rates than civilian blacks, for example, one might make the argument that divorce rates among blacks in the military reflect other preexisting socioeconomic status indicators more so than any direct role of the military environment. However, the NLSY provides a wide range of socioeconomic controls, including income, schooling, parental education, and family structure background, none of which diminish the lowered probability of divorce for blacks in the military sample. Furthermore, one of the continuing debates in the race and divorce literature centers on why socioeconomic characteristics fail to explain so little of the racial disparity in divorce rates.

Therefore, if omitted variable bias is indeed driving the results of this analysis, it is probably not related to socioeconomic status. More likely, it relates to some less conventional measure not captured in the universe of NLSY covariates—one that selects African Americans into the military with preexisting tendencies toward more stable marriages.

While I cannot fully resolve the absence of potentially causal variables, I attempt to further isolate the causal role of military service. In separate analyses I estimate models that follow married enlistees after they discharged from the military rather than censoring them as was done in the foregoing event history analyses. One might expect that if entrance selectivity were the heart of the issue, the divorce patterns observed in the military would hold even after rejoining civilian society. Instead, I find that African American divorce rates for veterans are high and no different than that of African American civilians in general. This suggests that environment may play a larger role than selectivity.[11]

An additional issue of unobserved heterogeneity in this analysis is the inability to distinguish between interracial and intraracial unions. This is a concern given that interracial marriage elevates the risk of divorce and that the military is known for its high rates of racial intermarriage. If, for example, more enlisted whites than enlisted blacks in this sample are in interracial marriages, this may explain why enlisted whites have higher divorce rates. However, it would not necessarily explain why enlisted blacks are less likely to divorce than civilian blacks. However, it is entirely possible that interracial marriages are less associated with divorce in an environment like the military, where such unions are numerically more prevalent and racial relations on the whole are more open. Determining the relationship between interracial marriage and marital stability in the military is unfortunately beyond the limits of the NLSY data.

This analysis raises more questions than it answers. In addition to the issues raised above, it would be useful to understand how divorce rates might differ if the analytical period were longer. It would also be instructive to know whether the trends observed here apply to today's military, given both the rise of African American representation in military service since this period and prolonged military engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq.[12] Most important, the underlying *causes* of racial variation in military divorce merit in-depth exploration, perhaps best accomplished through qualitative research methods. All of these points make for promising future research directions to better illuminate the trends described in this paper.

In sum, this research locates a subculture where the race effect in divorce rates is atypical. Low divorce rates for enlisted African Americans provide a unique glimpse into a counterfactual reality of the military environment, where many difficult to measure aspects of racial discrimination and segregation are substantially mitigated. It is tempting to conclude that explanations pointing toward normative-cultural family orientation play no role in the U.S. black–white marital dissolution gap, but I cannot deny that preexisting cultural proclivities are not simply overridden or replaced by the military's own brand of cultural norms. What I can say, however, is that in an alternate structure, being African American is no longer associated with high divorce rates. This suggests that the military's mitigated racial stratification and socioeconomic equality plays a pronounced role in the process. It also suggests, for those who believe that cultural norms are a major component of the explanation, that such orientations are not steadfast and are summarily overridden with even minimal exposure to a different set of structures.

11. On the other hand, there seems to be some credence to selection bias for white enlistees. Even after discharging from the military, divorce rates for white military members remain higher than those of white nonveterans. Despite that they, like black soldiers, are of greater socioeconomic standing than their civilian counterparts (Table 1), there may be some latent characteristic—ideological or otherwise—distinguishing them from African American soldiers and white civilians that is correlated with marital instability.

12. The NLSY interviews took place during a time of peace. It is possible that any such protective effects for African American enlisted families are obviated today by additional stressors of wartime.

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