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Ethnic and Gender Satisfaction in the Military: The Effect of a Meritocratic Institution

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This article reevaluates traditional racial and gender disparities in the work satisfaction literature by examining the U.S. military: an institution that has ameliorated many racial inequalities while exacerbating gender conflict. The military departs from civilian society in some analytically useful ways, making it a unique, though underutilized, setting for examining inequality. Using data from the Pentagon's 1999 Survey of Active Duty Personnel (SADP), results suggest that black males and females, Latino males and females, and white females all experience greater perceived benefits to military service than do white males along several dimensions of self-assessed job satisfaction and quality of life. Perceptions of advantage relative to civilian reference group comparisons largely explain these findings. I conclude by discussing how the structure of organizations can be powerful enough to reverse differences in relative satisfaction among key status groups.

Self assessments of quality of life and work satisfaction consistently show that blacks report lower happiness levels than whites. At the same time, parallel studies consistently show that females report higher than or equal happiness levels as males—this is known as the “paradox of the contented female worker” (Crosby 1982). Because such findings hold in the face of extensive controls, researchers often attribute black *discontent* to either racial discrimination or race-based differences in standards or expectations. Female *contentment*, on the other hand, while also attributed to differences in standards or expectations, is attributed to sex-segregated conditions that insulate females from direct experiences of gender inequality. Surprisingly, few researchers have combined

these two literatures to consider interactions of gender and ethnicity within an organizational context.

In this article, I address levels of satisfaction among black, white, and Latino women and men. I shift the focus, however, to a context where racial discrimination has been much ameliorated but where gender conflict is popularly thought to be exacerbated—the U.S. military. If race and gender disparities in self-reported satisfaction stem from subcultural differences (for blacks) and the maternal role and gender socialization differences (for women), then such disparities should persist, even in an institution as unique as the military. On the other hand, if differences in satisfaction are driven primarily by structural conditions—racial discrimination (for blacks) and sex-segregated insulation from direct gender discrimination (for women)—then well established race disparities and the “gender paradox” should disappear. An additional strength of this research design is that it extends the satisfaction analysis to Latinos and minority women, two groups that have been consistently ignored in the job satisfaction literature.

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JOB SATISFACTION, RACE, AND GENDER

Well-known disparities in employment rates, income, educational attainment, neighborhood quality, and health and life expectancy offer everyday reminders that racial stratification continues to be a major characteristic of U.S. society. It is not surprising that perceptions of life and work quality reflect these racially distinct experiences. Over the past 30 years, longitudinal analyses of the General Social Survey (GSS) repeatedly find that blacks are less satisfied than whites along a continuum of quality-of-life measures (Hughes and Thomas 1998; Mookherjee 1998; Tuch and Martin 1991). Similar patterns hold for workplace satisfaction among black and white employees sharing the same occupation. In national samples of a wide variety of work settings—from corporations, managerial departments of professional firms, and academia to the assembly line—blacks report notably lower contentment than their white counterparts (Davis 1985; Deitch et al. 2003; Greenhaus, Parasuraman, and Wormley 1990; Moch 1980). Interestingly, the gender satisfaction literature shows just the opposite trend (Clark 1997; Crosby, 1982; Hodson 1989; Phelan 1994). Despite the fact that women earn less and enjoy substantially less autonomy and authority on the job than men, female job satisfaction is consistently equal to and often higher than that of men. This is the paradox of the contented female worker.

Intersections of gender and race, however, have been neglected, particularly when it comes to variations and causes of job satisfaction. As a result, much of what is known about race gaps in satisfaction corresponds (by default of exclusion or small sample size) to males, and what is known of gender differences corresponds, again by default, to whites. Even though the female work satisfaction literature is often treated as unrelated to the literature on race satisfaction, they share common theoretical tensions between the role of structural versus cultural and socialization factors in self-assessed satisfaction.

Supply-side controls for population-based differences in race satisfaction studies—most importantly indicators such as health, job tenure, and job autonomy measures—only partially mitigate the effect of race. Structural factors, such as racial discrimination, however, are more difficult to measure and are likely causes of

lower satisfaction. Attempts to gauge the role of discrimination have met with mixed success. For example, blacks' reports of happiness in the GSS share no relationship with perceptions of generalized racial discrimination (Davis 1984). Analyses using the Detroit Area Study, however, show that when controlling for the personal experience of discrimination, blacks' reported life satisfaction levels are higher than whites (Williams, Yu, and Jackson 1997). Other studies have not replicated this finding; however, one study did find that accounting for on-the-job mistreatment reduces black workplace dissatisfaction by half (Dietch et al. 2003).

The structural explanation for female contentment is premised on the protective effects of occupational sex segregation. Since women tend to work in highly gender-segregated conditions, it is suggested, their referent category is other women, not men. Indeed, there is some evidence that women's job satisfaction increases with the level of occupation-specific sex segregation (Hodson 1989; Wharton and Baron 1991). Conversely, women who work in primarily male occupations have lower job satisfaction levels on average than most women, despite higher pay and status associated with male-dominated jobs (Hakim 1996). With mostly males as peers, women may more readily perceive gendered occupational inequality. Numerical minorities are also vulnerable to tokenism, being treated as outsiders by fellow employees and subjected to stereotypical expectations and scrutiny (Kanter 1977). Because labor markets are so highly sex segregated, it is possible that gender inequality is substantially masked for most women. In contrast, labor markets are much more racially integrated; racial inequality in pay, promotion, supervision, and overall treatment is therefore more conspicuous (Tomaskovic-Devey 1993). In sum, structural approaches suggest that black employees are more dissatisfied than female employees because they are reminded of their marginalization on an everyday basis.

There is, however, an alternative explanation for satisfaction in both the race and gender stratification literatures: culture and socialization. Blacks are theorized to have different cultural orientations that dispose them to be less satisfied than whites. Here, and building on Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) oppositional culture hypothesis, some researchers argue that differences in

standards and expectations underlie satisfaction by race (Cox 1994; Martin and Tuch 1993; Moch 1980; Tuch and Martin 1991). Yet, the same type of explanation (via gender socialization) has been used to explain why women have *similar or higher* satisfaction as men. Referred to as “preference theory” in the gender satisfaction literature, it is often suggested that maternal roles and gender socialization predispose women to value paid work differently than do men (Agassi 1982; Clark 1997; Donohue and Heywood 2004).

While both structural and cultural explanations are forwarded for why females generally have higher work satisfaction levels than males, and why blacks generally have lower satisfaction levels than whites, little is known about how this is mediated by intersections of race and gender. Women are not a monolithic group despite the fact that most of the literature on job satisfaction treats them as though they are. Race and ethnicity are relatively invisible. Yet, in assessing the pay gap among women, we know that an ethnic economic hierarchy exists: white women earn the highest wages, followed by Latinas, and then black women (England, Christopher, and Reid 1999). Some researchers suggest that minority women experience a “double jeopardy,” accruing greater penalties than either status would on its own (Almquist 1975). Others posit that one status simply trumps the other (Jones 1986). Studies on job autonomy outcomes generally support the “double jeopardy” variant, showing that black women fare worse than both black men and white women relative to white men (McGuire and Reskin 1993; Petrie and Roman 2004). These findings on job autonomy and the pay gap are likely to have some bearing on job satisfaction outcomes as well.

