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Reinstitutionalizing Families: Life Course Policy and Marriage in the Military

The transition to adulthood has become an increasingly telescoped process for Americans with marital formation occurring increasingly later in the life course. It is therefore striking to find a context like the U.S. military, in which marriage rates bear an anachronistic resemblance to those of the 1950s era. Using narrative data from life history interviews with military affiliates, the authors show that the military has reinstitutionalized military families at the same time that civilian families are becoming deinstitutionalized. Structural conditions of modern military service, such as war deployment and frequent geographical relocation, have created policies that rely on families to make these conditions more bearable to military personnel. These policies are part of an overarching institutional culture that directly and indirectly promotes marriage. The authors bring together life course literatures on turning points, the welfare state and linked lives to show how the military has reinstitutionalized families in these ways.

Research shows that the pathways taken to adulthood leave an indelible mark on the life

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course (Rindfuss, 1991). One of these pathways to adulthood—marriage—now occurs increasingly later in the American life course (Lesthaeghe & Neidert, 2006). Among some low-income populations, marriage is often foregone altogether (Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Goldstein & Kenney, 2001). This retreat from marriage reflects the protracted and individualized transition to adulthood that has become common throughout the Western world. In the midst of this societal shift, one well-known American institution appears resistant to these processes: The U.S. military, which is characterized by early and pervasive marriage rates (Lundquist 2004; Lundquist & Smith 2005; Drummet, Coleman, & Cable, 2003; Hogan & Furst Seifert, 2010; Teachman, 2009) that today stand in contrast to the rest of U.S. society. Although these trends have been well documented, the processes through which they occur are poorly understood. We suggest that U.S. military service hastens an early transition to adulthood by deliberately embedding families into its core institutional structure. In so doing, we bring together life course literatures on turning points, the welfare state, and linked lives to show how the military has reinstitutionalized families.

Existing explanations for prevalent military marriage rates center primarily on its compensation package, in particular financial incentives provided by housing benefits for married couples (Hogan & Furst Seifert, 2010; U.S. Department of Defense, 2008. We take a broader view. On the basis of life history interviews, we argue

that housing benefits are but a small piece of the puzzle contextualizing military marriage. Major structural conditions of modern military service, such as war deployment and the military's inexorable demand for frequent geographic relocation, have created policies that implicitly rely on families to make these conditions more bearable to service members. These policies are part of an overarching institutional culture that directly and indirectly promotes marriage.

BACKGROUND

During the brief period lasting from the end of World War II into the 1970s, the transition to adulthood was far more uniform than it is today. Life course theorists call this the *Fordist era*, one that was characterized by early and near-universal marriage (Katz & Autor, 1999; Mayer, 2004; Mayer & Muller, 1986; Sironi & Furstenberg, 2012). Postwar socioeconomic mobility provided secure employment earlier in the life stage, whereas today upward mobility has become a privilege enjoyed mainly by the college educated. In tandem, women's employment has increased dramatically due to the decline of family wages and shifts in gender values. In this post-Fordist, deindustrialized era, marriage has been pushed back increasingly later in the life course, and for some it is out of reach completely. In short, families are diversifying and deinstitutionalizing.

In the military, on the other hand, families have been reinstitutionalized. Repeat studies have shown that marriage is much higher among service members than their same-age civilian counterparts (Drummet et al., 2003; Lundquist, 2004; Teachman, 2009). Research has shown that role transitions have differing impacts depending on whether they occur at normatively prescribed periods during the life course (Settersten & Hägestad, 1996). While early marriage among civilians has become normatively "out of time," the pervasiveness of young military marriage makes it culturally "on time" in that context. Little is known empirically about how this process happens. Few sources collect data on the military population, and those that do are limited. Nevertheless, a substantial amount of speculative attention has been given to the military's housing benefits as an incentivizing factor. Single, lower ranking enlistees must live in military barracks, but upon marriage they may move into privatized housing and receive rental funds.

This is called the *basic allowance* for housing. The average allowance for junior enlistees ranges from \$800 to \$1,900 per month ("2014 Basic Allowance," 2014). Anecdotes about "green card marriages"—arrangements between friends for a housing allowance—are common. Even at higher ranks, where barracks are not required, married members receive a higher housing allowance than singles so that they can purchase more living space in the civilian economy. The difference adds up to an annual \$2,500 differential between the two groups.

A recent report by the Defense Advisory Committee on Military Compensation recommended abolishing the housing differential, concluding that the policy is embedded with a marriage incentive (U.S. Department of Defense, 2008). Scholars have also attributed housing policy to early marriage (Kelty, Kleykamp, & Segal, 2010). Only one study tested the impact of housing policy empirically, concluding that housing benefits are a major motivating factor of early marriage in the military (Hogan & Furst Seifert, 2010). Although the authors creatively manipulated cross-sectional data to rule out selectivity, they left out a number of broader incentives for military marriages that we argue are built into the basic military employment structure. Viewing housing benefits as a "perverse incentive" that inadvertently causes marriage eclipses something more pervasive. In fact, the military has a powerful incentive to institutionalize early marriage among its troops.

THE MILITARY AS A TURNING POINT

Glen Elder (1986) was one of the first scholars to examine the critical role of military service in the life course, connecting veterans' stories to their changing society. Although military service has played a varying role for different cohorts in differing eras, it has always served as an institutional turning point in the lives of young people. During the draft era, military service enabled a knifing off of negative influences while simultaneously delaying the transition to adulthood (Laub & Sampson, 2003). Although military service no longer affects as many Americans as it did during the height of World War II, it remains America's largest employer and, as such, is a major pathway to adulthood in our society.

Because of low retention rates after the Korean War due to family disruption, the Pentagon resolved to make families an essential

component of personnel policy and management (Bourg & Segal, 1999; Little, 1971). The transition to the all-volunteer force in 1973 required reinvention in order to recruit and retain young people amid civilian labor market competition. To offset the hardships of enlisted life, the Pentagon adopted an unusual array of policies to support families, including full family health coverage, family housing, day care services, schooling systems, and so on. These policies are unique in U.S. society as a whole, which lacks a well-articulated welfare state, and rarer still in the low-wage economy. Today's military still serves as a crucial turning point in young people's lives but, instead of delaying it, it now advances the transition to adulthood in the form of marriage. This stands in marked contrast to other major institutions that serve as influential turning points in the lives of young adults. The higher education and penal system, for example, delay and disrupt family formation. In this sense the military is unusual.

MILITARY SERVICE IN THE ABSENCE OF A STRONG WELFARE STATE

Life course scholars have observed that the welfare state has become a major source of important life course markers throughout Europe (Mayer & Muller, 1986; Settersten, 2008). Although the U.S. welfare state is comparatively less generous, its military stands in contrast as a major provider of universalistic entitlements to service members and their families. It is not a surprise, then, that military service is a major determinant of young adult life course transitions in the United States. Work-family strain characterizes all employment in the postindustrial era; however, military travel and deployment demands are particularly extreme. To lessen this tension, the service engulfs families into the military apparatus entirely. The results of this are reflected in the population of dependents and spouses that now dwarfs the number of members, in clear contrast to the draft era (Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, 2013).

