

**MLDC Research Areas**

Definition of Diversity

Legal Implications

Outreach & Recruiting

Leadership & Training

Branching & Assignments

Promotion

Retention

Implementation &
Accountability

Metrics

National Guard & Reserve

This issue paper aims to aid in the deliberations of the MLDC. It does not contain the recommendations of the MLDC.

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Racial/Ethnic and Gender Differences in Attitudinal Measures of Retention Among Active-Duty Enlisted Servicemembers

Abstract

This issue paper (IP) uses responses from the 2008 Status of Forces Survey to assess demographic differences in attitudinal measures of retention among active-duty enlisted personnel in the armed forces.

The purpose of this IP is twofold: First, it assesses whether there are gender or racial/ethnic differences in measures of enlisted members' job satisfaction, organizational commitment, retention intentions, career intentions, and intentions to join the reserve or National Guard components. Second, it assesses whether these direct and indirect measures of retention tell a consistent story about retention across gender and race/ethnicity groups. This IP should be considered a companion piece to Military Leadership Diversity Commission (2010b), which focuses on retention attitudes and intentions among active-duty officers.

Particularly important to the MLDC is whether a greater proportion of minority servicemembers express a desire to leave the military compared with their majority peers and whether minority servicemembers report lower levels of satisfaction and commitment. Racial/ethnic and gender differences in retention attitudes and intentions could indicate potential future retention problems and underlying problems with morale and perceptions of climate. The results of this analysis show that, across the Services, female and minority enlisted servicemembers were as likely as their white male counterparts in the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corps, and the Air Force both to be satisfied with the military way of life and to report that they intended to remain in the armed forces. However, the data also show that female soldiers (Army) and sailors (Navy) were less likely than their male

counterparts to report positive career intentions. That is, enlisted women in these two Services were less likely to report that they see the military as a career. With few exceptions, minority enlisted personnel were as likely as their white peers to view the military as a career. Black soldiers were actually more likely than their white counterparts to report positive career intentions. Thus, there is some indication that future enlisted retention will differ by demographics in a way that may prevent women, but not necessarily minorities, from reaching the top enlisted ranks. The results appear to be consistent across both officers and enlisted servicemembers.

The charter for the MLDC has one specific task that is directly relevant to retention: "Measure the ability of current activities to increase continuation rates for ethnic- and gender-specific members of the Armed Forces." As part of the effort to address this tasking, this issue paper (IP) assesses whether there are gender or racial/ethnic differences in retention attitudes and intentions among active-duty enlisted personnel in the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corps, and the Air Force as measured by responses to the 2008 Status of Forces Survey. Second, it assesses whether these direct and indirect measures of retention tell a consistent story about retention across gender and race/ethnicity groups.¹

Studying retention attitudes and intentions is important for the MLDC for two reasons. First, by examining *current* retention attitudes and intentions, we can assess whether potential *future* differences in actual retention rates may occur. Second, retention intentions can be a signal of job satisfaction, or lack thereof, and may indicate problems with morale and perceptions of climate. Thus, this IP also addresses whether there are

underlying differences in job satisfaction (specifically, satisfaction with the military way of life) and organizational commitment that may indicate that climate is perceived and experienced differently by different race/ethnicity and gender groups. Of particular importance to the MLDC is whether minority members of the armed forces express a desire to leave the military in greater proportions than their majority peers. If this is the case, then retention intentions, and especially career intentions, may be one important contributing factor to unequal representation at higher ranks.

Data and Measures

Retention intentions have been shown to be a strong predictor of actual retention behavior among military samples (Guthrie, 1992; Marsh, 1989; Janega & Olmstead, 2003). Although intentions based on survey data tend to overestimate actual behavior, individuals who report a desire to leave an organization are more likely to actually leave the organization than counterparts who do not express a similar opinion (Jans & Frazer-Jans, 2006). According to Jaros (1997), “turnover intentions is the strongest, most direct precursor of turnover behavior, and mediates the relationship between attitudes like job satisfaction and organizational commitment and turnover behavior” (p. 321).

The data for this analysis come from the Defense Manpower Data Center’s (DMDC’s) November 2008 Status of Forces Survey (SOFS) of Active Duty Members (DMDC, 2009). The survey is designed to capture attitudes and opinions on a wide range of quality-of-life issues among military personnel. Core survey items focus on overall satisfaction, retention intentions, perceived readiness, stress, tempo, permanent change-of-station moves, and Military One Source. Appendix A presents more details on the data used in this IP. For the analysis of active-duty enlisted servicemembers, we focus on the four DoD Services: the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corps, and the Air Force.

In this IP, we use four measures of indirect retention attitudes.² The first is *satisfaction* with the military way of life. The second, *affective commitment*, measures an individual’s emotional attachment to, identification with, or involvement with an organization (in this case, the military). The third, *continuance commitment*, measures an individual’s attachment to an organization based on the perceived costs of leaving that organization. The fourth, *normative commitment*, measures an individual’s sense of obligation to remain in an organization.

The active-duty SOFS also contains three questions regarding retention intentions. The first asks respondents how likely they would be to remain on active duty if they were faced with that decision. The second asks respondents how much they agree (or disagree) with a statement indicating positive commitment to the military as a career. The third asks respondents how likely they are to join a National Guard or reserve unit after leaving active duty.

In this IP, race/ethnicity groups are defined as follows:

- white, non-Hispanic
- black, non-Hispanic
- Asian and Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic
- other, non-Hispanic (includes American Indians, Alaska natives, and individuals of more than one race)
- Hispanic.³

Finally, note that, in figures and tables, an asterisk indicates a significant difference between men and women or between whites and minorities. Appendix B explains how significant differences are defined.

