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A Comparison Of Civilian And Enlisted Divorce Rates During The Early All Volunteer Force

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A COMPARISON OF CIVILIAN AND ENLISTED DIVORCE RATES DURING THE EARLY ALL VOLUNTEER FORCE ERA[*]

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The belief that enlisted military divorce rates are unusually high is a recurring theme expressed among those living in the military community, yet quantitative data on military divorce rates remain a virtual lacuna. The all-volunteer enlisted force also happens to be an almost all-married enlisted force. Assessing the degree of marital dissolution experienced by military personnel has important implications for the well being of military families and also for readiness levels and reenlistment likelihood. In this paper, I analyze underutilized military data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth and find that enlisted divorce rates in the Armed Forces are higher than for comparable civilians within a specific age range.

> *"It offers a lot of great benefits, but there are a lot of downsides to the military, too. I guess that's why people say the military has the highest divorce rate."*
>
> Dana's story from *Invisible Women: Junior Enlisted Wives* (Harrell 2000, p. 31)

The belief that enlisted military divorce rates are unusually high is a recurring theme expressed among those living in the military community, yet quantitative data on military divorce rates remain a virtual lacuna. Assessing the degree of marital dissolution experienced by military personnel has important implications for the well being of military families and also for readiness levels and reenlistment likelihood. The all-volunteer enlisted force also happens to be an almost all-married enlisted force. This demographic transition is aptly illustrated in the replacement of the old expression, "If the Army wanted you to have a wife, it would have issued you one" with "We recruit soldiers, but we retain families" (Scarville 1990:1). In this paper, I analyze underutilized military data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth and find that enlisted divorce rates in the Armed Forces are higher than for comparable civilians within a specific age range.

That so little is officially known about levels of military divorce owes largely to the cross-sectional nature of most military data. To accurately measure

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divorce prevalence, it is necessary to follow couples from marriage formation forward, while also taking into account attrition from the military and any other changing individual-level characteristics during the period of analysis. To place such findings within their proper context, one needs a civilian baseline for comparison. However, it is rare that military surveys include civilian data. Instead, divorce percentages are often compared across the civilian and enlisted populations in the absence of controls for compositional differences. This lack of comparability can sometimes be partially remedied by comparing Pentagon data to cross-sectional data from the civilian Current Population Survey (CPS); however, there are significant inconsistencies across the datasets in their sampling design and variable structure. Using the CPS as an augmentative comparison is further compromised when analyzing divorce rates because the CPS contains variables only for "currently divorced" rather than providing dates of divorce. This paper provides a more rigorous means of evaluating the prevalence of military divorce by using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, a longitudinal dataset that allows for a simultaneous comparison of divorce outcomes for both enlisted military and civilian respondents.

BACKGROUND

Cumulative US divorce literature has identified a group of factors that consistently predict heightened marital instability across time and context, most of which are highly interrelated (for a comprehensive review of the determinants of divorce see Faust & McKibben, 1999). Lower education and economic instability are correlated with unstable marriages due to increased levels of financial stress (Cherlin, 1992; Conger and Elder, 1994; Oppenheimer, 1994). Younger ages at marriage are associated with higher divorce rates because early marriages are increasingly rare, taking place during non-normative and less stable life stages (White, 1991). There is also evidence for an intergenerational transfer of marital instability, where adults whose own parents divorced are more likely to do so themselves (Amato, 1996; Amato and DeBoer, 2001; McGue and Lykken, 1992; White, 1991). Strong religious orientation and church attendance frequency are negatively associated with divorce. It appears that particularly religious individuals are less likely to elect marital exit as a remedy to marital duress (Hackstaff, 1999). Finally, racial status is an important factor in theorizing divorce. Largely due to disproportionate levels of poverty and residential segregation, African Americans have higher divorce rates than people from other ethnic groups (Amato, 2000; Current Population Reports, 2000; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995).