In the absence of draft-era coercion, the military had to gain recruits' consent to control in a number of other ways. Janowitz (1964) famously argued that a future military would rely on manipulation, persuasion, and group consensus. An important part of this persuasion process is providing two elements that are often

out of reach to working class young adults: (a) secure employment with opportunity for advancement and (b) ample provision for family members. These conditions were created to serve the needs of both military families and the military, although toward two different ends.

Toward the first end, military enlistment provides a rare form of employment to young people, the equivalent of what the unionized factory job was in the past. Economic security and career stability at early life stages for these youth has led to a more stable transition to adulthood than for civilians (Kelty et al., 2010). Relative to entry-level service economy jobs for young people who lack a college degree, military work pays in the top percentile (U.S. Department of Defense, 2008). To illustrate, Walmart, second in size only to the military, offers an average full-time annual wage of \$26,000 with few to no benefits (Folbre, 2013). Once the military's in-kind benefits, such as universal health care, retirement pension, continuing education, GI Bill education benefits, and room and board are factored in, military service compensation eclipses other entry-level jobs in the service economy, with an estimated \$99,000 entry level value (Folbre, 2013). Furthermore, military active duty members and veterans are able to acquire mortgages without down payments and commonly purchase homes earlier than civilians (Segal & Sullivan, 1998). Military service is largely immune to layoffs while providing an unambiguous occupational mobility ladder. As a result, military enlistment for today's cohorts triggers a succession of early role transitions that reverberate through the life course. In this article we focus on marriage, but other pathways to adulthood, such as early career entry, homeownership, and early parenthood, are intertwined, mutually influential experiences for many military youth.

Toward the second end, the military depends implicitly on familial labor, which explains in part the generosity of its benefits. Here we draw a parallel to the more conservative branch of European countries described in the comparative welfare state literature (Esping-Andersen, 1990). These welfare states channel social policies through the employed male head of household, relying on the reproductive and caretaking labor of women. Similarly, in an extension of Becker's (1981) household specialization model, military spouses are expected to provide a full support system in the face of long

hours, constant transfers, and war deployments. This intensive reliance on spousal labor by the military intersects with the life course concept of linked lives to aptly illustrate the process through which the military institutionalizes marriages.

LINKED LIVES

A foundational element of the life course perspective, *linked lives* describes the sharing of mutually intertwined life trajectories that extend throughout the life course (Elder, 1998; Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003). Although often intergenerationally focused, such research also focuses on the interconnected lives of spouses (Moen & Wethington, 1998). Spouses are among the most intensive linkages because they move through the life course together. This is particularly true of the military, in which the nuclear family members are often geographically separated from extended family members.

The military plays an explicit role in this linking process because it depends upon spousal support roles to operate. To illustrate, the Army spouse guide (U.S. Army, 2007) notes that “families must be very self-reliant, such as when a soldier is at training, a special duty assignment, or even deployed overseas,” which will bring about “new confidence . . . gained from its ability to work together and to grow while supporting the Soldier” (p. 2). The Army’s *Deployment Readiness Family Handbook for DA Civilians and Family Members* (U.S. Army, 2010) extends this point, demonstrating that the family domain is inherently a “militarized” space:

It is of utmost importance that Army Families prepare, train, and resource themselves for the day-to-day requirements associated with Army living. They must be ready to assume command of the home front in the absence of their Soldier on short notice. This means equipping, arming, and training as Army Families to meet the needs of self-reliance, preservation, and forward movement as Soldiers focus on the mission that lies in front of them. (p. 9)

As such, family members are clearly also doing time in the service. Military research has shown that, in addition to being more likely to reenlist, married members have fewer depressive symptoms and lower rates of job-related problems (Burnham, Meredith, Sherbourne, Valdez, & Vernez, 1992). Thus, linking the lives of its

members to spouses is an effective strategy not only to ensure domestic support but also to counteract unpredictable or even volatile elements of young (usually male) adulthood.

Military families receive the generous provision described earlier in exchange for a high degree of regulation. The military aggressively intervenes with social services it deems appropriate, excludes nonnormative families, and enforces conservative family military law (Burland & Lundquist, 2012). Although the military recently decreed that officer promotion could no longer be influenced by the actions of the spouse, expectations for volunteerism and other uncompensated work operate informally (Gassmann, 2010; Harrell, 2001a), illustrating the depth of linked lives in the military. Spouses of all ranks are relied on to be the primary caretaker of the children during deployment and to participate in military culture integration classes and family support groups (Harrell, 2001b). Military volunteer organizations expect and rely on the labor of family members, an invisible military subsidy worth billions (Christensen, 2011; Gassmann, 2010). The geographic structure of the military career makes family portability a necessity, which necessarily deprioritizes spousal careers. Military spouses are often unable to accumulate work experience and face higher rates of unemployment than civilians (Kleykamp, 2012). This structural feature of the military is more supportive of breadwinner-homemaker families than dual-career families and, much like conservative European welfare states, relies on the specialized labor of each member. This necessity helps explain the considerably generous in-kind benefits provided by the military to entry-level, low-skill workers.

A policy encouraging linked lives ensures the provision of care work and emotion labor, in particular during episodes of war when service members need it most. Running the household while the employee is at war and being available psychologically and emotionally for the deployed member and the military community as a whole are major support roles. The *Deployment Handbook* urges the spouse to “Accept your responsibility [to the Unit] in assisting in a positive and nurturing role” (U.S. Army, 2007, p. 25). It suggests how spouses can best help their children process the long-term absence of a parent while emphasizing the importance of staying connected to the soldier:

As you and your Family members are learning ways to manage and cope with the separation and deployment of a loved one, it is equally important to stay in touch and connected throughout the deployment . . . Maintaining an emotional connection is essential . . . Active communication also boosts morale for both the Soldier and those left at home. (U.S. Army, 2010, p. 60)

This caretaking labor at the home front provides service members and other military families with security and morale that the military would find difficult to substitute in other forms. The military family literature shows that combat deployment is associated with higher stress levels for families (Huebner, Mancini, Wilcox, Grass, & Grass, 2007; Karney & Crown, 2007; RAND Corporation, 2008), yet it has also found that military families are unusually resilient in a variety of ways (Karney & Crown, 2007; MacDermid Wadsworth, 2010). This resilience effect must be credited to the great deal of unpaid work and emotion management on the part of spouses whose lives have been linked to the military apparatus.