Results

Figure 1 shows the percentages of male and female enlisted members across all Services who were (very) satisfied or (very) dissatisfied with the military way of life. Overall, the majority of men and women reported being satisfied with the military way of life. There were no statistically significant differences between male and female personnel.⁴

By race/ethnicity and branch of Service, Figures 2 and 3 show, respectively, the percentages of enlisted personnel who were (very) satisfied or (very) dissatisfied with the military way of life. In general, enlisted members of all races/ethnicities reported being satisfied with the military way of life. There were no significant differences in the percentages of enlisted members who were satisfied with the military way of life (see Figure 2). However, there were a few significant differences in the percentages who were dissatisfied. Compared with whites, in the Army, significantly fewer blacks, Hispanics, and Asian/Pacific Islanders reported being dissatisfied; in the Marine Corps, significantly more Asian/Pacific Islanders reported being dissatisfied; and, in the Air Force, significantly fewer Asian/Pacific Islanders reported being dissatisfied.

High levels of job satisfaction appear to cross gender and race/ethnicity groups. Given this finding, we would expect similarly high levels of organizational commitment across these demographic groups. By Service, gender, and race/ethnicity, Table 1 presents means for the three measures of organizational commitment in SOFS: affective, continuance, and normative.

Overall, there are few demographic differences across the three measures of organizational commitment. No significant gender differences were found. In terms of affective commitment, Asians/Pacific Islanders in the Army were less emotionally connected to their Service than their white counterparts, but, in terms of continuance commitment, the results suggest that this group saw more obstacles to shifting to a civilian career than did their white counterparts. In terms of

normative commitment, Hispanics and Asians/Pacific Islanders in the Navy and enlisted servicemembers of “other” race/ethnicity in the Air Force had a lower sense of obligation to remain in their Service than their white counterparts. In contrast, black airmen had a higher sense of obligation than their white counterparts.

The above measures capture an enlisted servicemember’s attitudes about retention. Based on the fact that we found few demographic differences in these attitudes, we might also expect few demographic differences in retention intentions. Figure 4 presents the percentages of male and female enlisted who were (very) likely or (very) unlikely to stay in active-duty service. Across all the Services, there were no statistically significant differences in the percentages of male and female enlisted who were likely (or unlikely) to continue their active-duty service.

Figures 5 and 6 show, respectively, the percentages of white and minority enlisted personnel who reported positive and negative retention intentions. The data show that, regardless of race/ethnicity, most personnel had positive retention intentions. There were no significant racial/ethnic differences in the percentages of enlisted servicemembers who reported that they were very likely or likely to remain in active-duty service. However, compared with whites, significantly fewer black and Asian/Pacific Islander soldiers reported being unlikely to continue active-duty service; significantly fewer Asian/Pacific Islander sailors reported being unlikely to continue active-duty service; and significantly fewer black marines reported being unlikely to continue active-duty service.

Even though most enlisted servicemembers reported positive retention intentions, reenlisting for another term of service is not the same as making the military a career. Thus, we next examine whether there are gender or racial/ethnic differences in intentions to make military service a career. Specifically, SOFS asks individuals to indicate how committed they are to making the military a career. Figure 7 shows career commitment by gender and Service. Career commitment is lower among some female enlisted: Significantly fewer female than male soldiers and sailors report that they (strongly) agree that they are committed to making the military a career.

By race/ethnicity and Service, Figures 8 and 9 show, respectively, the percentages of enlisted members who agreed and disagreed that they were committed to making the military their career. Regardless of race/ethnicity, the majority of enlisted servicemembers, between 40 percent and 60 percent, agreed that they were committed to making the military a career, with specific rates depending on Service.⁵ Career commitment was highest in the Air Force and lowest in the Marine Corps. A few significant differences did emerge across race/ethnicity groups. First, significantly more black than white soldiers said that they were committed to a military career. Second, significantly fewer “other” sailors reported positive career commitment to the military. Third, compared with white counterparts, significantly fewer black and Hispanic

soldiers and significantly fewer Asian/Pacific Islander sailors disagreed that they were committed to making the military their career.

Finally, we examine whether there are demographic differences in intentions to join a reserve or National Guard unit after leaving active-duty service. Figure 10 shows the percentages of male and female enlisted members who reported that it was (very) likely or (very) unlikely that they would continue service in a reserve or National Guard capacity. Overall, the majority of both male and female members said that entering into this type of service after leaving active duty was not likely. Only one significant gender difference emerged: Significantly more female than male sailors reported that they were likely to join a reserve or National Guard unit after they left active-duty service, and significantly fewer female than male sailors reported that they were unlikely to do so.

Figures 11 and 12 report intentions to join a reserve or National Guard unit by branch of Service and race/ethnicity. The majority of enlisted personnel reported that they were unlikely to move to a reserve or National Guard unit after leaving active-duty service, and this was consistent across the Services and races/ethnicities. However, there are a few significant differences based on race/ethnicity. First, significantly more Asian/Pacific Islander than white soldiers reported that they were likely to join a reserve unit when they left active-duty service. Second, compared with white soldiers, significantly *more* black soldiers and significantly *fewer* Asian/Pacific Islander soldiers said that it was unlikely that they would continue service in a reserve or National Guard component. Third, significantly fewer Asian/Pacific Islander than white marines said they were unlikely to continue service in a reserve status.

Comparison with Officers

As previously mentioned, this IP is a companion piece to a similar analysis of active-duty SOFS data that focuses on officers. Generally, the results are consistent for both groups. Perhaps the most prominent difference is that, among officers, women in all the Services were less likely to report positive career intentions than their male counterparts. Among enlisted, we found this to be true only in the Army and the Navy: Gender differences in the Air Force and the Marine Corps were not statistically significant. A second noteworthy difference is that career intentions are generally more positive among officers than enlisted, most positive among officers and enlisted in the Air Force, and least positive in the Marine Corps. Similarly, more officers than enlisted servicemembers reported being satisfied with the military way of life, a finding true across the Services and the demographic groups. Finally, it appears that officers were also more likely than enlisted servicemembers to report a positive intent to join a reserve or National Guard unit after leaving active-duty service.