It is likely that determinants of marital instability for society at large similarly determine marital instability in the military, but as result of the aforementioned data issues, little has been published on military divorce, particularly in the post all-volunteer era, and the limited information that does exist is contradictory. Research indicates that divorce rates were unusually low in the

seventies, especially in the Air Force (Goldman, 1973) and that military marriages formed during Vietnam service were not associated in the long term with higher than usual divorce rates (Call and Teachman, 1996; Ruger et al., 2002). On the other hand, a recent article reports that divorce rates in the Marines are higher than the national average, with 32% of marriages among Marines ending in divorce before age 25 (Carlborg, 2001). In a non-random, small-scale survey of Army personnel collected in September 2002, a majority of those surveyed perceive divorce rates to be much higher in the military than in the civilian world (Lundquist, 2004b).[1] There is some recent evidence that divorce and remarriage occur earlier and at somewhat elevated rates among the military population, but this data is based on military surveys that report current marital status only and lack a direct civilian comparison (Adler-Baeder et al., in press). Yet the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research reports that divorce levels in the Army are comparatively low, which "contradicts the perception that divorce is frequent and widespread in the Army" (Fafara, 1997).

Factors that predict divorce, such as age at marriage, socioeconomic class, parental divorce, religiosity, and race, figure strongly when considering the unique demographic makeup of the military population. In addition, there are specific environmental factors of military service that may exacerbate marital instability and others that may, alternatively, promote marital stability.

Marriage rates in the military are extraordinarily high, and this is particularly true at young ages (Lundquist, 2004a, 2004b; Lundquist and Smith, 2005; Martin and McClure, 2000). Young ages at marriage normally predict divorce in the civilian world and may do the same in the military, yet the fact that early marriage is so pervasive may mean that it is a normative process in the military, with supportive social and economic structures. In fact, it is possible that the same forces driving such high marriage rates in the military contribute to equally high levels of marital stability. From a transition to adulthood life course perspective, it is likely that increased military marriage rates reflect relatively high levels of socioeconomic stability[2] for young enlisted adults who would otherwise be in college or employed in low-skilled, low-wage jobs. Stable employment and secure socioeconomic status are positively correlated

[1] The total sample size was 61. I collected the surveys at the annual BOSS conference held in Lansdowne, VA. The conference acronym stands for "Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers," which speaks to the Pentagon's recognition of the possible alienating conditions experienced by unmarried individuals living in a largely married population.

[2] Relative to the civilian sector, returns to lower education levels are high in the military. Those without college degrees have high career mobility within the enlisted ranks, and educational benefits conferred both on and off duty provide opportunities to sharpen one's credentials in preparation for reentry into a competitive civilian job market.

with entry into marriage, and they are negatively correlated with divorce. For those who face otherwise poor economic prospects, as do many military enlistees, the military offers a unique set of economic opportunities and benefits.

Alternatively, other characteristics of the military population provide reason to think that divorce may be quite prevalent. As shown in the descriptive data section of this paper (Table 1), enlisted personnel are twice as likely as civilians to have divorced parents and are also significantly less religious than civilians. The African American presence in the enlisted US armed forces is also high, at about twice the size of their proportion in the civilian population. Beyond such compositional differences between the military and the civilian population, there are distinctive qualities of military life itself that may contribute to high divorce rates. It is possible that marriage rates are driven in part by several structural incentives for marriage associated with the military. There has been some controversy in the military regarding pay premiums for married couples (Pexton and Maze, 1995) and even some speculation that couples marry one another temporarily to receive such benefits (Until ETS Does Us Part 1977). In contrast to unmarried service members, married members are given an off-base housing allowance and food expense subsidy. Single soldiers are usually expected to live on base and in cases where on-base housing is unavailable for all soldiers, single soldiers receive substantially less housing allowance than those with dependents. Married couples also receive a family separation allowance and higher moving allowances.

To the extent that material incentives unite couples who would not otherwise have married, such marriages may be built on weak foundations and divorce may therefore be prevalent.[3] It is true that marriages that have been entered into with greater incentive, for example the nonmarital conception of a child, have high probabilities of marital dissolution (Teachman, 2002). Alternatively, as is often assumed in current marriage promotion policies, financial incentives may exert a stabilizing force on marriages. It is well known that divorce occurs more frequently among low income families due to lower returns to marriage when neither partner can provide an economic advantage to being married, as well as to greater poverty-related stress levels (Cherlin, 1992). However, there are additional aspects of military service that potentially exert negative effects on marital stability.