In the few studies that do account for race/ethnicity and gender, results indicate that the gender paradox may weigh more heavily than race in determining job satisfaction for black women. One study, for instance, finds that black women in white-collar clerical positions have the highest levels of job satisfaction (Brenner and Fernsten 1984). But in a study of (primarily female) nurses, blacks and whites reported no difference in job satisfaction, although blacks did report lower job burnout rates than whites (Lankau and Scandura 1996). And in a study of college professors, white women had the high-

est levels of job satisfaction, followed by white men, then black men, and finally by black women (Davis 1985). In the analyses that follow, I explicitly examine patterns by both gender and race/ethnicity to build on the limited research in this area.

Exploring job satisfaction for other minority groups is also important given the rise of ethnic heterogeneity in the United States over the past 50 years. Latinos, in particular, are a rapidly growing population in the United States; their numbers now surpass blacks and are projected to double by 2050 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2004). They are disproportionately concentrated in prime working ages, making Latino workplace perceptions of immediate relevance. Like blacks, Latinos experience high levels of poverty, lower levels of educational attainment, and a substantial wage gap. While there is little doubt that Latinos are disadvantaged relative to the non-Latino white population, the extent to which they experience stratification on par with blacks is questionable. Many of the economic and social disparities that Latinos experience vary by national origin and stem directly from selectivity and circumstances of immigration (e.g., neighborhood segregation into ethnic enclaves). There is some evidence that Latinos experience less discrimination than blacks (although this is less true for phenotypically black Latinos) and that they are preferred by whites as both neighbors and employees (Charles 2003; Waldinger and Lichter 2003). The movement of some groups into a “model minority” status is leading to a symbolic shift from the traditional white–non-white divide to a new black–non-black divide (Bean and Stevens 2003). Indeed, the few studies that examine Latino satisfaction have not replicated classic black–white perception differences. Instead, they find that Latinos are more satisfied than both blacks and whites (Lankau and Scandura 1996; Moch 1980).¹ To better understand job satisfaction in the United States, the literature must address how Latinos perceive

¹ Nativity probably plays an important role in satisfaction levels. Some evidence suggests that discontent with one’s social and economic status increases along with length of residence for Latino immigrants and their offspring (Hurtado, Gurin, and Peng 1994).

their lives and work, as well as black–white differences.

THE MILITARY CONTEXT AND ITS IMPORTANCE

Given its reputation as a “socialist meritocracy” (Webb 1997:20), the military provides an excellent context in which to examine workplace satisfaction. The armed forces have substantially reduced racial inequality due to the confluence of four conditions: an emphasis on racially-integrated work and living environments, a top-down enforcement of equal employment opportunity (EEO) policies, a social hierarchy explicitly built on rank rather than class or race, and a disproportionately large black population (Mare and Winship 1984; Moskos 1983, 1993; Sampson and Laub 1996). These specific economic and social conditions that contribute to diminished racial discrimination will also, I expect, positively impact job satisfaction levels for minorities in the military. Indeed, both black and white service personnel report that race relations are substantially improved in the military compared with civilian life (Moskos and Butler 1996).² Perhaps the best indication of greater racial equality in the military is that interracial marriage is more than double the civilian rate (Jacobson and Heaton 2003).

Emerging research shows that racial disparities and outcomes common among the civilian population do not apply to those in military service, even after taking the selectivity of military enlistment into account. For example, blacks in the military are just as likely as whites to marry, and divorce rates among enlisted black families are notably lower than among their

civilian counterparts (Lundquist 2004, 2006; Teachman 2007). It is therefore of interest to evaluate whether the racial disparity in job satisfaction is also mitigated in the military. If it is, theories supporting the role of racial discrimination in determining job satisfaction would be bolstered. If greater black dissatisfaction persists in the military, theories supporting the role of cultural differences would be bolstered.

Little is known about the experience of Latinos serving in the armed forces. They are underrepresented for their civilian population size, but due to increased recruitment of Latinos, their percentage has almost tripled since 1985 to approximately 11 percent of the military.³ The labor experience of Latinos and Latinas is a relevant topic in its own right given their projected growth as the largest minority population in the United States. It is also useful, though, in examining whether the black equalizing experience in the military can be generalized to other minorities.

The military also provides an effective backdrop against which to evaluate the female paradox in job satisfaction. Unlike its reputation for improved race relations, the military’s gender integration process has a more troubled record. Following a prolonged history of male-only membership, the military’s institutional framework is built on a foundation of masculinity. The introduction of females during the transition to an all-volunteer force (AVF) led to pronounced gender polarization. A succession of highly publicized sexual harassment scandals (e.g., Tailhook in 1991 and Aberdeen Proving Ground in 1997) and an ongoing controversy surrounding women’s combat roles illustrate this polarization. In a recent survey, 67 percent of military women reported being sexually harassed over the past year, although it is unclear to what extent this departs from levels in the civilian job market (Antecol and Cobb-Clark 2006). Furthermore, early attrition rates for women in all branches of the military are higher than for men (U.S. GAO 1998).

² This is not to say that racial discrimination is absent in the military. In 1999, the Department of Defense conducted a race relations analysis and found that 20 percent of military blacks believe that they received a negative evaluation because of their race, compared to 4 percent of military whites (Holmes 1999). Another study found that blacks, and to a lesser extent Latinos, are less happy than whites with the Army’s equal opportunity climate (Moore and Webb 2000). These findings suggest that although military personnel believe that racism and racial inequality are less prevalent in the military, military blacks still perceive some degree of racial discrimination.

³ One does not have to be a citizen to serve in the U.S. Armed Forces. Since 2002, the military has sped up the citizenship process for service personnel as an added recruitment incentive.

It is certainly possible that the media have overplayed the sexual harassment scandals at the expense of the military's gender integration successes. Some researchers note that the same institutional characteristics that reduce racial inequality—EEO policies and a subculture that emphasizes group loyalty over the individual—should also reduce gender inequality (Titunik 2000). Indeed, some studies support this argument. For example, unlike the civilian labor market, women in the military experience little gender inequality in pay (Firestone 1992). White women also rate the Army's EEO climate more favorably than do black men and women (Moore and Webb 2000). Higher wages and improved career advancement opportunities in the military may offset otherwise negative experiences of military service for women. Despite higher attrition rates among women, a recent analysis of junior enlistees' intentions to attrite found that white men, not women, are most likely to express a desire to exit military service. Black men and women were most likely to say they would remain, followed by Latino women and men, and then white women (Moore 2002).

The military has less gender occupational segregation than the civilian work force, and this is true across all branches and ranks (Firestone 1992). Although women are still denied entry into some ground combat roles and tend to be more concentrated in administrative, medical, and functional occupational areas (Committee on Techniques for the Enhancement of Human Performance 1999), sex ratios across occupations are more equal in the military than among civilians. Firestone (1992) found sex segregation to be lowest among blacks, enlisted personnel, and in the Air Force and Navy services. Because women make up only 15 percent of military personnel, and because gender segregation is lessened, women are not the majority in any military occupation. Thus, although decreased sex segregation partially reflects gender equity, military females are still minorities in their jobs. And the literature on job satisfaction predicts that in occupations where men are the majority, women's job satisfaction declines.