Conclusion

The survey results reported in this IP show that, across the Services, in 2008, female and minority enlisted servicemembers were as likely as their white male counterparts in the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corps, and the Air Force both to be satisfied with the military way of life and to report that they intend to remain in the armed forces. The results also show, however, that female soldiers and sailors were less likely than their male counterparts to report positive career intentions. That is, enlisted women in the Army and the Navy were less likely to report that they see the military as a career. In contrast, with few exceptions, minority enlisted members were as likely as their white peers to view the military as a career. Black soldiers were actually more likely than their white counterparts to report positive career intentions. Thus, we see some indication that future retention will differ by demographics in a way that may prevent women, but not minorities, from reaching the top enlisted ranks.

Notes

¹In IP #31 we present actual retention *behavior* among enlisted personnel (i.e., reenlistment rates by zone) (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2010a).

²See Appendix A for a description of the measures.

³See Military Leadership Diversity Commission (2009). Note that, for this analysis, Asian and Pacific Islander are combined into a single category to be consistent with other issue papers.

⁴Servicemembers in the other race/ethnic category in the Navy and whites, Hispanics, and other race/ethnicities in the Marine Corps are the exceptions.

⁵Servicemembers in the other race/ethnic category in the Navy and whites, Hispanics, and other race/ethnicities in the Marine Corps are the exceptions.

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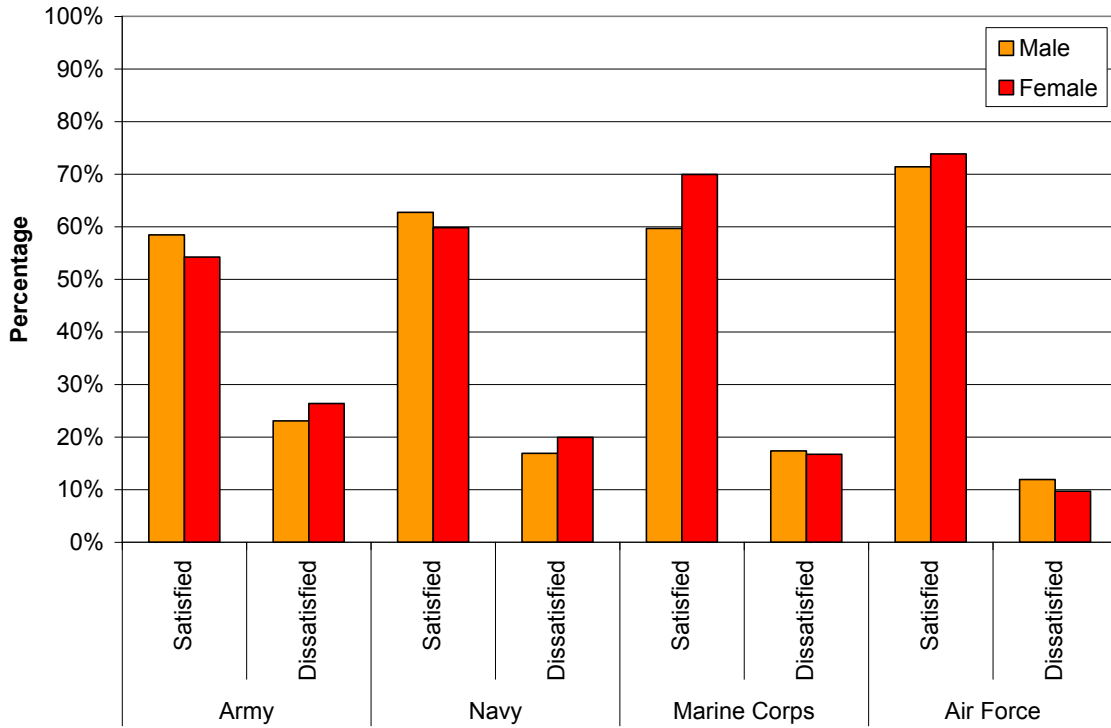
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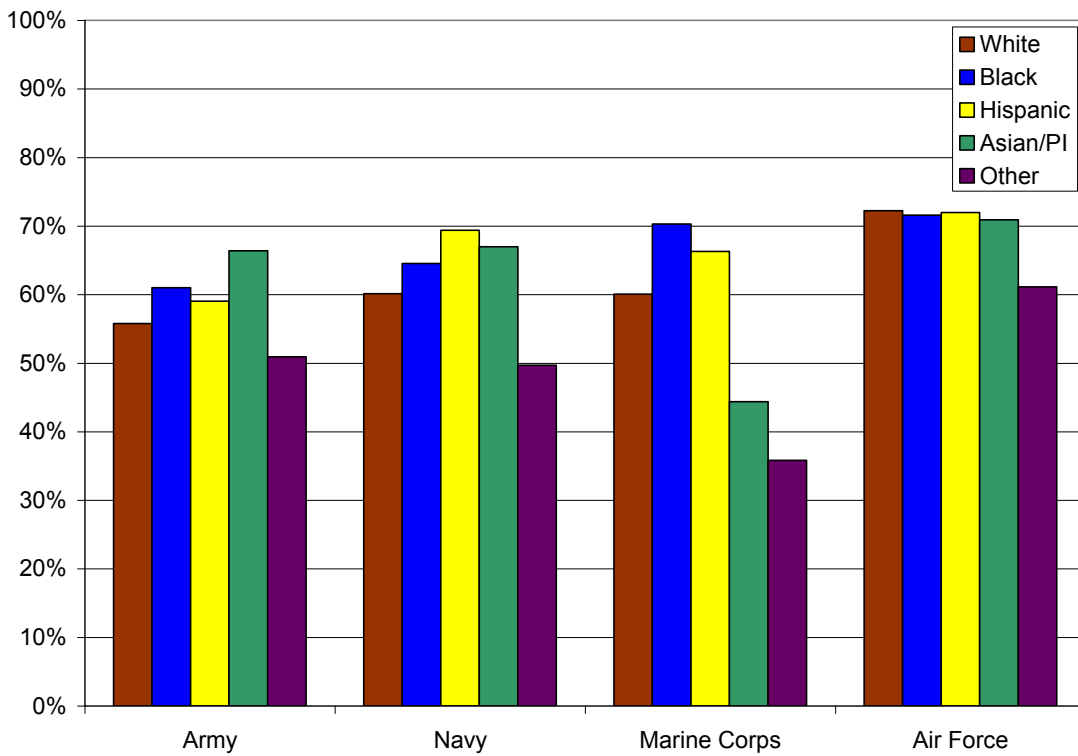
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Figure 1. Satisfaction with the Military Way of Life, by Service and Gender