[3]It should also be noted that as of 1981, the US government enacted the Uniformed Services Former Spouses Protection Act, which treats military retirement benefits as joint property of both husband and wife (Thole and Ault 1994). This can include up to 50% of the military spouse's retirement benefits, the amount of which is determined by paygrade at the time of retirement, not at the time of divorce. Ex-spouses are entitled to retirement benefits regardless of their subsequent remarriage status. Thus, the accrual of military benefits does not necessarily end with divorce.

Military life may be unusually stressful for the spouses and children of enlisted members. Mady Segal (1986) has described the spheres of military life and family life as greedy institutions in constant competition against one another. Military families are subject to a distinct set of demands, including frequent geographical relocation, extended spousal/parental separations, residence in foreign countries, and, not least, occupational risks of injury and possibly death. Evidence from the first Gulf War, for example, shows a linkage between deployments and marital dissolution for female soldiers (Angrist and Johnson, 2000). Frequent relocations mean that spouses often face poor employment prospects, which can contribute to personal dissatisfaction as well as economic problems. According to one study, employed military spouses earn 40% less than comparable civilian spouses for this reason (Payne et al., 1992). The Pentagon has acknowledged the stresses afflicting military families. Recent "homesteading" policy reform seeking to reduce family instability increases the period between relocations to approximately six years in order to reduce disruption to a spouse's career and children's schooling (Ricks, 2004).

In conclusion, the factors that potentially predict divorce in the military are conflicting. When considering the above characteristics, it is plausible to imagine both a scenario in which divorce rates are very low and another in which divorce rates are very high. Structural constraints of military service and the demographic makeup of enlisted personnel coupled with short-term incentives that possibly encourage marriage may predict higher risks of marital instability, yet the relative socioeconomic stability and benefits provided by the military would arguably lead to less rather than more divorce. It is entirely possible that these opposing factors ultimately balance one another out, leading to equivalent divorce rates as those of civilian society.

SAMPLE AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

This paper employs data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY). Its longitudinal survey design and military subsample are unique in that it provides information on family formation patterns at multiple points in time for substantial numbers of both civilians and military enlistees. The NLSY is a national probability sample that went to the field on January 1, 1979, and included a subsample of military active-duty enlisted personnel serving in one of the four branches, ages 17-21 as of September 30, 1978 (N=1,280). The sampling design of the NLSY is multi-staged, consisting of stratified random samples with a small degree of nonresponse. I use the constructed weights, strata, and proportional-sampling units provided by the NLSY in estimating descriptive data but not multivariate data.[4] Subsequent funding

[4] When weights are a function of the observed independent variables in the models, as they are in my analyses, unweighted regressions will result in efficient, consistent, and unbiased estimates (Winship and Radbill 1994).

cuts resulted in the retention of only 201 of the original military cases from 1985 onward. This analysis is therefore necessarily constrained to a five-year time period, such that respondents can be followed only through their early to mid-twenties (ages 23-27 in the final year). It is thus important to note that the young age of the respondents necessarily constrains all analyses to be those of *early* marital dissolution trends for both enlisted personnel and civilians. Fortunately, because such large proportions of enlisted men and women marry at very early ages, the sample size of married respondents is large enough to ensure a robust comparison to the married civilian sample.

Figure 1 shows overall proportions of ever divorced individuals across both samples over time. The proportion of ever-divorced individuals is higher among enlistees than civilians during the time period. However, the generalized divorce data shown in Figure 1 may simply reflect the larger population of enlisted couples than civilian couples *at risk* for divorce, explaining, perhaps,