JOB SATISFACTION IN THE MILITARY

The job satisfaction literature occasionally touches on military work, but primarily during the early years of the AVF and seldom includ-

ing women. Most analyses have found that among male enlistees, the perceptions of job satisfaction among blacks and whites are similar, unlike in civilian occupations (Fredland and Little 1983; Jones et al. 1977; Wilson and Butler 1978). A more recent study, which included both Latinos and females, found that active duty black members are less satisfied than whites (Sanchez et al. 2004). There are no significant differences for active duty Latinos or for females, though the study lacks a gender and race interaction. Some descriptive data, however, have shown both that black servicemen are less satisfied than white servicemen and that there is no difference in satisfaction levels between black and white servicewomen (Moskos and Butler 1996). Another recent descriptive finding found neither ethnic nor gender differences in job satisfaction and commitment in the Army (Moore and Webb 2000). Finally, a recent study shows that military women who report experiencing sexual harassment have lower job satisfaction levels, but the relationship is weaker for black women than for white women (Antecol and Cobb-Clark 2006).

Literature comparing job satisfaction levels across the civilian and military spheres generally finds that military enlistees have lower satisfaction levels than civilians. Without controls for race, however, this finding applies mainly to the white military population (Holmes and Butler 1987; Segal 1977; Woodruff and Conway 1990). Using descriptive data without controls reveals that white enlistees are generally less satisfied in their occupations than white civilians, but black enlistees are more satisfied than their black civilian counterparts (Moskos and Butler 1996).

MILITARY/NON-MILITARY DIFFERENCES AND POSSIBLE MECHANISMS

Patterns of job satisfaction in the military may depart significantly from those in civilian society. To the extent that relocation and the equal opportunity military lifestyle mitigate racial residential segregation and economic and social inequality, I suspect that the standard black-white difference in job satisfaction for men will disappear in the military. Predictions regarding other groups are less clear. With so little written about Latinos in the job satisfaction literature, it is unclear how they would perceive

the advantages or disadvantages of military service. For women, pay and job benefits are more equal in the military than in the civilian labor force. But popular notions of hostility toward women in the military suggest that they would have less job satisfaction compared to women in the civilian occupational sector. Even if the media overplay female marginalization in the military, women are still minorities in their occupational areas. Consequently, they may be more aware of gender inequity than women in the civilian sector, who work in more sex-segregated work occupations. Overall, I suspect that women in the military have lower satisfaction than men, but that black women have higher satisfaction levels than white women, given the countervailing positive forces of reduced racial disparities in the military. Comparing available data on non-military and military personnel largely supports these predictions.

Figure 1 shows job dissatisfaction across military and non-military respondents. The right side shows responses from the 1998 General Social Survey (GSS), the left side shows responses from the 1999 Survey of Active Duty Personnel (SADP). The figure shows only black-white differences because the GSS does

not contain a large subsample of Latinos. For a basic comparison, I show two similar attitudinal assessments from each survey: job loyalty and job satisfaction. For job loyalty, the GSS asks: "All in all, how likely is it that you will try to find a job with another firm or organization within the next 12 months?" The SADP similarly asks: "Suppose that you have to decide whether to stay on active duty. Assuming you could stay, how likely is it that you would choose to do so?" Response categories for both questions range from very likely to very unlikely and the figure shows the combined answers of likely and very likely (and unlikely and very unlikely for the SADP because it asks the reverse question). For job satisfaction, the GSS asks: "On the whole, how satisfied are you with the work you do?" The SADP asks: "Now taking all things together, how satisfied are you with military life?" Response categories for both range from very satisfied to very dissatisfied, and the figure combines the unsatisfied and very unsatisfied responses from each survey.

In general, the GSS gender and racial/ethnic patterns support what the literature has repeatedly documented. Blacks express higher job dissatisfaction than their white counterparts and are less committed to their jobs. Consistent with

Figure 1. Ethnic and Gender Hierarchies in Job Satisfaction and Job Tenure (Survey of Active Duty Personnel and the General Social Survey)

the contentment paradox, white women express the lowest level of job dissatisfaction. By contrast, job dissatisfaction levels among military members in the SADP are much more comparable across racial and ethnic groups. Notably, blacks express the least job dissatisfaction and the least inclination to leave their jobs. White women indicate the lowest level of job commitment but otherwise differ little from white men in expressed dissatisfaction.

Although we cannot directly compare differences in magnitude (since the instruments and samples are different for each survey), the differences in the direction of the trends do suggest that common race–gender patterns of civilian society are less applicable in the military environment. Compellingly, population demographics in military society are highly skewed relative to civilian society in ways that underestimate these notable differences across the samples. Military respondents are much younger, half as many have college degrees, and they are mostly male. Because the literature notes that older age, higher education, and being female are all associated with higher levels of job satisfaction, it is likely that controls for demographic variables would considerably lower dissatisfaction levels in the SADP. These descriptive statistics, in combination with the already unusual racial/ethnic–gender patterns, suggest that the military has a different dynamic of job satisfaction than the civilian sector.

DATA

Data are drawn from the Pentagon's Survey of Active Duty Personnel (SADP). This cross-sectional data set was collected by mail in 1999, yielding a 50 percent response rate. I use sampling weights in all descriptive and multivariate analyses to adjust for disproportionate sampling and nonresponse. The sample size for the population analyzed in this article is 30,489 individuals. Although results from a more recent SADP survey have just been released, I use this earlier survey because the data were collected prior to military engagements abroad and thus represent the experiences of active duty personnel during peacetime.

Table 1 shows descriptive data from the SADP for service personnel grouped by gender and ethnic group; asterisks denote significant differences from white men. The first two columns

pertain to non-Latino black men and women, followed by non-Latino whites, and the final two columns show Latinos. The survey data do not specify the national origins or nativity of the respondents, but it is likely that most of the Latino military population is Mexican American or Puerto Rican (the two largest Hispanic background groups in the United States).

Military members are young compared to the overall U.S. population; this is particularly true for Latino members, who are about 26 years old. Within each ethnicity, more women than men joined the military with a college degree or higher; whites overall have the highest education levels at entry. Accordingly, more whites are officers, a function of education level at the time of enlistment. The educational benefits variable indicates whether the service member received either tuition assistance or continuing education over the past year. Every group reported this benefit at higher levels than white men, particularly black women and Latinas. It is noteworthy that black men tend to be concentrated at the higher enlisted ranks than white men, whereas other groups are clustered at lower pay grades than white men.

The largest military branch, the Army, has the greatest proportional representation of most of the six groups, with minority members particularly overrepresented. Time served in the military correlates with pay grade, showing that black men have served longer in the military than white men; all other groups have served less time than white men. Men, especially black men, are more likely to be currently married than are women, and, accordingly, are more likely to report children in their households. Among female service members, black women report higher percentages of children and lower percentages currently married than do white women and Latinas.