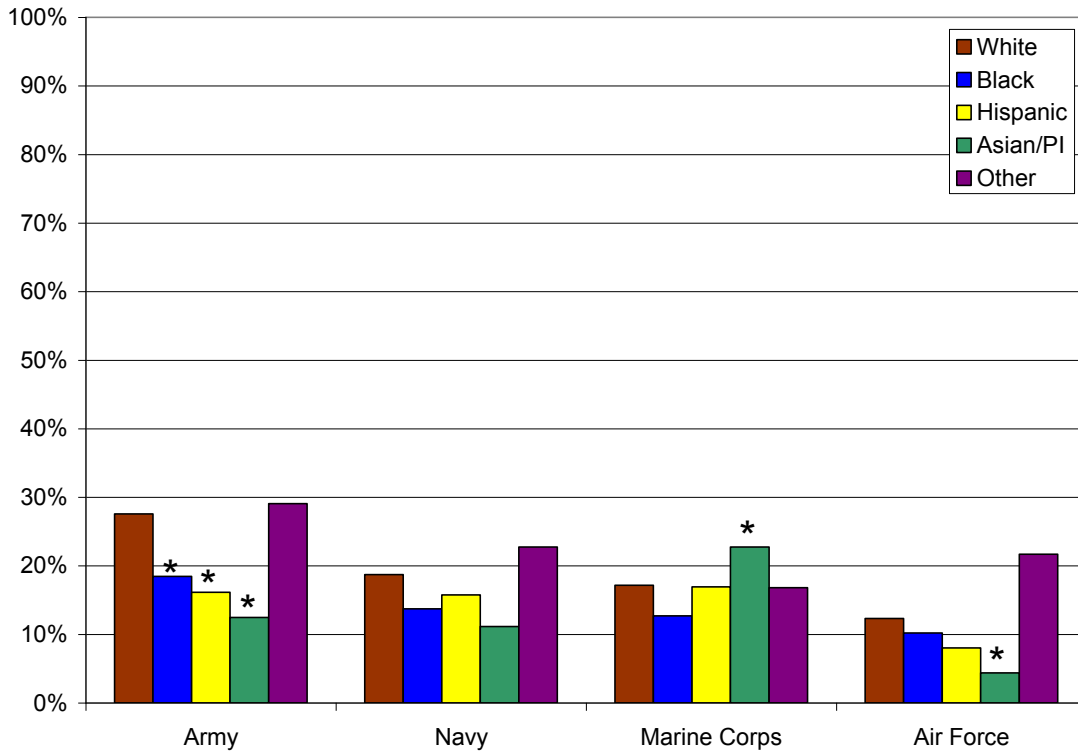
SOURCE: November 2008 active-duty SOFS.

Figure 2. Satisfaction with the Military Way of Life, by Service and Race/Ethnicity



SOURCE: November 2008 active-duty SOFS.

Figure 3. Dissatisfaction with the Military Way of Life, by Service and Race/Ethnicity



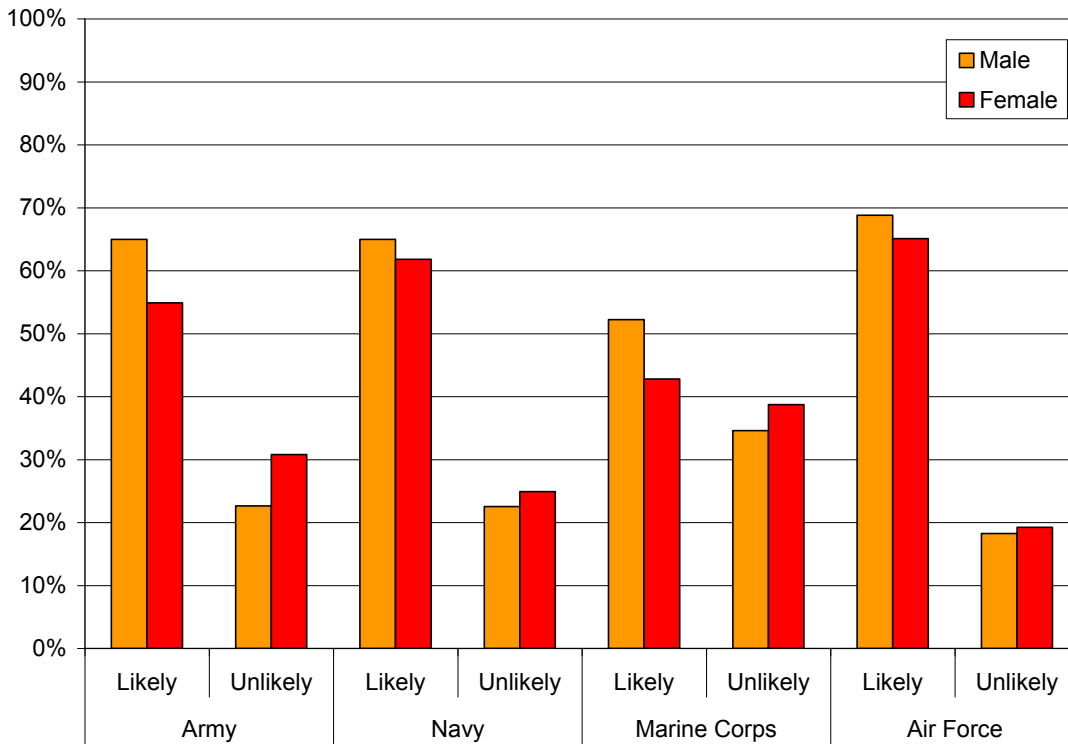
SOURCE: November 2008 active-duty SOFS.