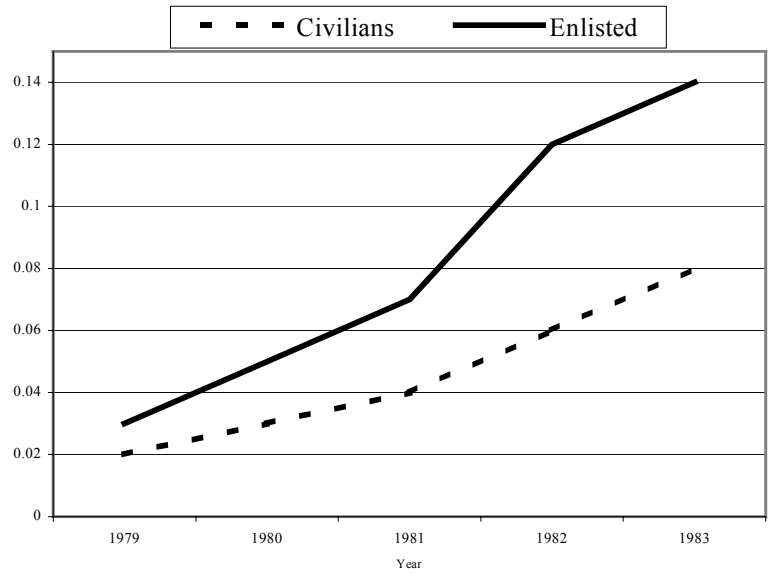

FIGURE 1. PROPORTIONS EVER DIVORCED: NLSY ENLISTED VERSUS CIVILIANS

Furthermore, I have determined that the dependent variable I use in the following analyses (marital status) is not a function of the NLSY's sampling stratification; therefore, the standard errors should not be affected in the absence of weights (Winship and Radbill 1994). This is in keeping with many NLSY studies that discard weights for multivariate analyses but employ them for accurate representation of descriptive data.

the widespread belief that military divorce is common. Figure 2 illustrates such differences vis-à-vis overall ever-married proportions over the time period (note that the scale of Figure 2 has been changed to reflect a higher total ceiling); by the end of the time period, 21% more soldiers than civilians had married.

Using Event History Analysis in discrete-time units (Allison 1984), I control for such compositional differences. I limit the total sample to those in a marital union and predict the log odds of marital dissolution occurring over a five-year consecutive period. The analysis for each individual begins upon marriage, and I create marriage-years for each unit year of observation in order to capture variation in time-sensitive characteristics, for a total of 12,747 person-years.[5] Although permanent attrition is rare in the NLSY, movement between the military and civilian samples is frequent. There are particularly high levels of exit from the military sample into the civilian sample, which in most cases reflects term of service completion. Less frequently, respondents who were originally interviewed in the civilian sample enlist with the military. My analytic models take this attrition into account by censoring military members upon their

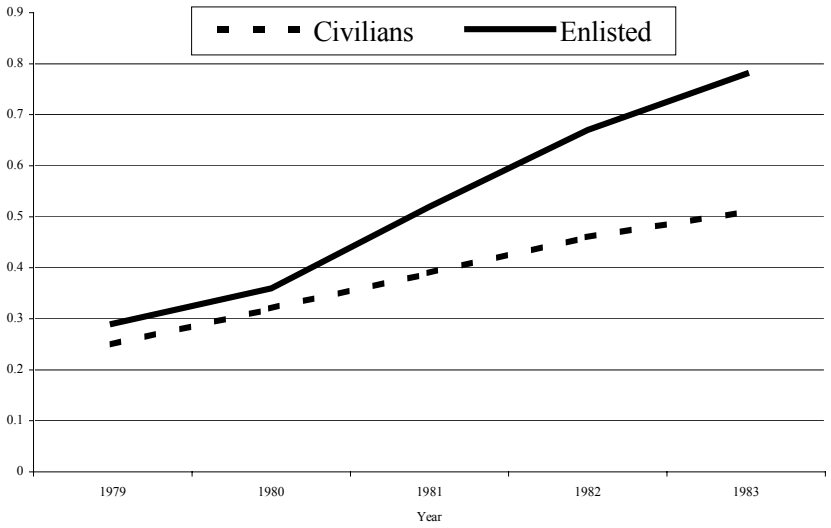

FIGURE 2. PROPORTIONS EVER MARRIED: NLSY ENLISTED VERSUS CIVILIANS

[5] A very small percentage of marriages occurred prior to the first interview year. They are left censored because their risk of divorce leading up to 1979 cannot be measured; however, the marriage duration variable does take into account the number of years they have been married leading up to sample formation.

exit from the service. They also censor civilians who enlist with the military during the time period.