More minority than white military members are currently stationed overseas. While those serving at home are still partially integrated into U.S. civilian culture, living outside the United States may promote more dependence on the military base. Finally, Table 1 does not show occupational areas within each military branch because they are too numerous (92 categories). The eccentricities of military occupational categories do not make for obvious standardization according to census occupational categories. Furthermore, work conditions in each military

Table 1. 1999 Weighted Survey of Active-Duty Personnel; Variable Averages and Means

Independent Variables	Black Men (3,954)	Black Women (1,213)	White Men (19,086)	White Women (2,689)	Latinos (3,021)	Latinas (524)
Age (years)	30	29	29	28	27**	25*
Education Upon Joining						
No high school degree	.05**	.02	.03	.01***	.03	.01*
High school degree	.54	.43***	.53	.44***	.55	.50
Some college	.34***	.45***	.29	.35***	.36***	.39***
Bachelor's degree	.06***	.09***	.13	.16***	.06***	.09***
Graduate degree	>.01***	.01***	.02	.04***	>.01***	.01**
Used Education Benefits	.47**	.61***	.33	.43***	.41*	.55**
Pay Grade/Rank						
Enlisted 1–3	.14	.21**	.18	.23***	.28***	.33***
Enlisted 4	.19	.25**	.21	.26***	.25***	.36***
Enlisted 5–6	.43***	.36***	.31	.23***	.31	.19***
Enlisted 7–9	.16***	.1***	.12	.08***	.09***	.03***
Warrant Officer 1–5	.01***	.01***	.02	.01***	.01***	>.01***
Officer 1–3	.04***	.05***	.1	.12***	.05***	.06***
Officer 4–6	.03***	.02***	.08	.07*	.02***	.02***
Service Branch						
Army	.48***	.53***	.32	.30**	.39***	.38*
Navy	.24	.21***	.26	.24	.25	.25
Marines	.10*	.04***	.13	.06***	.19***	.08***
Air Force	.16***	.23***	.26	.38***	.16***	.30
Coast Guard	>.01***	>.01***	.03	.02***	.02***	.02***
Time in Service						
4 years or less	.31***	.43***	.38	.47***	.52***	.66***
5–6 years	.07	.10	.09	.11**	.10	.11
7–10 years	.14	.12	.15	.12***	.12**	.11*
11–14 years	.16***	.16*	.13	.11***	.10***	.05***
15–16 years	.08*	.06	.07	.05***	.05**	.03***
17–20 years	.15	.09***	.12	.10***	.08***	.02***
21–25 years	.05	.02***	.04	.03***	.02***	>.01***
26–30 years	>.01**	>.01***	.01	>.01***	>.01**	>.01
31+ years	>.01	>.01	>.01	>.01	>.01	>.01
Married	.67	.45***	.65	.52***	.60***	.47***
Children in Household	.66***	.56	.52	.38***	.50	.38***
Stationed Overseas	.19***	.20***	.15	.16	.20	.21***

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p \leq .001$ (two-tailed tests for difference from white men).

occupational specialty vary greatly depending on which branch the job is located in and whether it is held by an enlistee or an officer. I include these 92 occupational dummies in the analyses that follow to capture the full variation across the six gender–ethnic groups along branch, officer versus enlisted rank, and occupational concentrations.

The job satisfaction literature shows that demographic factors such as college education, older age,⁴ being married with children, and

occupational prestige are associated with higher levels of satisfaction. This may explain some of the SADP patterns in Figure 1. Although black men in the military have lower educational levels than white men, they are slightly older and have higher levels of job tenure. They are therefore more concentrated at the higher enlisted ranks and pay grades than white men (there are more white men at officer levels, but enlisted ranks make up the majority of the armed services). Add to this black men's higher likelihood of benefiting from the military's educational benefits and the reversal in race satisfaction becomes clearer. Black men in the military are in a more elevated occupational

⁴ As in a civilian occupation, selectivity increases with age with satisfied soldiers more likely to reenlist.

position than white men. Regarding gender differences, men are older and more are married with children, implying overall higher job satisfaction for men than for women. Black women also enjoy somewhat higher occupational prestige than white women within the enlisted ranks. They are also more likely to benefit from military educational assistance benefits. This likely explains why black women, although less satisfied than black men, still have higher levels of job satisfaction than white women (see Figure 1). In the analyses that follow, I assess the extent to which satisfaction varies by gender and race/ethnicity in the presence of controls for such occupational and demographic composition differences.

MEASUREMENT

Service in the all-volunteer military is as much a lifestyle as an occupation given that individuals live, work, and socialize within its purview. It is likely then that the military's EEO policy permeates many other aspects of personal life beyond the workplace; it extends to geographic surroundings and local institutions, living arrangements, and relationships with co-workers in one's neighborhood and general social circle. I therefore ran a series of ordinal logistic regression models, each with a different dependent variable outcome scale capturing individual assessments of satisfaction and happiness along various dimensions of military life. The SADP contains a large number of items tapping similar themes, which I combined into a succession of scales to reduce single indicator measurement error and to increase measurement reliability. The outcome of interest in each model is how overall perceptions vary along each of the ethnic-gender group variables relative to white male assessments.

Each outcome scale is made up of equally weighted variables. I standardized them to range across five discrete categories, from -2 to +2, with the lowest number representing a negative assessment of military service and the highest number representing a positive ranking.⁵ The Cronbach's alpha (α) indicates scale reliability

and estimates the correlation between the observed value of the scale and the "true value" if all possible items could have been measured. The first three scales are conventional measures of job satisfaction, encompassing the dimensions of work characteristics outlined in job satisfaction theory (Kalleberg 1977). Because the military has been described as a "greedy institution" (Segal 1986), extending far more than other occupations into the personal lives of service members and their families, I include two additional scales that assess perceptions of family policies and living conditions.

The first scale is the Overall Quality of Life indicator. Two variables make up the scale: one measures respondents' satisfaction as a whole with life in the military and the other measures whether respondents' lives have been better or worse than they initially expected upon enlistment ($\alpha = .72$). This scale is akin to conventional global satisfaction measures.

The second scale is the Employment Opportunity indicator. This scale is made up of five variables that instruct respondents to answer (1) how satisfied they are with their basic pay, (2) if they think they will be fairly promoted in the military, (3) if they believe there is much to be gained by sticking with the military, (4) how satisfied they are with specific assignments, and (5) if their work has been better or worse than expected upon enlistment ($\alpha = .60$). Although the alpha is low for this scale, results are virtually unchanged in separate analyses that use each of these variables as outcome variables. Rather than running five different models, I use the scale for parsimony.

The third scale, the Career Commitment indicator, is similar to conventional organizational commitment scales and made up of four variables. The first two variables measure turnover intention and ask respondents to assess the likelihood of staying with the military in the short term and the long term. The second two variables ask respondents whether they talk highly of the military to others, and whether they would encourage others to join the military ($\alpha = .76$).

The fourth scale, the Family Benefits indicator, is made up of five variables that ask respondents if they are (1) satisfied with medical care for family, (2) satisfied with family support programs, (3) satisfied with family dental care, (4) satisfied with on-base youth activities, and (5) satisfied with area schools ($\alpha = .68$).