Furthermore, the spouse's duality as both military affiliate and civilian provides a crucial, often-overlooked service for the military: that of reintegrating veterans into civilian life and serving as ambassadors for their emotional management throughout the transition. The military's family support and expectation for reciprocity can become a lifelong obligation, even after active duty. GI Bill educational transfers to family members, disability and retirement pensions, and veteran home loans are not freely given; family members are major long-term caregivers of physically disabled and emotionally disturbed veterans (Rosen, Durand, & Martin, 2000). Even in the event of death, the military remains entwined in the family's life. In exchange for survivors' benefits, the widow or widower's marital status is monitored to in order to determine whether he or she will continue to receive full benefits. By being paid not to remarry, the widow/widower's emotion work of bereavement is thus symbolically extended across the life course.

Very little empirical research has investigated the ways in which the lives of family members are shaped by their connection to the military; our research provides important insight into how those linkages are initially formed. In this article we demonstrate that military service reinstitutionalizes marriage in a variety of early-career

stage dimensions of members' lives. Marriage envelops spouses into the military from their civilian life, interconnects their fate to that of the service member, and mutually "militarizes" both individuals. We will show how timing and context within the early military career life course determine the occurrence of such linked lives. The 43 life history interview excerpts that follow provide rich insight into relationship formation in the Army from many perspectives, demonstrating the sheer pervasiveness of opportunities to marry in the military. Our data suggest an institutionalization of nuptiality that extends well beyond abuses of loopholes in housing policy. Three powerful mechanisms that link the lives of spouses to service members are (a) war zone deployment, (b) the marriage policy as it relates to relocation assignments, and (c) overarching Fordist regime-like characteristics of military employment. Together, these structural conditions of the military institution function as marriage catalysts, pushing the transition to adulthood early in life for its members.

METHOD

In 2010 and 2011 the first author conducted a study of individuals associated with two U.S. Army military installations located in Germany as part of a research project sponsored by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. Qualitative data from 79 interviews (43 in-depth, semistructured life history interviews and 36 targeted short topical interviews) were collected over a period of 11 months. This data collection is the first stage in a comparative project that evaluates institutional impacts on U.S. families across a spectrum of four workplace sites where the degree of "total institutionalism" varies from high to low: (a) an international military base, (b) a domestic military base, (c) civil service employment, and (d) private sector employment.

We use life history interviews for this article ($N = 43$), which solicited narratives on the full spectrum of the respondents' life events. We chose a life history interview approach in order to better understand the meaning people construct about their experiences and their relationships. This narrative process provides an opportunity for new meanings to emerge from life events and experiences, generating respondent reflections that might otherwise go unspoken and even unrealized (Atkinson, 1998).

The first author conducted this research as a part-time guest lecturer with a military-affiliated institution that provides educational classes to U.S. active duty soldiers and family members stationed in Europe. Through her contacts at the institution and in the local community, she snowball-sampled respondents associated with two different Army installations in Germany. Germany was chosen as the international study site it hosts the largest proportion of the U.S. military population outside the United States, with 287 military bases (Lutz, 2009) and is considered to be a standard tour of duty for most military families. Both affiliation sites were established in the immediate post-World War II era during the beginning of U.S. occupation in Germany. Although each installation has similar command functions, they differ drastically in size and surroundings. The first site is small, consisting of approximately 15,000 community members, and located in an industrial city. The second site is large, with approximately 60,000 community members, and situated in a historic, tourist city. Interviews took place at a location of the respondents' choice outside work hours and lasted from 90 minutes to 3 hours. She used purposive sampling (Patton, 1990) to select a wide range of individuals affected by the military from differing locations within the institution. Institutional review board approval was granted, and we ensured confidentiality and protection of respondent identities.

Active duty enlisted soldiers comprised half the sample, with unmarried partners, spouses, and adult children comprising the other half. The first author used an interpretive approach to develop emergent themes (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) on the ways that enlistment in a near-total institution differentially affects relationships and other outcomes. She was open to discovering the specific catalysts for marriage from the perspectives of interviewees while remaining attentive to the institutionalized context in which such catalysts were occurring and in which decisions were being made. Going into the field, she began with some sensitizing concepts (or tacit knowledge) based on the literature about military families, but the data collection process was primarily inductive. As themes emerged from interviews, her inquiry became increasingly more focused and she continually adjusted the sampling frame to maximize variation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Although the project focuses on the military's impact on individuals and their families, the first half of the interview established a baseline comparison to civilian life prior to one's military experience. Thus, interviews began with childhood memories of immediate and extended family, neighborhood, schooling, and friendship experiences and moved sequentially over the life course to encompass the individual's major life events, schooling and employment transitions, and relationship histories. The process of going through detailed life experiences from early to present provided opportunities for the respondents to express key themes of most importance to them and a nuanced context against which to position their current situation and belief system. The breadth of the interviews also allowed for the identification of continuities, as well as inconsistencies and anomalies, in the narratives. As an example, respondents framed marital decisions as purely individual decisions, rooted in the expected descriptions of love and romance. But in later describing the events surrounding the marital decision, their language consistently indicated a notable absence of autonomy.

The first author was both an insider and an outsider among participants. Being an American living abroad in Germany created an instant bond in a way it would not have if the interviews had taken place in the United States. She often knew the person who had referred the respondent to her, which helped create a foundation of some trust. Some of the interviews took place with former students in her small, 18-student Introduction to Sociology course. Although her position of relative power could have created a distancing effect, her out-group civilian status made her less threatening. Some students remarked that they were able to share information with her that they would have felt less comfortable revealing to, say, a higher ranking official in the military. There was also a previous semester's worth of rapport and trust built up with former students, which made for a safer space for communication and candid discussion. Outside the interviews, the researcher spent a year in the field working and socializing with a wide variety of military affiliates. This prolonged engagement process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), informed by her career-long study of military social dynamics, provided a strong foundation from which to carry out the study.

The average age of the respondents was early to mid-20s. A slight majority of the interviewees (58%) were men; most were either African American (40%) or White (45%); the third largest ethnic group was Latina/Latino (12%). Of the soldiers, most were enlisted, not officers. Enlisted soldiers comprise 80% of the military and do not enter with college degrees like officers do. Most soldiers were relatively junior, meaning that they were in low to middle military ranks and had been on active duty for 3 to 4 years. The average age at marriage was 22. All the soldiers had previous experience in stateside military service, and the life history interviews collected this information.

Data coding took place in a series of phases. The first author trained a team of five research assistants, and the group met weekly to collaboratively code the interviews using the open source programming software WeftQDA (www.pressure.to/qda/). The group began by reading through each of the transcripts in an open coding process to group a priori themes into initial conceptual codes. Then we began to dimensionalize (LaRossa, 2012) the codes into specific variables by systematically comparing the frequency and nuances of these themes as we worked sequentially through the interviews, going back frequently to expand or refine the original coding schema. In this axial coding phase, we paid special attention both within and across interviews to repetitions of specific words and phrases, contradictory sentiments, and patterns related to demographic and life course context. In the final coding phase, we identified interrelated subcategories relating to romantic relationships, both the respondents' own and those around them, and their experiences of military life that affected these relationships.