BIVARIATE RESULTS

Table 1 shows weighted bivariate distributions of variables used in the analyses that follow. They fall into three groupings associated with marital stability: basic demographic characteristics, religiosity, and socioeconomic status. The left hand column shows distributions for the married military sample, and the right hand column shows those for married civilians. Statistically significant differences across the two groups are indicated with an asterisk in the middle column. Some of the demographic differences across the two populations are structural artifacts of military service. For example, females comprise a minority of the enlisted population, and so there are significantly fewer married female enlistees than there are married female civilians. African Americans, on the other hand, are overrepresented in the military subsample, reflecting the fact that African Americans comprise a larger overall percentage of the military population than the civilian population, and also that their marriage rates are substantially higher than black civilians (Lundquist, 2004a). Remaining demographic characteristics, such as the presence of children, age at marriage, residence at age 14, and previous marital status do not vary significantly across the two groups.

Religiosity, a consistent predictor of more conservative views toward divorce, is notably higher for civilians than soldiers. Enlistees' reports of infrequent church attendance or no church attendance are 10% higher than those for civilians, whereas 11% more civilians report weekly and higher rates of attendance. The majority religious affiliation of both civilians and enlistees is Protestant; however, Catholicism is more common among civilians than enlistees.

Socioeconomic status, another instrumental correlate of marital stability, is measured via a number of educational attainment and childhood household structure variables. Differences in educational levels across the two subsamples again reflect some institutional elements of the military. Military recruitment standards generally require a high school degree, and many enlistees at these ages are either replacing or forestalling higher education through military service. Therefore, more enlisted members have a high school education than civilians but fewer have attended college. Scores on the Armed Forces Qualifying Test (AFQT), largely a reflection of schooling quality, are three points higher for soldiers than civilians. As a matter of sample construction, 100% of the military sample is employed full-time and none is in school on a full-time basis. Despite higher levels of secondary schooling and no unemployment, the military subsample members were raised in more disadvantaged households, with almost twice the proportion of single parents and larger numbers of siblings. Even so, maternal education levels (paternal education was less likely to be known by respondents) are on par across the groups.

TABLE 1. NLSY VARIABLE AVERAGES AND MEANS AS OF YEAR OF MARRIAGE (N=2,944)

Independent variables	Enlisted N=650		Civilian N=2,294
Basic demographic factors			
Male	88%	*	41%
Previously married	>1%		1%
♋ Number of children living in household	0.27		0.28
Age at marriage	20.2		20.3
African American	20%	*	9%
Rural or suburban residence, age 14	23%		26%
Religiosity			
Religion in which raised		*	
Catholic	24%		31%
Protestant	62%		54%
Other	10%		12%
No Religion	4%		4%
Religious attendance		*	
Never	30%		21%
Infrequently	34%		32%
Once a month	10%		9%
2-3 times a moth	11%		12%
Once a week	10%		18%
More than once a week	5%		8%
Socioeconomic status			
♋ High school graduate	94%	*	83%
Attended private high school	5%		7%
♋ Attended college	15%	*	33%
Single parent, age 14	23%	*	13%
Number of siblings	3.8	*	3.4
AFQT score	55.9	*	52.7
Mother's education (years)	11.6	*	11.7
♋ Currently enrolled in school full time	n/a		9%
♋ Currently employed full time	100%	*	66%
Attitudinal			
Conservative values	17.4	*	17
Rotter score	8.4		8.5

♋ Indicates time-variant characteristic.
* Indicates significant difference between subpopulations.