⁵ In cases where variables predict in the opposite direction, I reversed their coding to match the rest of the variables in the composite index.

(again, although the alpha is low, results differed little when run as five separate models). This scale applies to a subset of military members who have dependents. The military is well known for its adherence to family benefits as a way to retain personnel. Family benefits may have special salience for female soldiers, as they are more likely than male soldiers to be single parents.

The fifth scale, the Housing and Neighborhood indicator, is made up of three variables instructing respondents: (1) to rate their satisfaction with housing quality, (2) to assess the safety of their neighborhood, and (3) to rate the condition of their residence ($\alpha = .78$). Not all active duty personnel live on base; however, military base location does influence the type of neighborhoods in which personnel live and their access to services. This is of particular relevance when considering that geographical relocation upon military enlistment likely removes black families from inner-city neighborhoods and school districts with concentrated disadvantages.

For each of the five SADP models, I ran ordinal logit models predicting positive ratings of military experience. Also known as proportional odds or cumulative logit models, this type of regression is used when dependent variables have three or more ordered discrete categories (in this case, there are five ordered categories ranging from -2 to 2). The coefficients for each independent variable can thus be interpreted as the effect of the variable on the probability of being in a higher category rather than a lower category, where higher categories reflect more positive ratings of the military.

The primary independent variables of interest are the race/ethnic-gender categories: black female, black male, Latina female, Latino male, and white female. The comparison category for each dichotomous variable is white male.

ANALYSES OF RACE, GENDER, AND SATISFACTION IN THE MILITARY

Tables 2 through 4 report ordinal logistic regression results for each of the five satisfaction scales. The gender-ethnicity identity coefficients of interest are shown at the top of each model. Analyses predicting satisfaction on the Overall Quality of Life Scale and the

Employment Opportunity Scale appear in Table 2.

The first analysis indicates that, in the absence of controls, every minority group except Latinas reports a higher quality of life in the military than do white males (Model 1). This effect does not diminish in Model 2 with the inclusion of demographic variables, current education, family structure, and age. In fact, the effects for black women and Latinos strengthen. The effect for Latinas gains statistical significance and magnitude in the same direction as the other minority groups. The inclusion of military-specific controls, paygrade/rank, duty location, tenure, educational benefits, and occupation within service branch (Model 3), affects the magnitude of the gender-ethnicity coefficients only marginally. Minority males express the highest quality of life, with odds 57 percent greater ($e^{.448}$) for black men than for white men, followed by 54 percent greater for Latinos, 50 percent for black women, 39 percent for Latinas, and 25 percent for white women.

Notably, although my hypotheses predict race satisfaction differences will disappear in the military, the direction of the race coefficient instead reverses itself from conventional satisfaction race patterns among civilians. The effect for women, however, is positive, in keeping with standard female contentment paradox findings, despite my hypothesis that it, too, would disappear. None of the control variables outlined in Table 1 account for these racial/ethnic patterns among military members.

To uncover the causal nature of these results, Models 4 and 5 add attitudinal controls that may mediate dimensions of military satisfaction beyond population composition differences. Model 4 includes a variable measuring the extent to which respondents share values in common with the military. It stands to reason that individuals with a particular kind of predisposition toward the military may be willing to overlook some hardships of military life, thereby rating military life more highly. Perhaps the military attracts minority groups who hold a stronger military ideology than do white males, thus explaining their higher satisfaction in the first three models. The coefficient for this variable indicates that lesser shared values negatively predict satisfaction with military life; yet the impact on the race-gender coefficients upon inclusion of this measure *increases* the

Table 2. Survey of Active-Duty Personnel Predicting Happiness/Satisfaction in Military by Ethnicity: Quality of Life and Employment Opportunity Models

Overall Quality of Life in the Military (N = 30,489) Ordered Logit: Predicting Very Happy										Employment Opportunities in the Military (N = 30,489) Ordered Logit: Predicting Very Satisfied										
Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		
Variables	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE		
Black men	.45	.05***	.44	.05***	.45	.05***	.55	.05***	.34	.05***	.18	.05***	.22	.05***	.28	.05***	.36	.02***	.14 .06**	
Black women	.25	.07***	.33	.07***	.33	.08***	.53	.08***	.28	.08***	.19	.08***	.27	.08***	.38	.09***	.53	.09***	.27 .10**	
White women	.22	.05***	.28	.06***	.22	.06***	.23	.06***	.07	.06	.11	.06***	.13	.06*	.13	.06*	.14	.06*	-.05 .06	
Latinos	.24	.07***	.40	.07***	.43	.07***	.43	.07***	.31	.07***	.02	.07***	.18	.07***	.25	.07***	.21	.07***	.06 .07	
Latinas	.15	.12	.41	.12***	.40	.12***	.40	.13**	.17	.14	.10	.12	.32	.12**	.40	.13**	.38	.13**	.11 .13	
Associates degree			.12	.05*	-.02	.05	-.09	.06	-.04	.06			.10	.05*	.01	.05	-.06	.06	.00 .06	
College degree			.03	.03	-.27	.06***	-.32	.06***	.11	.05***			.38	.04***	-.29	.06***	-.34	.07***	-.12 .07	
MA degree +			.04	.04	-.35	.07***	-.38	.07***	.09	.08***			.52	.04***	-.39	.07***	-.42	.07***	-.07 .08	
Married			.11	.04**	.06	.04	.02	.04	.07	.06***			.03	.04	-.02	.05	-.07	.05	-.05 .05	
Have children			-.05	.04	-.10	.04**	-.12	.04**	.13	.07***			-.03	.04	-.06	.04	-.07	.04	-.06 .04	
Age			.06	.00***	.02	.00***	.02	.00***	.06	.13**			.04	.00***	.01	.01*	.01	.01	-.01 .01	
Pay grade/rank					.27	.03***	.20	.03***	.20	.06					.33	.03***	.27	.03***	.27 .03***	
Stationed abroad					-.04	.04	-.01	.04	.01	.06***					.05	.04	.09	.04*	.11 .04**	
Years served					.05	.02**	.05	.02**	.11	.07***					.00	.02	-.01	.02	.04 .02*	
Received educational benefits					.08	.04*	.06	.04	.12	.04					-.04	.04	-.07	.04	-.03 .04	
Occupational area by officer/enlisted (92 categories)					Not shown		Not shown		Not shown				Not shown		Not shown		Not shown		Not shown	
Do not share military values					-.751	.018***	-.625	.005***									-.64	.02***	-.51 .02***	
Quality of life better in military									.710	.030***									.56 .02***	
Pay/compensation better in military									.140	.041									.19 .02***	
Promotion better in military									.257	.017**									.35 .02***	
Log Likelihood			-.40954		-.40086		-.37574		-.34523		-.31154		-.30556		-.30033		-.28637		-.26149	

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$

magnitude of relative satisfaction ratings for black women and men. This indicates that blacks are less likely than white males to share military values, which biased their satisfaction with military life downward in previous models. None of the other groups appear to differ from white males in their degree of shared military values.