We now provide a brief description of our coding process. Married respondents, for example, had fairly standard and immediate answers when asked why they had married, answering with normative cultural scripts: "I was in love," "She was my best friend," "We were ready," and so on. But when we went through their life histories year by year, it became clear that, as with most major life decisions, timing and context were key driving factors. Through a constant-comparison process we identified two recurring subthemes of geographic relocation and war deployment that infused narrative descriptions of life events leading up to marital decisions. Although our

original a priori codes included categories for the pro-nuptial influence of life course conditions in the military, respondents rarely drew direct associations between the two. But variables embodying the early transition to adulthood were constantly described, and we began to appreciate how the two other emerging subthemes were intimately embedded within this institutional context. Whereas the role of relocation, deployment, and Fordism subthemes were fairly constant without variation across the respondents' military affiliation, gender, and ethnicity, variation did emerge in relation to the housing benefits subtheme, primarily with regard to sexual orientation. In general, more discordant discourses emerged with regard to the housing benefits theme than the other subthemes.

We assessed interrater reliability continuously as we went through the coding and analysis process. There was 60% agreement on the first iteration of coding variables. After reexamining data where disagreement was highest, we triangulated and refined the schema, resulting in high levels of agreement of 80% + as the coding process matured. We later solicited comments from one of the key respondents on an early draft of this article. This, combined with the use of multiple coders using an interactive constant-comparison process and the first author's cultural immersion in the study environment, ensured accurate data interpretation and extensive analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

FINDINGS

In the following sections we present vignettes from our interviews that most clearly illuminate the major themes emerging from our narrative analysis. First, we assess the extent to which housing incentives drive marital behaviors in the military. We then describe two other emergent narratives that point to a more structural incorporation of early marriage in the military: (a) war deployment and (b) duty reassignment. Finally, we analyze the recurring themes of the military's social welfare provision that permeate the biographies and narratives of our interviews and provide a backdrop against which the foregoing themes occur.

The Promise of Housing

In the existing literature, housing benefits are often invoked to explain early marriage in the

military; however, we found that its role in incentivizing marriage failed to map onto common arguments regarding the financial advantages of such benefits. Instead, it played more of an escape role for our respondents than a financial one. Most of the narratives focused on the fact that barracks afford far less privacy than a private residence and that barracks are subject to rules and scrutiny by one's superiors. For example, Alex, an outgoing junior reservist married to an active duty spouse, jokingly described his search for a "spouse shield" from the barracks. For Alex and his wife, getting married was a way to avoid feeling like they were living in a fishbowl: "They're watching you," he observed. "The barracks is a horrible thing to live in. Everybody knows your business. When you have a family, nobody comes and bothers you." Now, 3 years later and expecting a baby, he said that it worked out for the best. "It was supposed to be a contract marriage at first . . . but it turned into a real relationship." His wife, Mary, a soft-spoken 22-year-old who grew up in the military, often raised a sardonic eyebrow at her husband's comments during the interview. On this point, however, she concurred, adding, "Yeah, like Jenelle and Mark. They got to the unit and they didn't know each other, got married, now they're having a kid. A lot of people do that." After describing a barracks money pool among men taking bets on which of the only three women in the barracks would sleep with them first, she added, "Thank God I found my husband and got out of the barracks!"

Later in the interview, however, both Alex and Mary revealed an earlier impetus for getting married, which happened well before Mary ever began living in the German barracks. They had been dating in the United States for about 8 months, both living in on-base barracks, when she was transferred to a duty station in Germany:

We had strong feelings for each other . . . we went to the courthouse and got married so he could come back over [to Germany]. Technically, he wouldn't have housing here unless he was a dependent, which now he is.

After a few months of barracks life on a German Army base, Mary moved into an apartment once Alex was transferred to join her.

Erin, a high-ranking noncommissioned officer, was sympathetic to the "barracks escape" theme. Recalling her own experience as a

junior-ranked enlistee, she said, "You live in a little, you know, 10 × 15 cell, and you probably have to share a bathroom . . . You don't have your own kitchen" She said that she doesn't blame couples, adding, "Like, I can come and, uh, inspect the room, basically whenever I want . . . but if you're married, I can't just come in your house." The incentive to escape the watchful eye of one's superiors and gain some modicum of privacy was mentioned often among the interviewees. Outside the military, young couples who wish to escape parental rules leave the house and establish a cohabiting union. In the recent past, however, their options were more similar to Mary's and Alex's: The only acceptable way they could enter an intimate union was to marry. In the military setting, this antiquated expectation continues because of the structure of the workforce and the policies it has adopted.

There were alternative views. Many interviewees thought contract marriages were more hype than they were common, as Zack, a mid-level enlistee in his early 30s, explained:

They're too much trouble. Not worth the money. The problem is, there's all the other stuff that goes along with it on the legal stance. Nah. Not for a couple extra hundred bucks . . . You can get in big trouble if they find out.

Zack's commentary indicates that there is substantial onus on the couple to "prove" that they are in a legitimate union. Derek, a veteran contractor, similarly mentioned that, although some people "talk the talk" about contract marriages, they are uncommon. Darryl, another veteran contractor, voiced surprise that anyone could dislike barracks life, saying, "I've never met anybody who done that. I loved the barracks. The barracks was a blast—we partied the hell out of the barracks!"

But not everyone finds the barracks to be such a blast. This context holds less allure for soldiers struggling to maintain their sexual identity in the shadow of the former "Don't Ask Don't Tell" (DADT) policy. Gay and lesbian service members have far more to lose in barracks life and described the extra risk and trouble of a contract marriage as worth it. At one point Arnold, a constantly smiling junior enlistee with a deep Southern accent, showed me a picture of his wife, who was still living back in the United States. A few months later I ran into him and a

friend on post, holding hands; he introduced her to me, with visible discomfort, as his girlfriend. When we met for our interview a few weeks later, he told me he would never cheat on a “real” wife and that, in fact, the woman in the States was a contract wife from his previous military posting in Alabama. He explained that his wife, a civilian and good friend, was in a committed lesbian relationship with one of his friends, a female soldier, who in turn was involved in a contract marriage with a gay soldier. This arrangement enabled the two women to live off post together, and Arnold and the gay soldier each used their extra housing allowance to obtain their own off-base housing, thereby avoiding “superiors coming into your room at 3 o’clock in the morning without warning going through your stuff.” It provided an altogether different kind of “spouse shield” for the lesbian and gay service members whose sexual identities might otherwise come under scrutiny. For Arnold, who made sure to describe himself as “straight as an arrow in Cupid’s quiver,” this marital arrangement enabled him to live at home with his mother and help her out with his share of the housing allowance while also providing medical and dental benefits to his contract wife (who could not legally marry her partner in the military). If this seems complicated, it is. Arnold detailed his effort to keep up such appearances on his Facebook and MySpace pages, noting that military oversight was “very strict on it—talking to your friends, checking your records.”