I also include two types of Likert scale variables to measure attitudinal variation. The first is the Conservative Family Values scale, an index of agree-disagree statements, like "Women's place is in the home, not the office or shop," ranging from 7 to 28 by degree of conservatism. Traditionalist orientations are associated with less open attitudes toward divorce and may also be correlated with the attitudinal orientation of those who enlist with the military. The Conservative Values score is slightly higher for the enlisted group. The second scale is the Rotter score, a gauge of one's locus of internal or external control, intended to measure resilience to adversity and self esteem. One agree-disagree statement comprising the scale, for example, is "What happens to me is of my own doing." The Rotter score ranges from 4 to 16, and the lower the score, the higher the degree of internal control. There is little difference across the two populations on this measure.

An examination of the characteristics of married individuals across the two populations of interest in Table 1 indicates inconsistent predictors of marital stability. Educational attainment and employment are associated with marital stability. As such, the enlisted population's almost universal high school graduation rate and employment rate would then predict relatively low divorce levels. From another perspective, however, the enlisted population has lower levels of religiosity than the civilian population and was also more likely to be raised in a single-parent family, a characteristic associated both with socioeconomic disadvantage and lack of socialization into two-parent family environments. The number of African Americans enlistees is double that of African American civilians in the sample, which may also contribute to potentially higher overall divorce rates.

MULTIVARIATE RESULTS

In the multivariate event history analyses that follow, I predict the likelihood of divorce for civilians and soldiers in a series of nested models that estimate the role played by each of the above compositional characteristics. Divorce risk is measured in terms of marital duration.

Each model in Table 2 estimates the logistic likelihood of divorce. The primary independent variable of interest across each nested model is "Enlisted in the Military," highlighted in gray across the top of the table. The first two columns of Table 2, Model 1 and Model 2, estimate baseline models. In the absence of any controls, military members are 27% ($e^{.237}$) more likely than civilians to divorce. Upon adding variables which measure marital duration in order to introduce a time hazard element to the model, the magnitude of the military divorce effect increases significantly to an odds of 44% ($e^{.365}$). It is not a surprise that duration of marriage generally predicts marital dissolution (although the risk declines over the length of marriage), and the shift in magnitude and significance across Models 1 and 2 indicates that, upon taking

comparable years spent married into account, military marriages are at a higher risk of dissolution than civilian marriages.

Model 3 introduces a basic reduced-form model comprised of basic demographic independent variables. When controlling for all the basic demographic factors, the relationship between enlisted status and divorce likelihood increases in strength. Married enlisted individuals are now 62% ($e^{.481}$) more likely to divorce during the time period than married civilians. It appears that before demographic controls were introduced, the larger population of African Americans in the military population exerted a depressant effect on military divorce rates. This is counterintuitive given that African Americans in the civilian world generally have higher divorce rates (Amato, 2000; Current Population Reports, 2000; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995). The model includes an interaction between race and military status, which shows that white enlistees rather than black enlistees are the ones experiencing comparatively high divorce rates. I speculate in another analysis (currently under review) that this may reflect group reference theory (Meade, 1934). African American enlisted couples may be willing to endure greater levels of marital stress in exchange for the greater gains they receive relative to the civilian world. It may also be that the stresses of military marriage are not so different from those experienced in civilian society by blacks; as a result, African American military marriages may be more immune to hardship than white military marriages.

In addition, Model 3 indicates that having children is negatively correlated with divorce, which is compatible with most findings showing that the presence of children in the household heightens marital stability. The model also shows that the age at which individuals marry contributes to stability levels. The younger the age at marriage, the higher the risk of divorce becomes.

Model 4 adds the grouping of religiosity variables to the analysis. Upon their inclusion, the military status variable diminishes slightly both in terms of magnitude and significance level; however, military members are still 54% ($e^{.435}$) more likely than civilians to divorce. This suggests that accounting for civilians' higher levels of religiosity only in part explains their lower propensity to divorce. Generally in the model, frequent religious attendance is associated with a 10% ($e^{-.101}$) reduction in divorce risk, but being female is associated with a 23% ($e^{.206}$) higher risk for both populations.[6] A likelihood ratio test comparing the log likelihoods across the two models indicates that the addition of the religion variables significantly improves the model's goodness of fit.