Model 5 adds variables that account for the relative deprivation and advantage comparison framework to help explain why minority groups assess quality of life in the military more highly than do white males. It is likely that minorities' position of disadvantage in the civilian world drives their higher satisfaction in the military, more so than any aspect of military life that benefits them more than white men. Similarly, white men's lower rating of life quality in the military may reflect that the military has largely eliminated, or at least reduced, pervasive white male privilege. This final grouping of variables assesses whether respondents rate the military more highly *than their experience in the civilian world* in terms of quality of life, promotional opportunity, and pay. The inclusion of three civilian-military comparison controls limit the race and gender coefficients on life satisfaction to assessments beyond simply how military life may be better or worse than civilian life. Model 5 shows that including these variables dramatically changes the race and gender satisfaction coefficients. Compared to Model 4, including the civilian-military comparisons fully explains the higher life quality satisfaction of white women and Latinas, rendering their coefficients insignificant. It explains almost 50 percent of the higher satisfaction coefficients that black respondents previously reported, but only some of Latinos' higher life-quality assessments. From the full models, the odds of having greater satisfaction than white males are 41 percent higher for black males, 32 percent higher for black females, 36 percent higher for Latinos, and white females and Latinas no longer differ from white males on this measure.

Similar patterns hold in the second set of models, which predict military employment satisfaction. Similar to previous models, each group except Latinas is more likely than white men to be satisfied with military employment before adding controls. The coefficient for Latinas becomes significant in the second model. Although the coefficients for white women change little across the first three nest-

ed models, each addition of variable groupings increases the likelihood of a positive rating (relative to white men) for the remaining groups. Model 3 indicates that minority women have the highest satisfaction levels, at odds close to 50 percent higher than white males. Black men show 33 percent higher odds and Latinos 28 percent higher. The opinions of white women on employment satisfaction differ least from white men, yet are still about 14 percent more positive. The controls for shared military values have the same effect as they did in the quality-of-life scale analysis. There is no evidence that ethnic or gender differences in personal commonality with military values drive higher satisfaction levels with the military; in fact, the opposite seems true for blacks because including this control significantly increases their higher rating of the military. Similar to the previous analyses, Model 5 makes a compelling case for the influence of relative deprivation and advantage. Considering the military's employment opportunities relative to those in the civilian world, Latinos, Latinas, and white women no longer hold significantly different levels of satisfaction from white men. This control does not fully explain blacks' higher satisfaction; however, compared to Model 4, it reduces its statistical significance and substantially diminishes the degree of difference from white men. The full models show that the odds of satisfaction are still 6 percent higher for black men and 10 percent higher for black women compared to white men.

Table 3 shows analyses for the Career Commitment Scale and Housing Quality and Neighborhood Safety Scale. Before adding controls, only black men show greater levels of career commitment than white men. The effect for black men changes little across the first three nested models, but the coefficients for Latinos and Latinas become significant and positive when demographic controls are included. In Model 3, which eliminates the influence of population composition differences, Latinas have 40 percent greater odds of commitment to the military than white males, Latinos 37 percent, and black males 30 percent. This is not the case for white or black women, who show no significant difference from white men. By Model 4, which controls for degree of personal affiliation with military values, black women's greater commitment to the military becomes

Table 3. Survey of Active-Duty Personnel Predicting Happiness/Satisfaction in Military by Ethnicity: Career Commitment and Housing/Neighborhood Models

Variables	Career Commitment to the Military (N = 30,489) Ordered Logit: Predicting Very Happy										Housing Quality and Neighborhood Safety (N = 30,489) Ordered Logit: Predicting Very Satisfied									
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE
Black men	.29	.05***	.25	.05***	.27	.05***	.37	.05***	.15	.06**	.00	.05	.06	.05	.14	.05**	.15	.05**	.07	.05
Black women	-.08	.08	.02	.08	.03	.08	.20	.08*	-.06	.09	-.01	.09	.12	.09	.22	.09*	.26	.09**	.17	.09*
White women	-.07	.05	.03	.06	.02	.06	.01	.06	.18	.06**	.24	.05***	.28	.06***	.26	.06***	.26	.06***	.20	.06***
Latinos	.06	.06	.28	.06**	.32	.06***	.31	.07***	.18	.07**	-.17	.06**	-.01	.06	.08	.06	.06	.06	.01	.06
Latinas	-.07	.12	.29	.13*	.33	.14*	.32	.14*	.05	.14	-.17	.14	.05	.14	.09	.14	.07	.15	-.02	.15
Associates degree	.02	.05	.02	.05	-.09	.06	-.17	.06**	.13	.06*			.01	.05	-.05	.05	-.07	.05	-.04	.06
College degree	.11	.04***	.11	.04***	-.33	.06***	-.39	.06***	.21	.06***			.50	.04***	.17	.06**	.17	.06**	.25	.06***
MA degree +	.01	.04	.01	.04	-.52	.07***	-.57	.08***	.35	.08***			.59	.04***	.15	.08*	.15	.08*	.25	.08***
Married	.10	.04*	.10	.04*	.05	.04	.00	.04	.02	.04			.25	.04***	.23	.04***	.22	.04***	.23	.04***
Have children	.20	.04***	.20	.04***	.15	.04***	.17	.04***	.19	.04***			-.04	.04	-.06	.04	-.06	.04	-.06	.04
Age	.07	.00***	.07	.00***	.04	.00***	.04	.01***	.02	.01***			.03	.00***	.01	.00**	.01	.00**	.01	.00
Pay grade/rank					.33	.03***	.25	.03***	.27	.03***					.19	.03***	.16	.03***	.16	.03***
Stationed abroad					-.02	.04	.03	.04	.00	.04					-.28	.04***	-.27	.04***	-.27	.04***
Years served					.03	.02	.04	.02*	.09	.02***					.00	.02	.00	.02	.01	.02
Received educational benefits					-.01	.04	-.04	.04	-.01	.04					-.02	.03	-.03	.03	-.02	.03
Occupational area by officer/enlisted (92 categories)					Not shown		Not shown		Not shown						Not shown		Not shown		Not shown	
Do not share military values					-.81	.02***			-.69	.02***					-.22	.02***	-.22	.02***	-.16	.02***
Quality of life better in military									.71	.02***									.22	.02***
Pay/compensation better in military									.12	.02***									.06	.02***
Promotion better in military									.17	.02***									.03	.02*
Log Likelihood																				
	-35799		-34467		-33798		-31524		-29131		-36816		-36146		-35831		-35674		-35434	

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$

marginally significant and the coefficient for black men's commitment to the military is strengthened. Military–civilian comparison controls in Model 5, however, completely explain away greater Latina and black female career loyalty and substantially diminish the size and the significance of greater black male and Latino career commitment. White women, who previously showed no difference on this dimension of military satisfaction from white men, emerge for the first time as significantly less content than white men. Their odds of lessened commitment to the military are 16 percent lower than for white men, once the influence of relative advantage from civilian life is eliminated. The odds for black males and Latinos are still 16 and 20 percent higher, respectively, than that for white men.