Erik, a mid-level enlisted self-described “loudmouth” who gained his American citizenship during his stint in Afghanistan, described a similar arrangement: “You know that [housing allowance], all of us queers get married for that [laughs]!” While serving his first term in Texas, he married a friend so that they could “live outside, two separate lives.” He explained, “I didn’t want nobody saying ‘Erik is gay’ and be all up in my business, um, so I needed to move off post and the only way to do that was to get married.” For gay individuals under the former DADT policy, the need for a spouse shield took on more urgency, allowing them to avoid institutionally enforced stigma and potential job loss.

Mobility and Military Families

By far the most common marriage scenario described by military affiliates revolved around

a sudden and looming externally imposed deadline. Couples suddenly had to decide whether to commit to one another much earlier than anticipated. Most respondents described making a major relationship decision upon receiving news of an upcoming war deployment or, more frequently, an upcoming duty station move. The language describing marital decisions around these events evoked words like “rush,” “haste,” and “pressing.” We divide the narrative themes into two sections. The first involves impending war deployment and how couples negotiate this kind of separation. The second involves relocation, a permanent change of duty station location that occurs every few years, forcing couples into a stark choice: link their lives together in marriage or permanently separate.

Deployment and emotional connection. Military marriages sometimes occur in response to imminent war separation. When a service member is sent to a war zone, anxieties and emotions run high. Committing to marriage is one way to solidify a relationship against hardship, providing the service member with an emotional connection to home. Many soldiers discussed marital decisions as stemming from an emotional need for stability in the face of the unknown. This process is especially heightened in the climate of mixed fear and excitement that surrounds deployment into a war zone. Derek, a 21-year-old mid-level enlistee, got married just before going to Iraq. He said it made the experience easier “knowing you have a reason to come home . . . knowing you have someone waiting on you.” Connecting to loved ones while away and anticipating a homecoming and a life together enables service members to better navigate the stresses of war zone deployment. This is an often-overlooked way that the military benefits from incorporating families into service. Echoing Derek’s sentiment, Tony reflected on his experience with soldiers in his platoon: “Deployment has a strong effect on soldiers that have never been into that situation.” A more senior enlistee who considered himself a mentor to incoming junior soldiers elaborated:

These young boys come in, vulnerable, these women kiss them on their neck, say, “I love you,” and they’re ready to get married . . . I know guys that would’ve met a girl, dated 3–4 weeks and he’s about to go down-range and he wants to marry her before he deploys . . . It happens a lot.

Although deployments sometimes trigger hasty marriages, other soldiers described painful separations, which often led to breakups at some point during the 12- to 16-month deployment. Soldiers called these break-ups "Dear John" letters, although for most these days it is an email. But some interviewees made marital engagement decisions during deployment, often resulting in proxy marriages over the Internet. Indeed, there exist half a dozen online proxy-by-marriage services advertised on Google that cater specifically to deployed service members, and a scan of the testimonials echoes the sentiments we document here: worry, commitment, connection.

Upon notification of deployment, interviewees described their emotions as running high, making commitment a way to ease the separation. "I was a mess thinking about it . . . I wrote him long letters . . . In some ways I loved him even more at that time because, like, I knew he might never come back, you know?" remembered Carol, a young civilian woman who married her junior enlisted boyfriend before he left for Afghanistan. Although Carol was still married 4 years later and described her husband as her best friend, her anecdote suggests that decisions made during the intensified context of war are sometimes idealized. Some respondents, however, were openly practical about the decision. Christine, a veteran who married her enlisted boyfriend 2 weeks prior to his Iraq deployment, explained:

I wasn't ready to get married, but I knew there might be the possibility that . . . [leaves sentence unfinished]. It was the best option to take care of my daughter and myself. We already owned a house together. We were practically married, so might as well put a label on it.

The possible deployment death of her partner was the trigger that led Christine to seek official military recognition so that the family would receive support if her husband were to die in the line of duty. Survivor's benefits are generally hundreds of thousands of dollars along with a lifetime pension. This is a deliberate policy on the part of the military that seeks to compensate a family's sacrifice, for both the loss of a loved one and for their support during deployment. Her husband was delivered home to Christine with traumatic brain injury, whom the Army now recognized as his official caregiver spouse:

I was just so grateful he, you know, survived the [improvised explosive device] . . . he always knew we were back there rooting for him and made it back safely to us . . . The recovery has been hardest on Michelle (stepdaughter), who just doesn't get why he seems so different now.

Christine's story illustrates the linked lives role of military marriage. The military provides generous paternalistic policies to partners, but only to those who are married. Upon marriage, the transition is swift. Christine's and her daughter's fate became officially bound up in her husband's life course trajectory and his recovery from the traumatic brain injury.

Not only does military policy make marriage accessible, but also its existence signals a family-supportive culture. For most of the narratives, war-related marriage was a way to remain emotionally connected during an impending, high-risk separation. Relationship solidification in the midst of traumatic events is not without precedent in studies of nonmilitary families (Cohan & Cole, 2002). The fact that the anticipated stressful event is combined with an imminent couple separation is likely to lead to a desire to commit, perhaps as way to give the couple strength to get through the deployment. This emotion labor from the home front helps ensure smoother deployments and more rapid postdeployment recovery among the military's labor force.

Although war deployment is surely an inducement to marriage, only a minority of military couples face deployment at this stage in their relationship. Military marriage rates have been high throughout the last 40 years, including during peacetime. Thus, it is important to examine how couples deal with the major defining structural component of military service that distinguishes it from almost any other civilian job: its constant nomadic lifestyle.

Relocation and nomadic lifestyle. By far the most pivotal pretext for marriage in the military revealed by the interview data relates to the Permanent Change of Station (PCS) process, which occurs every 2 to 3 years. To deal with the globalized nature of U.S. peacekeeping, the military must offer its labor force a way to include families in the face of an imposed nomadic lifestyle. The military's solution is to incorporate families in their entirety, and it pays the full relocation costs for each family member. This policy enables families to stay together while also being

a crucial way for the military to ensure a portable support system for its employees. It is important to note that PCS moves also promote the formation of new marriages. Unmarried couples face permanent separation; however, if they marry in anticipation of an upcoming duty change, the spouse is fully integrated into the relocation process. Thus, relationships that would have otherwise ended or eventually resulted in marriage undergo a premature turning point process.

When considering the career cycle of a recruit, transfers occur more frequently over time than either war deployments or barracks assignments. Nowhere in the military marriage literature did we find speculation as to the strong incentive that geographical separation avoidance is likely to play in the lives of military members. Yet this is a major component that is built into today's military service. Military nomadism is a theme that emerged from our very first interviews. Whether married, single, or a dependent, relocation loomed large as an anticipated event in the lives of each of the interviewees. It was described as a distinct turning point in the life course of a romantic relationship when couples were forced to make a decision. Unlike war deployment, when military members usually return, a PCS means that the partner is unlikely to return to that town again. Thus, couples are faced with two diametrically opposed choices: (a) dissolve their relationship or (b) transition into a marital arrangement. For the civilian partner, marriage means being brought along, all expenses paid, to the next duty station. But though the moving expenses are free, there is an implicit expectation on the part of the military. Marriage to a service member means linking your life to the military system and taking on a distinct labor role as a military spouse, while leaving your civilian lifestyle, hometown, family, and, often, career behind.