Model 5 introduces socioeconomic variables into the analysis, further improving the overall goodness of fit from the basic reduced form model, although only marginally. Controlling for differences in education, socioeconomic

[6] Given that women's experience of military service may differ substantially from that of men's, I tested for whether military status varied by gender in divorce outcomes. There was no evidence for an interaction effect.

TABLE 2. EVENT HISTORY MAXIMUM LIKELIHOOD LOGISTIC REGRESSION: PREDICTING DIVORCE FOR ENLISTED VERSUS CIVILIANS

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
Independent variables	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Enlisted in Military	0.237	0.125*	0.365	0.126**	0.481	0.141***	0.435	0.142**	0.404	0.152**	0.402	0.152**
Duration (years in union)			1.100	0.115***	1.167	0.117***	1.169	0.117***	1.166	0.118***	1.170	0.118***
Duration-Squared			-0.097	0.260***	-0.100	0.012***	-0.101	0.012***	-0.100	0.012***	-0.101	0.012***
Basic Demographic												
Race (omitted: White)					0.241	0.150	0.286	0.153+	0.104	0.173	0.100	0.174
Race*Enlisted in Military					-0.634	0.343+	-0.636	0.344+	-0.639	0.344+	-0.635	0.344+
Sex (omitted male)					0.178	0.112	0.206	0.112+	0.231	0.118*	0.219	0.119+
Age at Marriage					-0.156	0.030***	-0.146	0.030***	-0.146	0.033***	-0.144	0.033
Number of Children in Household					-0.563	0.073***	-0.562	0.074***	-0.571	0.075***	-0.575	0.075***
Previously Married (b4 1979)					-0.221	0.516	-0.261	0.518	-0.291	0.520	-0.288	0.520
Rural Residence, Age 14					-0.092	0.118	-0.088	0.119	-0.090	0.121	-0.099	0.121
Religiosity												
Religious attendance frequency							-0.101	0.033**	-0.096	0.034**	-0.093	0.034**
Raised catholic (omitted: Protestant)							-0.115	0.132	-0.119	0.135	-0.116	0.135
Raised no religion (“)							-0.176	0.275	-0.207	0.276	-0.214	0.277
Raised other religion (“)							-0.031	0.160	-0.038	0.162	-0.036	0.162

TABLE 2 (CONTINUED)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
Independent variables	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Socioeconomic Status												
Attended Private High School									0.007	0.255	0.009	0.255
AFQT Score									-0.003	0.003	-0.002	0.003
Number of Siblings									0.032	0.022	0.031	0.022
Single Parent, Age 14									0.200	0.128+	0.201	0.128
Mother's Education									-0.008	0.023	-0.008	0.023
High School Graduate (or GEI									0.040	0.155	0.051	0.155
Attended College									0.081	0.131	0.075	0.132
Currently Enrolled in School									-0.253	0.362	-0.257	0.362
Currently Employed									0.114	0.129	0.110	0.130
Attitudinal												
Conservative Values Score											-0.012	0.016
Rotter Score											0.041	0.025+
N=12,747 person years												
Intercept	-3.45	0.057***	-5.96	0.26***	-2.975	0.755***	-2.884	0.755***	-2.965	0.868***	-11.250	4.410***
Log Likelihood	*-1803.9*		*-1727.2*		*-1681.3*		*-1675.8*		*-1671.5*		*-1669.9*	

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

background, and employment reduces the likelihood of divorce for military by only five percentage points, and the standard error, though slightly inflated, still falls within the <.01 range. Hence, socioeconomic indicators do little to explain higher divorce rates in the military. Elsewhere, the only variable in this grouping that impacts the likelihood of divorce is the single parent at age 14 variable, which is associated with a 22% ($e^{.200}$) increase in risk. Otherwise, the lack of significant correlation for the remaining socioeconomic variables is surprising given their consistent significance in most other divorce analyses.[1] This may relate to the fact that marriages formed during this panel period are early and followed for at most five years.[2] Socioeconomic influences, which often manifest themselves over the long term, are likely more trivial in the short term.