In the initial models assessing the Housing and Neighborhood Scale, only white women and Latinos show a significantly different rating from white men. Although white women are more positive on this dimension than white men in Model 1, Latinos are more negative than white men. The negative effect disappears when demographic controls are included and the coefficient for Latinos loses its statistical significance. Including military controls in Model 3 results in a new statistically significant relationship between being black and rating the military more highly than white men on this satisfaction dimension. Overall, when controlling for population composition, white women have 29 percent greater odds of satisfaction, black women 24 percent, and black men 15 percent. Latinos and Latinas do not differ from white men in their opinions on this scale. Unlike the previous analyses, black respondents' lack of shared military values has little impact on their assessments of this scale in Model 4. The introduction of relative deprivation and advantage controls in the final model fully explains higher black male satisfaction with housing quality and neighborhood safety, and it reduces black and white female ratings somewhat. The odds of ranking the military higher on this scale as of Model 5 are 19 percent greater for black women and 22 percent greater for white women.

Finally, the Family Benefits Scale, shown in Table 4, is limited to the subsample of respondents who have dependents. Overall, in assessing satisfaction with military family benefits, all of the groups show uniformly higher levels of

satisfaction than white men and this remains generally consistent across each nested model. The coefficients for the ethnic–gender groups attenuate mostly between Models 4 and 5; however, Latina satisfaction with family benefits also diminishes across the first three models, becoming nonsignificant in the final model. In Model 5, greater satisfaction with family benefits is still 73 percent higher for black men than for white men, 93 percent higher for black women, 50 percent higher for white women, 22 percent higher for Latinos, and 50 percent higher for Latinas.

Beyond ethnicity and gender, the direct effects of the remaining control variables are not a focus of this article; however, I will summarize their effects briefly. Generally, a higher education level predicts more positive assessments of the various dimensions of military life. After the addition of full controls, though, this positive effect often reverses because the controls for pay grade and rank are correlated with education. Being married generally has little to no effect on military satisfaction levels, except for when considering housing. The effect of marriage in the Family Benefits Model is insignificant, meaning that single parents do not necessarily rate the military higher on its family benefits than do married parents, despite what one might expect given the military's reputation for comprehensive childcare.⁶ I was also surprised that the use of military educational benefits is not positively correlated to satisfaction in more of the models. It predicts higher levels of satisfaction in overall quality of life, but its effect is not very strong.

Parenthood has little to no effect in most of the models; however, it does predict greater career commitment to the military. Being stationed abroad predicts lesser satisfaction with housing and neighborhood safety but greater satisfaction with military benefits. There are no large or consistent effects of military tenure across the models and the varying effects of the 92 occupational dummies are too numerous to list. Finally, and not surprisingly, a lack of

⁶ I also tested for interaction effects in this model between gender–ethnic groups and marital status, given that single parenthood is more common among women than among men. There was no evidence for interactions.

Table 4. Survey of Active-Duty Personnel Predicting Happiness/Satisfaction in Military by Ethnicity: Family Benefits Model

Independent Variables	Family Benefits in the Military (N = 17,263) Ordered Logit: Predicting Very Satisfied									
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE
Black men	.57	.06***	.58	.06***	.65	.06***	.67	.06***	.55	.06***
Black women	.76	.11***	.72	.11***	.73	.12***	.79	.12***	.66	.12***
White women	.64	.07***	.60	.08***	.49	.08***	.50	.08***	.40	.08***
Latinos	.30	.08***	.28	.08***	.30	.08***	.25	.08**	.20	.09**
Latinas	.80	.23***	.71	.22***	.59	.23**	.58	.23**	.41	.24
Associates degree			.02	.06	.02	.06	.00	.06	.03	.06
College degree			.02	.05	-.12	.08	-.11	.08	.00	.08
Masters degree or more			.23	.05***	-.08	.09	-.06	.09	.11	.09
Married			-.07	.07	-.05	.08	-.06	.08	-.05	.08
Have children			n/a		n/a		n/a		n/a	
Age			-.02	.00***	.00	.01	.00	.01	-.02	.01**
Pay grade/rank					.00	.04	-.06	.04	-.06	.04
Stationed abroad					.16	.05**	.18	.05***	.18	.05***
Years served					-.07	.02***	-.07	.02***	-.05	.02*
Received educational benefits					.04	.04	.04	.04	.04	.04
Occupational area by officer/enlisted (92 categories)					Not shown		Not shown		Not shown	
Do not share military values							-.29	.02***	-.23	.02***
Quality of life better in military									.209	.023***
Pay/compensation better in military									.166	.022***
Promotion better in military									.075	.022***
Log Likelihood	-19995		-19953		-19721		-19524		-19177	

Note: Respondents in this model are limited to those with dependents.

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$

shared values with the military strongly predicts dissatisfaction, and positive military-to-civilian comparisons are predictors of higher overall reported satisfaction in the military.

DISCUSSION

Although one of my hypotheses is that negative assessments by black men should disappear, I did not expect the trend to reverse itself, with blacks expressing significantly *higher* satisfaction levels than whites. The first four models of every analysis show this finding, a notable departure from most of the literature on job satisfaction and from the GSS pattern depicted in Figure 1. A similar pattern also applies to the rest of the minority groups, both male and female. The civilian reference group comparison drives a large part of this reversal, indicated by the dramatic diminution of the race-gender coefficients in the fifth models. Focusing on the satisfaction trends before accounting for civil-

ian comparison controls (the fourth models), black men and women express higher satisfaction than white men on every domain of job satisfaction. Latinos and Latinas express higher satisfaction than white men in each domain except housing quality. And white women rate military life more highly than do white men, except for career commitment. For a crude assessment of how the groups compare as a whole in their military experience, one might add the statistically significant coefficients in the fourth models for each of the groups across the analyses (excluding Analysis 3 because it applies to only half the sample). Black women rank the highest in terms of level of satisfaction and consistency of statistically significant results. Black men rank second highest, followed by Latinas, and then Latinos. White women fall last, suggesting that they differ least from white men in their satisfaction with military service.

It is noteworthy that perceived benefits of military service for ethnic and gender minorities go beyond extrinsic benefits like pay and promotion. This suggests that improved conditions extend beyond that dictated by EEO enforcement. Although the coefficients are large for minority status in assessing pay and promotions via the Employment Opportunity Scale, the models with the strongest results are those regarding family well-being and overall life satisfaction. The higher ratings by blacks than white men on the scale measuring neighborhood safety and housing indicate that military service may indeed provide respite from racially segregated conditions of civilian life (although this does not explain why white women's ratings are also higher on this scale).