Table 1. Means of Organizational Commitment Across the Services, by Gender and Race/Ethnicity

Affective Commitment				
	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force
Male	2.19	2.36	2.25	2.13
Female	2.29	2.33	2.26	2.14
White	2.24	2.27	2.26	2.13
Black	2.20	2.19	2.20	2.19
Hispanic	2.14	2.16	2.23	2.10
Asian/PI	2.02*	2.24	2.20	2.07
Other	2.22	2.46	2.49	1.92
Continuance Commitment				
	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force
Male	2.84	2.96	2.83	3.11
Female	3.01	3.15	3.06	3.12
White	2.83	2.96	2.79	3.11
Black	2.89	3.02	3.07	3.05
Hispanic	2.91	3.12	3.00	3.14
Asian/PI	3.11*	3.22	3.03	3.24
Other	3.24	2.75	3.06	3.20
Normative Commitment				
	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force
Male	3.42	3.43	3.52	3.41
Female	3.36	3.42	3.41	3.42
White	3.44	3.50	3.52	3.40
Black	3.47	3.58	3.47	3.63*
Hispanic	3.35	3.19*	3.57	3.39
Asian/PI	3.08	3.09*	3.22	3.20
Other	2.80	3.65	3.30	2.95*

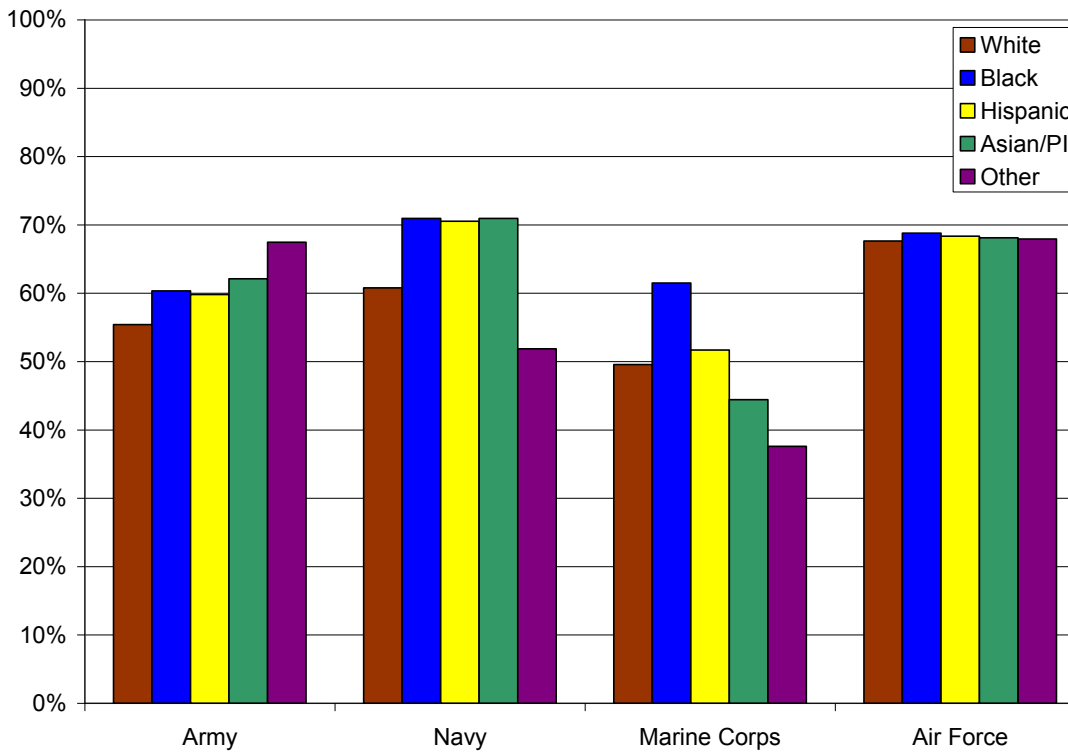
NOTE: The range is 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating higher levels of commitment.

Figure 4. Retention Intent, by Service and Gender



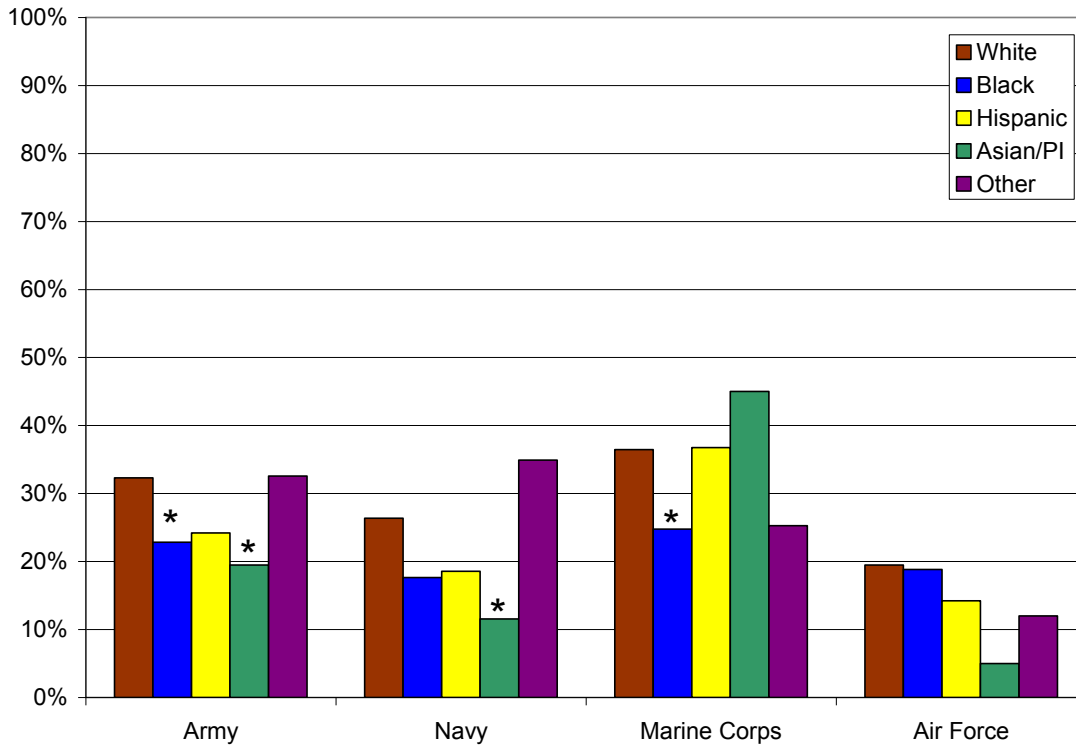
SOURCE: November 2008 active-duty SOFS.