We came to see that although marital decisions were often framed by the interviewees as a choice, their language consistently indicated a notable absence of autonomy. This was particularly true for nonmilitary spouses, whose lives often changed radically upon marriage to a member of the military. Margaret, a new military recruit at the time, had been dating her future husband for 7 months when she was ordered to move across the country. She told her boyfriend there was only one way they could stay together:

"We can get married and you can come with me, or um . . . you know." I really left it up to him. He was, like, "Well, I want to be with you." And I was, like, "Well, then, we need to get married . . . And he said, "All right, if that's what it takes."

Margaret described the difficulties her husband faced leaving his home and adjusting to life out West: "It was rough for him." Just a few months after relocating in order to stay together, they became separated anew when she was called out on a series of overseas duties and then deployed to Iraq for 15 months. Although the couple was able to exercise some control by forcing the military to accommodate their decision to marry, it meant that Margaret's husband was enveloped into the military complex on the military's terms, and they still had no control over Margaret's constantly changing assignments that took her away from their new home. This is a distinctive way in which the linked spousal role is more all encompassing within the military context.

Another soldier, Marta, described how she came to marry her husband, also a soldier, who was about to get transferred:

While I was deployed, we had to get married online . . . And I'm, like, I don't want to get married . . . But at the same time, I know he would be gone by the time I get back if we don't get married, so we had to rush.

In this relationship, war separation was not the catalyst for the decision to marry, although it may well have heightened the intensity of the commitment. The ultimate catalyst was the prospect of Marta returning from a war zone to find that her boyfriend has been shipped off to another location. Similarly, Jenna, a veteran, married to avoid a breakup. Describing the circumstances under which her first marriage took place at age 18, she prefaced her story with, "Well, it's a little embarrassing," continuing, "I dated him for six months and he was getting stationed somewhere else and he was, like, 'I want to take you with me,' and I was, like, 'Naaaah!' But then we just got married on a whim." Five days later, realizing this was "probably the stupidest thing I'd ever done in my life," Jenna filed for an annulment. Her story highlights the possibility that, depending on when in the life of a relationship a transfer occurs, individuals may be forced to make premature decisions about the

relationship's significance. Jenna is now married to a different soldier.

This scenario was common, both among the interviewees themselves and in stories they relayed about their friends in the military. For example, Amy, an enlisted soldier, shared the following:

Yeah, tons of soldiers get married just so they can be with their girlfriend. I kinda did this. I got an assignment to Italy and missed my boyfriend so much that I returned for a few days on leave and married him—just so he could get reassigned to Italy. It worked, but the problem is we didn't get married for the right reasons, and we broke up within a year. Getting married just for convenience is never a good idea.

Margaret, Marta's, and Jenna's stories suggest that divorce may not be an unexpected outcome when marriages occur under hurried circumstances. Derek, the veteran contractor we introduced earlier, himself a divorcee, told us, "That's why the divorce rate is twice as high in the Army side than the civilian side, because you've got to get married without really knowing somebody."

Derek's perception of divorce counters evidence showing that, on average, the divorce rate in the military is no higher than among civilians (Karney & Crown, 2007), but it supports studies showing that women soldiers (Adler-Baeder, Pittman, & Taylor, 2006) and combat veterans have high divorce rates (MacLean & Elder, 2007). There is widespread anecdotal speculation that too many service members are marrying before they are mature enough to choose compatible partners. Derek's comments also suggest that all marriages, whether remarriages or first marriages, are heavily incentivized. Counting on two hands the number of couples he knew who married in order to transfer as a couple, he went on to explain, "You meet someone in the military and it's two years at any given duty station; how [else] are you gonna stay together?" The military's imposed nomadism clearly makes life challenging for individuals who wish to foster a long-term, nonmarital relationship. Darryl echoed Derek's opinion, saying, "The only way to do it is 'Let's get married. You can come with me.' . . . Because of the urgency of things and not knowing where we're going, we rush things."

Interviewees matter-of-factly described relocation-driven marriages as simply a part of military life. Brenda, the daughter of an officer

who married an enlisted soldier when she was just 19, said that all of her military-affiliated family members had married young. When asked why she thought this was, she said, "Well, we all know long distance just doesn't work," indicating that these marriages took place to avoid the difficulties of maintaining a relationship from afar. Mary, who earlier discussed her marriage as a way for her boyfriend to join her in Germany, said her civilian friends were surprised by how young she married. When asked more about this she remarked, "I think that's normal . . . it's because we know eventually you have to move on. You don't want to end a relationship with that person, so you have to get married." Although Mary indicated that her early marriage was out of the culturally proscribed life course time frame of civilian society, it was clearly normative in the military environment.

Anna, the daughter of military parents (who knew each other for 2 weeks before getting married after notification of a transfer to Europe) was dating an enlisted soldier and agreed, saying she will probably get married sooner than later: "I don't know if I want to get married so soon, but the military forces you to. I hate to say it." Then she went on, "When he moves to his new duty station . . . I can't afford to just pick up and go with him, but the Army will pay for me if I'm married to him." Along with other accounts, Anna's example illustrates the way that the military job held by her boyfriend had a ripple effect into her own linked life. Also, upon marriage, Anna's life would dramatically alter, beginning first with a major relocation. These stories also demonstrate how early ages at marriage in the military correspond to the early life course stage at which a recruit experiences his or her first duty station transfer.

Incidentally, the nomadic lifestyle of military service and its impact on relationships is not limited to romantic relationships. Darryl described how couples at least have the option of marriage as a way to buffer the negative effects of constant relocation:

Darryl: [Marriage] is a way to save their relationship . . . because, no matter what [Military Occupational Specialty] or position, it's impossible to have a stable relationship.

Interviewer: So not just intimate relationships?

Darryl: Anybody. You have to start all over again. You meet somebody the first day you come. . . . In two years, it's bye-bye. Being in the military is

like being on an emotional roller coaster. Can you imagine moving every two years?

Even professional and working friendships are constantly cut short by the military's geographical imperative. As one soldier's husband said to me, "Truthfully, I'll be surprised if she stays in touch with you after we transfer. That's just the way she deals with always having to ditch people. She just cuts 'em off."

This aspect of military life was especially prevalent in conversations related to military children. Interviewees lamented and celebrated military children, whom they saw as advantaged because they learn how to deal well with change but disadvantaged in their lack of lifelong friendships. Thus, romantic relationships are just one type of relationship among many that are threatened by the military's nomadic lifestyle. The consequences of the military lifestyle for such romantic relationships are more visible because there is a deliberate policy that benefits the military apparatus. By design, marital relationships are privileged above all others in the military.