Reference group comparisons, as originally theorized by Mead (1934), best explain the patterns observed in these analyses; they are the result of relative deprivation. An identical term of military service experienced by a black man and a white man may be interpreted by each in divergent ways based on their different civilian baselines. The final models reflect this when controlling for the mitigating effects of civilian comparison. More equitable circumstances in the military than the civilian world explain a great deal of why groups that ordinarily express lower satisfaction than whites in the civilian world express higher satisfaction in the military context. This within-group comparison reduces black men and women's higher satisfaction by about half in most of the models. It accounts completely for why black women indicate more commitment to the military and why black men are happier with housing and neighborhood quality. The military's relative superiority to civilian life also influences Latino ratings. It is the primary reason why Latino soldiers rate employment opportunities higher than do white soldiers, and it reduces Latinos' higher opinions along the other scales. Civilian-military comparisons play an especially strong role for Latinas and white women, explaining away their higher assessment of both life quality and employment opportunities. This also accounts for why Latinas express greater career commitment than white men. And, in fact, this is the only reason why white women do not indicate less commitment to the military than white men. As for white men, it is unlikely that they are disadvantaged relative to other groups in the armed

forces; rather, they are likely experiencing both relative and absolute deprivation of status. They experience less advantage relative to ethnic minorities (and possibly also women) than they do in the civilian world. And their civilian reference group is, on average, more advantaged than they are, unlike the case for minorities' reference groups. White military men may have greater human capital than other groups within the military, but compared to white male civilians they have less (Teachman and Segal 1993).⁷

I also originally speculated that the "paradox of female contentment" should disappear in the military context for two reasons: (1) the institution's troubled history with gender integration and (2) military women work in less sex segregated conditions, a setting associated with lower female satisfaction. My results indicate that, at least in one realm, white women are less committed than white men to the military as a career; however, this is only the case once I control for white women's belief that the military has better opportunities for them than the civilian world. Without such controls, white female satisfaction generally outstrips white male satisfaction, just as it does in the civilian world. Unlike their civilian counterparts, the fact that civilian-military comparisons largely drive white women's higher satisfaction indicates that their contentment in the military is less paradoxical than reflective of an EEO environment. Indeed, in occupational contexts where women are the minority, female dissatisfaction should only apply when male pay and privilege are superior to women's. If the military truly reduces occupational gender inequity, then being an occupational minority should lose some of its negative impact. That said, the fact that white females indicate *lower* career commitment after controlling for the advantages of military over civilian employment may be evidence for the

⁷ Reported enlistment intentions may also explain why white men have lower satisfaction. Whereas black enlistees report joining the military for economic and career advancement, white enlistees are more likely to report joining for short-term reasons, such as money for school and job training for transition into civilian life (Gifford 2005). A shorter term commitment to military service may drive higher levels of discontent.

hypothesized atmosphere of sexual harassment or tokenism that the military's EEO policy only partially cancels.

I also predicted that black women should have higher satisfaction levels in the military than white women. This appears to be the case. Unlike patterns in the GSS showing that black women report less satisfaction than white women, black military women report higher levels of satisfaction than both white women and white men, even after accounting for reference group comparisons.⁸ Overall, the differences between women's and men's responses are less extreme than those between women of each ethnicity. This indicates that, at least in the military, ethnicity makes a bigger difference than gender in self-reported job satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

By evaluating job satisfaction along racial and gendered lines in a context where common societal norms do not always apply, this article contributes several important findings to the existing literature. Most importantly, it suggests that structural inequality, rather than cultural differences in preferences or standards, predominantly drives the black-white disparities in job satisfaction in civilian society. In an environment where racial stratification has been substantially reduced, traditional racial disparities across a variety of well-being dimensions reverse themselves. By including Latinos, I show that other minority groups clearly benefit from the meritocratic conditions of military life in similar ways as blacks. Moreover, this is one of the few analyses of satisfaction to account for both gender and ethnicity, finding that black women and Latinas report extensive gains from military service relative to their white counterparts. White women also appear to have more positive experiences in the military than white men, though the differences are not as extreme as seen with other groups. A comparative calculus that considers military employment opportunities to be superior to those in civilian society

largely drives women's higher satisfaction. Consequently, the results make a stronger case for the structural conditions hypothesis than for the female contentment paradox.

These results are a notable departure from the sparse body of earlier work that has evaluated job satisfaction in the military. Studies from the late '70s and early '80s found no racial (black-white) differences in military job satisfaction among men. I find that there are indeed ethnic differences, but in the opposite direction of the civilian world. This analysis improves upon earlier studies with its large sample size, its inclusion of all military branches, and its attention to both gender and ethnicity. It is also more timely;⁹ the military has implemented additional racial and gender equality reforms since the time of many of the initial studies. During the same time, economic conditions have contracted and even declined for many working-class civilians, leading to comparatively increased advantages associated with military service. An additional strength of this analysis is its increased analytic power with controls for the influence of relative deprivation through the inclusion of civilian experience comparisons. Finally, although my findings are important for understanding inequality in general, job satisfaction in the military is—in and of itself—a topic that should concern all of us, especially given the current geopolitical climate and concerns over national security. An illuminating question, which I hope to pursue with the release of the more recent Survey of

⁸ In analyses not shown, I tested whether the magnitude differences in the female coefficients are significantly different from one another by running models with white women as the comparison category.

⁹ One exception is Sanchez and colleagues (2004) who, using a different data set, found that active duty black men are less satisfied than white military men. They also found no difference for active duty Latinos or active duty women as a group (there was no control for women's ethnicity). It is likely that differences in model specification drive the varying effects. The authors did not look specifically at race effects and so their models are over-controlled to this end. They include independent variables for physical health, mental health, life satisfaction, job pressure, and life problems all in the same model (it is unclear what the status of their race coefficient for blacks was prior to the inclusion of these controls). In contrast, I use life satisfaction, for example, as a dependent outcome in one of my models rather than as an independent variable (although it is positively, not negatively, associated with ethnicity and gender).

Active Duty Personnel, is whether these findings hold when asked of respondents during war time.

More important than simply documenting minority and gender group job satisfaction outcomes is being able to capture underlying causality. The data at hand are limited in this regard. Available demographic and military-specific controls in the SADP data do little to alter minorities' higher satisfaction reports across the first four nested models. Most of the explanatory power emerges in the final models, indicating that women and minorities believe their quality of life, level of pay, and promotional opportunities are far better in the military than in civilian society; white men, in contrast, view them as worse. But reference group comparisons do not fully explain higher satisfaction among all the groups in each of the dimensions. Black women and black men still show the greatest and most consistent levels of satisfaction, even after accounting for civilian comparisons. One possibility is that these unexplained higher satisfaction levels reflect selectivity on characteristics that are not necessarily representative of the larger civilian population. I thus cannot rule out the possibility that the control variables fail to capture the influence of personal characteristics that vary by gender and race, variables that also happen to be correlated with job satisfaction. However, I believe that the residual higher satisfaction with military employment among minorities is rooted in the military's meritocratic organization. Having attributed specific characteristics to the experience of peace-time military service for minority groups, any continuing departure from average civilian trends in job satisfaction is most likely attributable to unmeasured dimensions of more equitable conditions associated with military life. In the absence of civilian-military comparison variables that explicitly capture how racial discrimination and segregation differ across the two environments, military affiliation is the best proxy for such conditions. Such high minority satisfaction in the military demonstrates that the structure of organizations is powerful enough to reverse differences in relative satisfaction among key status groups.

Minorities' marked preference for military life over civilian life on such a range of characteristics makes a strong case for their continued position of disadvantage in the civilian

world. Similarly, white men's consistently low scores of satisfaction with military life likely reflect a pervasive privilege in the larger society that the military has either eliminated or substantially reduced. Such findings suggest that workplace structure, not ethnic identity, predicts perceptions of well-being in occupations.

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