Figure 5. Positive Retention Intent, by Service and Race/Ethnicity



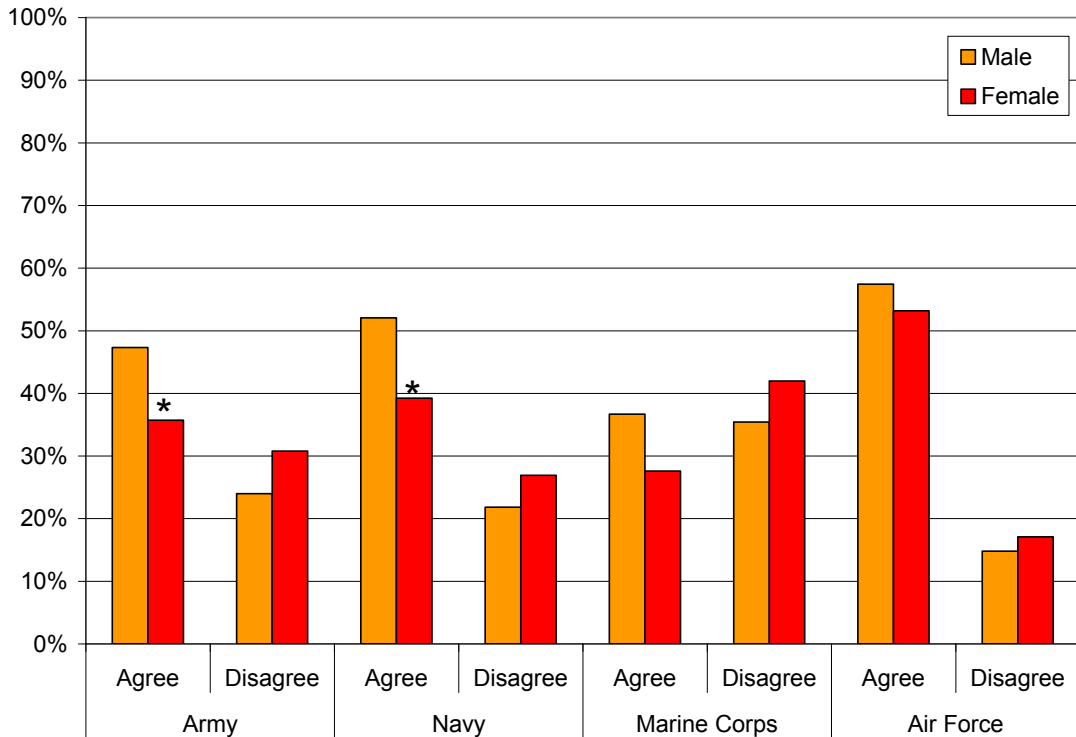
SOURCE: November 2008 active-duty SOFS.

Figure 6. Negative Retention Intent, by Service and Race/Ethnicity



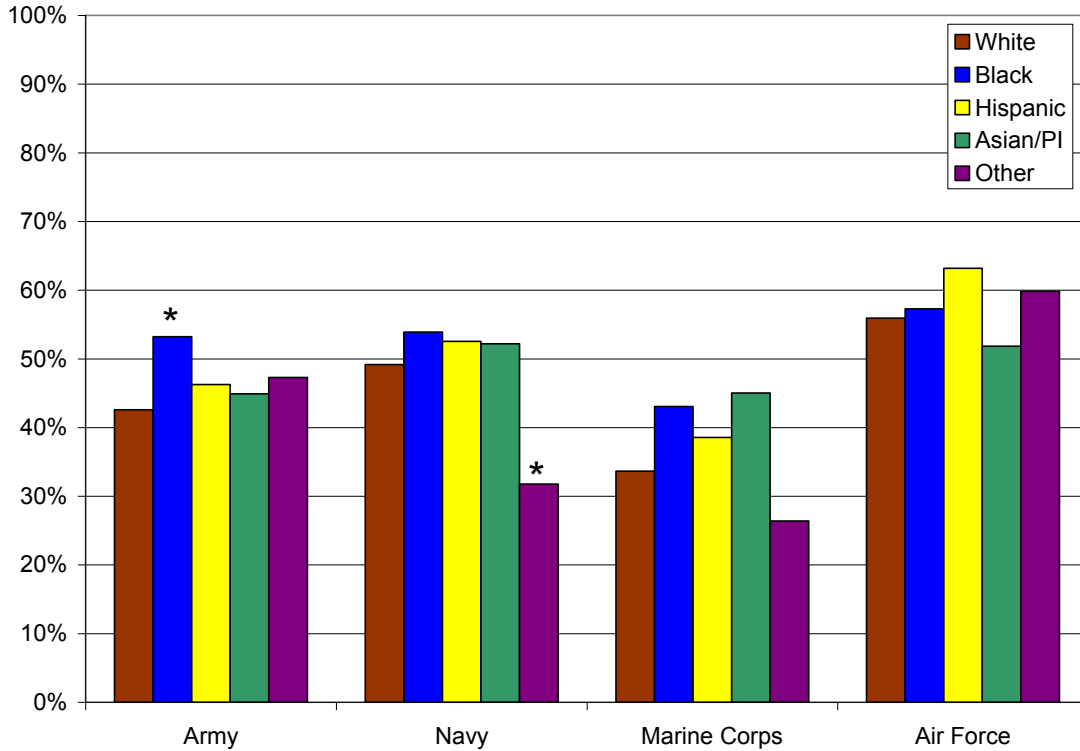
SOURCE: November 2008 active-duty SOFS.