Fordist-Era Employment Conditions

Responses to external stimuli, such as deployment duty transfer orders, and an incentive to escape public barracks all take place within a larger institutional context that has a vested interest in promoting an early transition to adulthood and benefiting from the labor of the families that come along with it. Life course theorists document the transition to adulthood across different historical eras, and the military setting is an institutional context that mimics the traditional, marriage-oriented Fordist era. The degree of provision in place for military families is similar in form and function to the more conservative welfare states in Europe.

Socioeconomic stability is a primary factor that drives marriage rates among civilians. Combined with the structural conditions of military service, its in-kind economic stability fosters an environment in which marriage is extremely common. Few interviewees were unambiguously happy with military service, and some longed for their military affiliation to end. Nevertheless, given often-lackluster civilian employment alternatives, almost every respondent noted economic advancement as a turning point upon becoming affiliated with the service. "Once my mom joined the military,

when I was in middle school, I could see a huge difference," said Anna, recalling her childhood. "I had nice clothes, we had a nice car, lived in military housing . . . It was a huge jump from where I was." Carol, in recounting her rise in living standard upon marrying her soldier husband, asked rhetorically, "I mean, what other place is there you can turn to that you can have a steady job, you have a steady paycheck?" Margaret, who was working at K-Mart before enlisting, said about her civilian employment opportunities, "This isn't going to work for me. I need better income. So, I went active duty. Now, I can't complain. Money, benefits, it's not bad." For Margaret the advantage was not only a higher income but also job security and an array of in-kind benefits absent from the service sector jobs available to someone of her credentials in the civilian labor market: "You're always going to get paid, regardless of whether you're on vacation or not. Up to 30 days of vacation, anytime I want to. Free medical. Free dental. Housing. Steady job."

Another major benefit is education and job training. Jamal, a junior enlistee married to a fellow soldier, entered the military with his GED but will exit with his associate's degree. His story shows how the military serves as a safety net that is lacking in civilian society unless one has the income to purchase one:

I won't have to pay all the student loans back. I'll be finished with my associate's in occupational technology . . . And I had my eyes done, my dental work done, school is taken care of. The majority of things that were issues in my life, it took care of that, so I'm good.

Interviewees often compared their current social and economic status favorably to their civilian reference group from high school while also benefiting from what life course theorists call a "knifing off" of negative influences. Alex, who said that he was engaged in gang activity at the age of 15, exclaimed, "Oh, yeah, but I showed them; I have everything!" He went on to explain his success, as measured in consumer items, including his car, "Mostly Army people, if you ever realized, have brand-new cars. Because when you apply for a loan, they know you're in the Army, it's a stable paycheck." Arthur, who had spent time in jail prior to joining the military, drew similar comparisons:

I keep in touch with the high school friends that were better off than I was. They all went to college and with the recession have had problems getting a job. I feel really fortunate to be in the military and think that if I was to go back into the real world I would definitely be able to secure a good job.

He also pointed out other, intangible aspects of military life that improved the quality of life for his family, such as cultural exposure and access to leisure activities on base:

It's small and quaint but it has this essence of a rich theater and they do plays similar to Broadway . . . It's something good. I'm not sure if I'm using this word out of context, but . . . "affluent." Culture. People go there dressed in a nice suit. I took my son to an opera! Can you believe it?

Arthur's commentary captures an important way in which cultural capital, in addition to human capital, is transferred in the military setting.

A similar recurring theme in the interviews was how such windows of opportunity altered the way individuals thought about themselves and their future. Alex described a personal metamorphosis: "I became a different person. I started thinking, realizing, appreciating more things in life . . . I went to [Advanced Individual Training] and graduated from that in the upper 10 percent of my class." Rico, who grew up in a military family and whose brother is enlisted, described a similar process: "The military has changed my brother's life completely . . . more mature, responsible, settled down, has a family he can actually support now. He's having the life he should be having."

In addition to the socioeconomic supports that might encourage marriage and promote marital stability, some interviewees discussed aspects of military life that are explicitly designed to support marriage. Anna, whose parents, as mentioned earlier, married after knowing each other for only 2 weeks in order to stay together through a duty station transfer, thinks military marriages have more institutional support than civilian marriages:

In the military community there's enough to keep it going . . . Once a month, there's a marriage retreat that goes down to Garmish. My parents have been on it seven times and they don't even have an issue with their marriage. You have to go through counseling, but you get free lodging at the Army resort, get to see the Alps, it's like a

free vacation. Everything—all kinds of stuff . . . Outside the military, you have to pay for that stuff, to go see a counselor . . . The military has a lot of things in place for it.

Such marriage supports are clearly intended to support marriages, once formed, and perhaps also to address perceptions of high divorce rates in the military. Marriage is the norm in the military, which is a natural result of the employment conditions described herein and self-perpetuating in the marriage-normative culture it creates. The pervasiveness of familistic culture in the Army may be best illustrated by the existence of the organization BOSS—"Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers"—that promotes a higher quality of life for unmarried soldiers.

Few individuals attributed economic stability directly to their decision to marry young; however, it emerged as a major undercurrent in each interview. As studies of civilian couples have shown, financial factors are often the primary reason deterring the transition to marriage (Smock, Manning, & Porter, 2005). Such socioeconomic benefits of military service are likely what pushes a couple to decide to marry rather than dissolve their relationship when faced with an upcoming move or with deployment pressures. For example, Rosa, a military spouse married to a midlevel-rank enlistee whose three children and mother-in-law were living in military housing on post, described family and community life on base as a "little time warp." Although she was referring to neighborhood safety and the prevalence of traditional family roles in military communities, we believe this is also an appropriate characterization of marital trends there.

DISCUSSION

It is striking to find a context in which marriage rates bear such an anachronistic resemblance to those of the 1950s era. Our data augment and enrich the small body of research that has examined military family formation, much of which has focused on the role of military housing. We have shown that there are much broader factors at play in this process. The military is innately structured to encourage early marriage among its recruits so that it can function efficiently. This is seen most clearly in its provision of a vast safety net and springboard for its members and its formulation of policies specifically intended

to make it more convenient to marry than remain single.

Although many of our respondents knew people who had married for the purpose of obtaining housing allowances, and even a few claimed to have done it themselves, others suggested it was more hype than practice. A few enumerated the disincentives the military puts in place to prevent this from happening widely. One respondent who claimed to have done this revealed later in the interview that the more proximate reason she had married was, in fact, an imminent transfer of duty station. Although we can only speculate, we wonder whether the rhetoric of contract marriage may be a way of justifying early marriage to one's peer group. If most junior enlistees agree that barracks life is degrading, claiming one got married to get out of the barracks may be a way to gain respect from peers by showing resistance to military control. Indeed, a common theme in our interviews was the sentiment that service members should unapologetically take advantage of military policies because the military unapologetically takes advantage of them. It is also notable that most of the concrete examples of contract marriage emerging from the interviews were linked to the DADT policy. If this is a more pressing incentive for lesbian and gay members, it suggests that it may become less of an issue in light of the recent repeal of DADT; however, it is unlikely that informal norms in the barracks stigmatizing non-heteronormative behaviors will fade quickly.