The addition of attitudinal measures in Model 6 fails to improve model fit and has a negligible impact on the relationship between military status and likelihood of divorce. Although high scores on the Rotter scale (indicating a low locus of internal control) have a slightly positive effect on divorce likelihood, the military status variable is unaffected, continuing to indicate that military marriages are 49% ($e^{.402}$) more likely to dissolve than civilian marriages. An interpretation of the race-military interaction coefficient in the full model indicates that compared to white civilians, white enlistees are 49% more likely to divorce while African American enlistees are 12% *less* likely.

The fact that racial composition has an unexpected effect on military divorce rates[3] raises the possibility that other variables potentially work in opposite directions than expected across the two populations, but are diluted when combined into the one analytic sample. To test this, I predicted the logistic likelihood of divorce for each subsample separately. I found that, net of race considerations already captured in the interaction, the civilian and enlisted models look no different in their array of characteristics predicting divorce (not shown for this reason).

CONCLUSION

In summary, the widespread belief that divorce is prevalent in the military has some credence, at least when applied to young enlisted personnel during the early years of the all-volunteer force. Some of this belief is purely compositional; previous work has found that military enlistees are more likely

[1] The lack of correlation between most of the socioeconomic variables and divorce is invariant to the order in which I nest the various models.

[2] The latter is less of a shortcoming than the former, since divorces are most common in the first few years of marriage.

[3] Models tested in the absence of the military-race interaction show a substantial reduction in the military status variable, illustrating the counteracting effect of a large African American composition in the military sample.

than civilians to marry at younger ages, and hence there is more opportunity for marriages to end (Martin and McClure, 2000; Lundquist, 2004a; Lundquist, 2004b; Lundquist and Smith, 2005). When compared to same aged, married civilians in the presence of multiple demographic, religious, socioeconomic, and attitudinal controls, enlistees are still more likely to divorce than comparable civilians. The nested analyses in Table 2 suggest that controlling both for religious attendance and having been raised in a single parent household slightly mitigates the higher divorce rate in the military; however, none of the variables in the model fully explains the military-civilian disparity. Unfortunately, the NLSY does not contain variables to test causal explanations for this differential, such as measures of marital stress that might capture the unique demands of military service or the role that military marriage benefits might play in encouraging the formation of unsubstantial marital unions.

The latter explanation is somewhat less credible when considering the finding that African American service personnel have comparatively *low* rather than high marital dissolution rates. There is no obvious explanation for why ulterior incentives for marriage would be more common among one race than another. In a separate analysis not shown here, I divided the military sample into those whose marriages formed prior to military service versus those whose marriages formed during military service (Pre-service marriages can be assumed to have begun in the absence of possible military-benefits opportunism). There were only 42 such marriages, so results should be interpreted with caution, but I found that divorce was highly likely for these pre-military marriages as well. This casts doubt on the perverse incentives hypothesis, and suggests that the combination of marriage with military service may simply produce greater stress levels.

The NLSY data employed in this analysis are not without their weaknesses. As previously mentioned, the data represent only a specific age group of married couples. They also represent an earlier time period that may be less applicable to today's Armed Forces. If anything, however, they are more likely to underestimate current divorce levels in the military than overestimate them. In recent years, marriage rates among enlisted personnel have risen sharply, so much so that the Marine Corps Commandant proposed a marriage ban on first-term enlistees (Connable, 2002). With the increasing military orientation toward international peacekeeping missions, spousal separation episodes have become increasingly prolonged. The decline in Cold War era permanent base occupations also means that military families are much less likely than in the past to be included in relocations along with the spouse. Finally, in a time period when most families are comprised of dual-wage earners and wives often have career aspirations of their own, geographical restrictions of spousal military employment impose a heavier burden than in the past. All such developments are reason to believe that maintaining military marital stability has become more of a challenge today than when the NLSY sample was originally collected.

This paper is an attempt to remedy major weaknesses of many civilian-military comparative analyses by conducting a time-sensitive, multivariate analysis of marital dissolution and utilizing a dataset comprised of both civilians and enlisted personnel for accurate comparison. By providing evidence in answer to colloquial beliefs on the topic, the analyses in this paper confirm that divorce is in fact high among young enlisted personnel in the military during the early years of the all-volunteer force.

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