Figure 7. Percentage Who Agreed/Disagreed with the Statement, "I Am Committed to Making the Military My Career," by Service and Gender



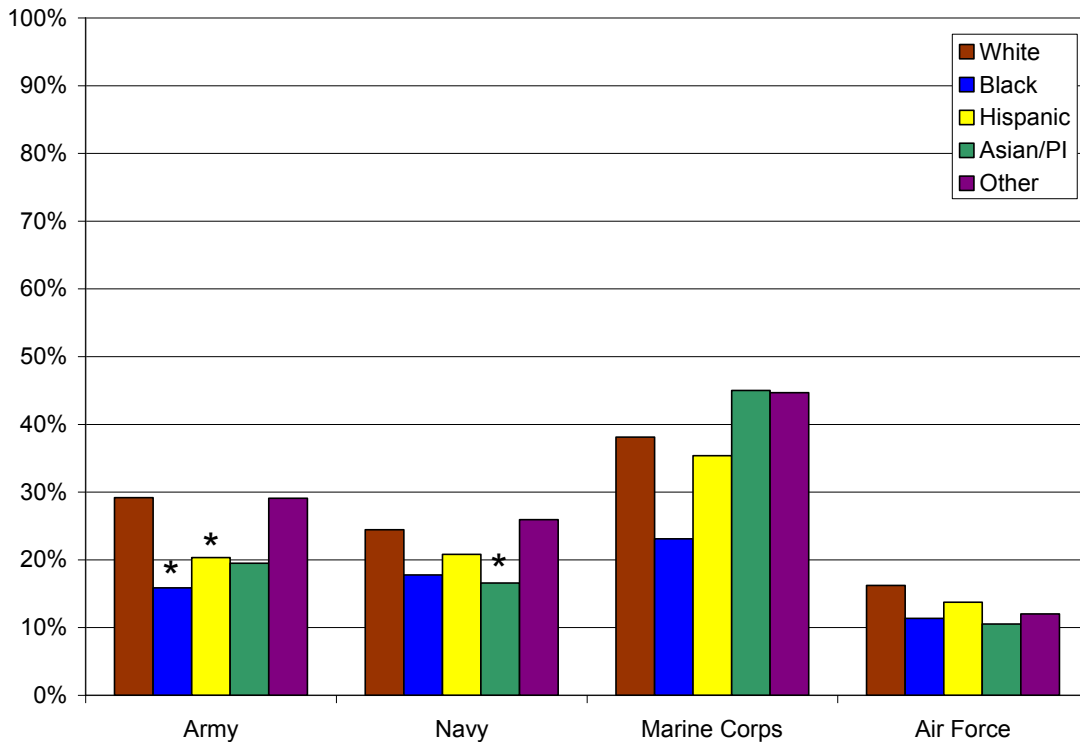
SOURCE: November 2008 active-duty SOFS.

Figure 8. Percentage Who Agreed with the Statement, "I Am Committed to Making the Military My Career," by Service and Race/Ethnicity



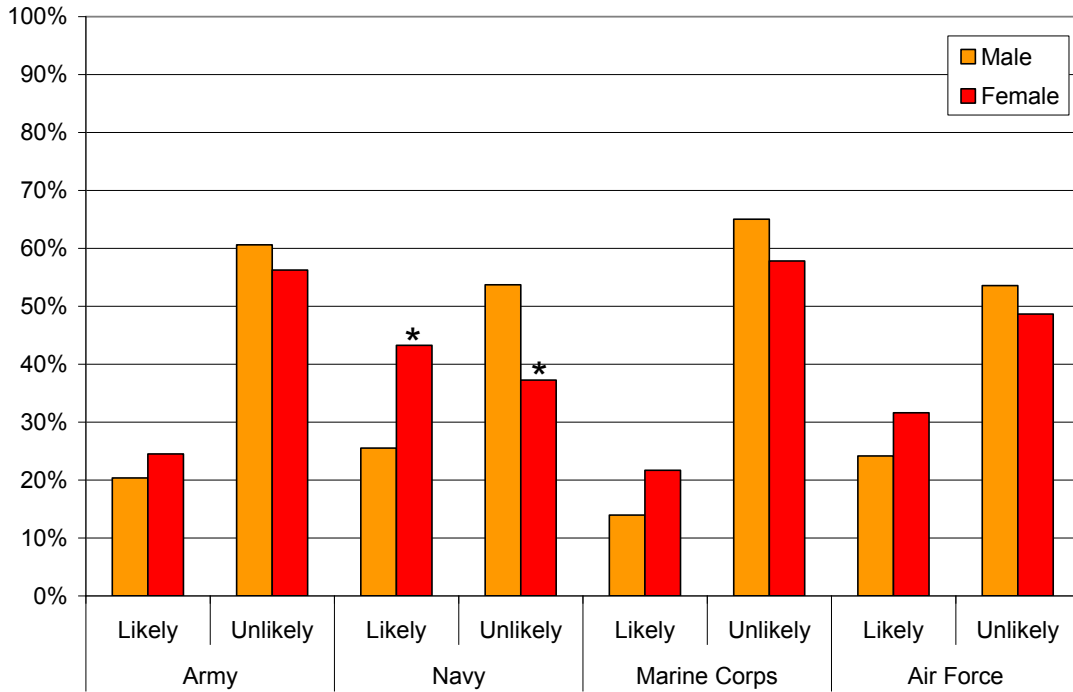
SOURCE: November 2008 active-duty SOFS.