Our interviews showed that the threat of geographical separation due to deployment and in particular relocation transfers was repeatedly tied to early marriage. The impact of these stressful life events on already-formed military families is well known in the military family literature, but our data suggest that these stresses play an even more influential role in the initial family life course. Not only do the forces of war and duty relocation affect military families, but also these conditions often generate the formation of these families in the first place.

Although the foregoing themes emerged in our research as proximate causes of marriage, they operate within an institutional context that depends on families to recruit and sustain its labor force. Thus, the fourth theme to emerge from our data acts as a more distal but all-encompassing catalyst of marriage: Fordist-era-like institutional conditions that promote an early transition to adulthood.

Marriage is prevalent in such a setting because it has been deliberately made to be compatible with military life. Would the first three explanations cause high marriage rates in the absence of these employment features? It is likely they would not. The operation of these factors in a setting designed to make an early transition to adulthood accessible to marginalized youth undoubtedly shapes the decision-making process.

Whereas in the past military service delayed family formation, its post-1973 personnel policy of linked lives makes it an altogether different kind of turning point that now encourages early role transitions into marriage. How this early transition to adulthood will affect military families in the long term, however, is an open question and one in need of examination. This article provides insight into just one cohort embedded within a specific historical time period in the military. It is notable that although we observed evidence for a knifing off of negative influences (often economic), enabling service members to start anew, the narratives also suggest another kind of knifing off: that of marriages. Military mobility policy encourages marriage, but it may promote *many* marriages among the same individuals. Ironically, the mobility demands of military service that lead to marriage are also what may destabilize it. Thus, when military service ends it is unclear whether the emotional bonds formed from hastily made marriages are strong enough to last in the absence of the military's all-encompassing family benefit system. This suggests that the military reinstitutionalizes families, but mainly during the period of service when it relies on familial labor the most. After active duty service, the linked lives of veterans and spouses may become much more tenuous.

Given the increasingly rare occurrence of early marriage amid the societal-wide retreat from marriage, a recent article urges researchers to ask "not only why people, especially disadvantaged people, *don't* get married, but also why they *do*" (Uecker & Stokes, 2008, p. 845). We have asked exactly this about the military population. What is then the "transferability" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of our findings to civilian society? Our findings on deployment draw a parallel to the impact of trauma and separation on civilian couples. Because deployment is an exogenous event imposed on many couples at once, its influence on nuptial decisions are large enough to measure. But our research raises

the question of whether less identifiable and heterogeneous forces operate on couples in larger society as well. For example, are couples more likely to become engaged when a loved one dies or when they are undergoing stressful periods of their lives? Indeed, some research has documented increases in marriage following natural disasters (Cohan & Cole, 2002).

As for the influence of mobility on military families, it would be interesting to see whether civilian occupations catalyze the marriage process in similar ways. Of course, rare is the civilian firm that requires its employees to relocate every couple of years, and such mobility requirements are even more unusual to impose on entry-level employees. Although many civilian jobs require frequent travel, a defining difference in the military is the trip's duration and thus the need to permanently relocate. But a few smaller scale occupations, such as the clergy, foreign service and sales, require frequent relocation, often at substantial geographical distances. Similarly, academic jobs may also force couples into marital commitment, given the scarcity and geographical diffusion of the job market. Indeed, preliminary findings from a longitudinal study of economist cohorts show that the major catalyst for marriage between dating couples is a job offer that requires one member to relocate (Murray-Close & Helppie McFall, 2013).

But we believe our main application to civilian trends is one of contrast, not similarity. In the highly individualistic, market-driven policy context of the United States, the transition to adulthood has been very weakly supported by the state. As a result, youth are often "warehoused" in particular institutional settings during this transitional period of unemployability. Those with parental resources spend time in the college setting, whereas those with the least resources spend time in the prison setting, which functions as a welfare state of last resort. The military, on the other hand, offers a social safety net that few other settings do, providing a clear and structured pathway to adulthood.

CONCLUSION

Our findings could have a number of policy implications. Within the military, barracks could be reconceptualized to be less dehumanizing settings or the military could reconsider "homesteading" policies, which keep military members at duty stations for longer periods of

time. However, these ignore the deeper, underlying source of nuptiality in the military. The root of early military marriage is its provision of stable employment, comprehensive family benefits, and socioeconomic advancement for working-class youth. By stepping in as a springboard during the transition to adulthood in ways that are mutually beneficial to both employee and employer, the military is a critical turning point in the life course. Altering such employment conditions of military service would leave few individuals willing to incur the risks and unique hardships of military service. Also, it is unlikely that the military has any interest in curbing early marriage. Despite a few high profile cases of upper ranking individuals advocating for policies against marriage among junior-ranked members (Evans, 1993; Schmitt, 1993), the military has much to gain from linking the lives of spouses to military life early on in the career. Without the support and emotion labor of spouses, the modern day military loses manpower readiness.

The cumulative-exposure model has shown that conditions during young adulthood can protectively mediate earlier life exposures of disadvantage (Berkman, Ertel, & Glymour, 2011). Military service offers a path to class mobility in the form of early family formation and socioeconomic stability that disadvantaged civilians lack. Indeed, life course researchers have found evidence for a "bridging effect" among racial/ethnic minority and economically disadvantaged recruits when they eventually enter the civilian labor market (MacLean & Elder, 2007). An open question is how post-sequester military rebudgeting and personnel reductions will affect the military's ability to serve as a substitute welfare safety net for a substantial portion of young Americans who otherwise have little recourse.

The biggest policy implication of our research relates to all families, not just military families. Some policymakers and family advocates have argued that the government should promote marital formation. Indeed, for the past decade, the federal government has funded the Healthy Marriage Initiative, spending \$150 million a year (Administration for Children and Families, 2013). But on the basis of the military example, marriage is widespread in part due to stable, decent-paying jobs and transfers of health care and education benefits to family members. Given growing class inequality, precarious

underemployment, and long-term unemployment, perhaps there are some aspects of the military employment model that could be extended to all U.S. youth. A serious jobs creation program modeled on the legacy of the New Deal's Works Progress Administration that borrows the in-kind educational and social benefits of military service is one model. Public works projects, such as infrastructure investment, and significant expansion of national service programs, like AmeriCorps, VISTA, and so on, are alternatives to military service as a route to economic security for our youth who lack a college degree. Better understanding the transferability of military employment dynamics to civilian contexts may shed light on how to support more stable transitions to adulthood for American youth.

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