Figure 9. Percentage Who Disagreed with the Statement, "I Am Committed to Making the Military My Career," by Service and Race/Ethnicity



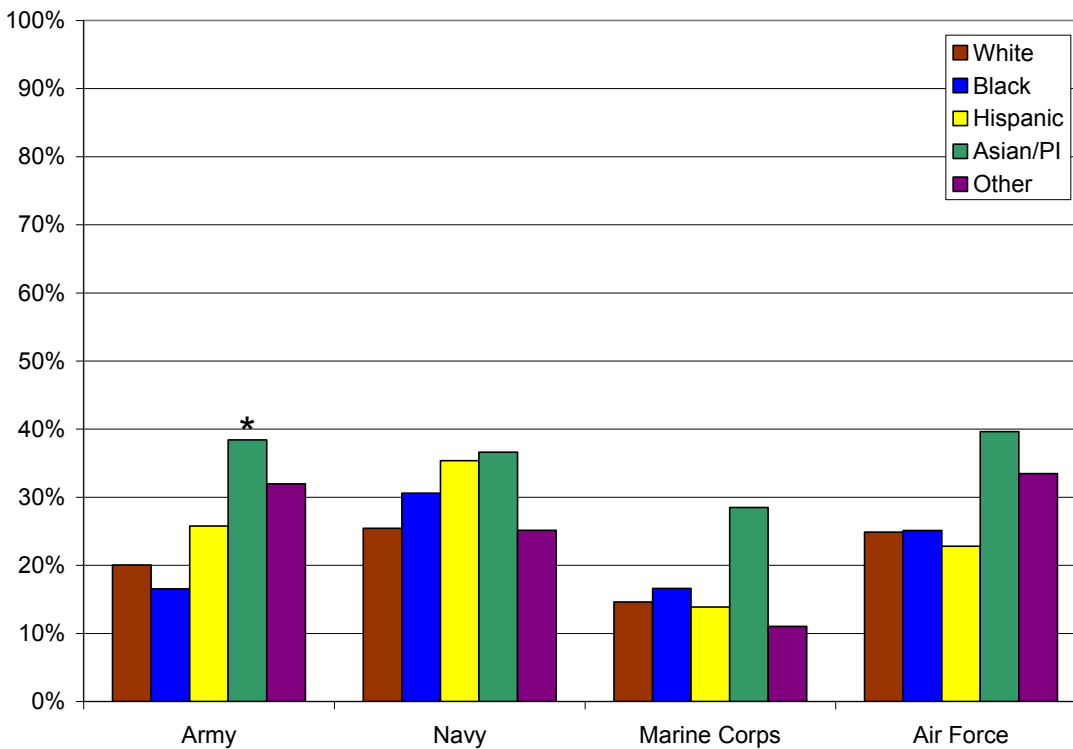
SOURCE: November 2008 active-duty SOFS.

Figure 10. Intent to Join a Reserve or National Guard Unit After Leaving Active-Duty Service, by Service and Gender



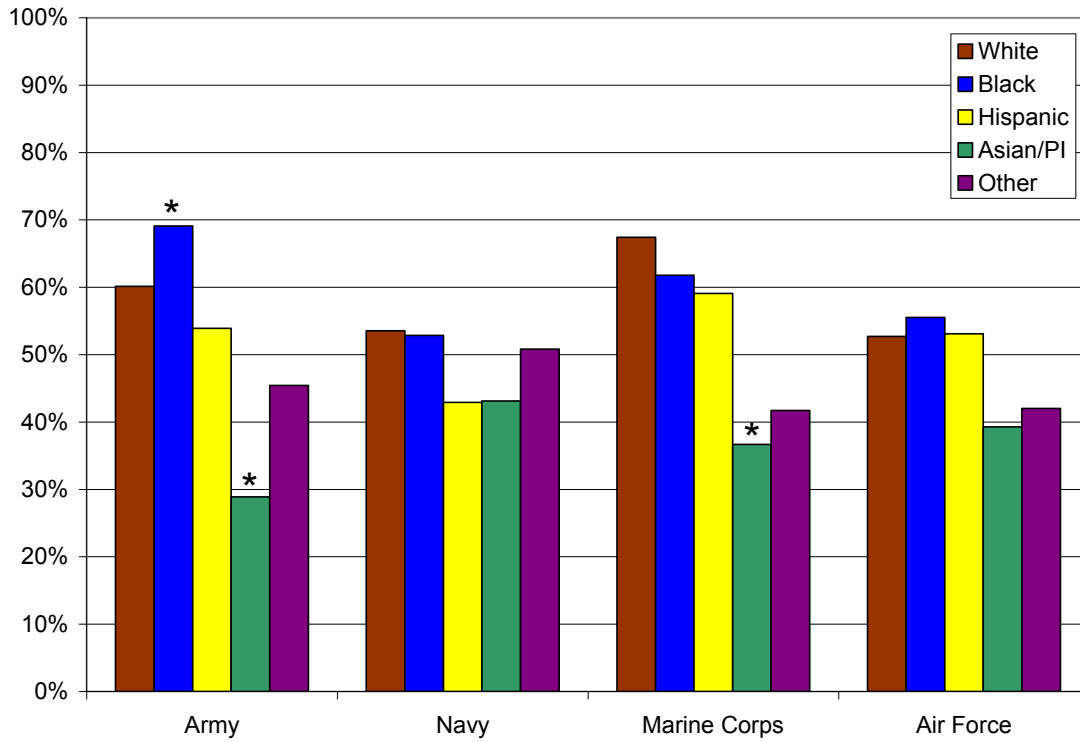
SOURCE: November 2008 active-duty SOFS.

Figure 11. Positive Intent to Join a Reserve or National Guard Unit After Leaving Active-Duty Service, by Service and Gender



SOURCE: November 2008 active-duty SOFS.

Figure 12. Negative Intent to Join a Reserve or National Guard Unit After Leaving Active-Duty Service, by Service and Gender



SOURCE: November 2008 active-duty SOFS.