

**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 Officers

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 officers 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 officers' 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 enlisted members.

Particularly important to the MLDC is whether a greater proportion of minority officers express a desire to leave the military compared with their majority peers and whether minority officers report lower levels of satisfaction. Racial/ethnic and gender differences in retention attitudes could indicate potential future retention problems and underlying problems with morale and perceptions of climate. The survey results indicate that, across the components, female and minority officers were as likely as their white male counterparts in 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. This was not true of women in the Army, who reported being less satisfied and were less likely to report an intention to stay in the Service. More importantly, however, we find that women in all

four Services were less likely than men to report positive career intentions. That is, women were less likely to report that they see the military as a career. With few exceptions, minority officers were as likely as their white peers to view the military as a career. Black officers in the Army 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 in particular from reaching the top officer ranks.

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 officers 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 eth-

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) 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 contains more details on the data used in this IP. For the analysis of active-duty officers (at or below the O-6 level), 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 officers 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. Only one significant difference is apparent: Significantly more female officers than male officers in the Army said that they were dissatisfied, and significantly fewer said that they were satisfied.

By race/ethnicity and branch of Service, Figures 2 and 3 show, respectively, the percentages of officers who were (very) satisfied or (very) dissatisfied with the military way of life. In general, officers of all races/ethnicities reported being satisfied with the military way of life. Only one significant difference emerged: Compared with whites, significantly more blacks in the Army reported being satisfied, and significantly fewer 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. The one fairly consistent difference is that women in the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force displayed significantly higher levels of affective commitment than their male counterparts. In terms of continuance commitment, the results suggest that Hispanic respondents in the Army saw more obstacles to shifting to a civilian career than did their white counterparts, and women in the Navy saw fewer obstacles to shifting to a civilian career than did their male counterparts. No statistically significant differences emerged between men and women or whites and minorities in terms of normative commitment.

The above measures capture officers' 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 officers who indicated that they were (very) likely or (very) unlikely to stay in active-duty service. Across all the Services, both male and female officers indicated that they were more likely to stay than to leave. However, in the Army, significantly fewer female than male officers reported positive retention intentions.

Figures 5 and 6 show, respectively, the percentages of white and minority officers who reported positive and negative retention intentions. The data show that, regardless of race/ethnicity, most officers in the Services had positive retention intentions. Few significant differences emerged. However, compared with whites, significantly more black officers in the Army reported positive retention intentions, and, in the Marine Corps, significantly more officers of "other" race/ethnicity reported positive retention intentions (but, we caution that the overall number of officers in this "other" group is small). The data also show that, in the Marine Corps, significantly fewer black than white officers said that they were unlikely to continue active-duty service. The same was true of officers from other race/ethnic backgrounds both in the Army and the Marine Corps.

Even though most officers reported positive retention intentions, continuing for additional years 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. Regardless of Service, significantly fewer women than men reported that they (strongly) agreed that they were committed to making the military a career.

By race/ethnicity and Service, Figures 8 and 9 show, respectively, the percentages of officers who agreed and disagreed that they were committed to making the military their career. In general, all respondents were more likely to indicate a positive commitment to making the military a career, and this was true across both Services and races/ethnicities. However, a few significant differences did emerge across race/ethnicity groups. Compared with whites, significantly more black Army officers agreed with the survey item, but significantly fewer "other" Navy officers agreed. Compared with whites, significantly fewer black and Hispanic Army officers and Asian/Pacific Islander Navy officers disagreed with the statement about 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 officers 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 officers said that entering into this type of service after leaving active duty was not likely. No significant gender differences emerged.

Figures 11 and 12 report intentions to join a reserve or National Guard unit by branch of Service and race/ethnicity. Again, the majority of officers reported that they were unlikely to move to a such a unit after leaving active-duty service, and this was consistent across the Services and races/ethnicities, with two exceptions: Compared with white officers, significantly more black Marine Corps officers said that they would not join a reserve unit and significantly fewer of "other" race/ethnicity than white officers in the Navy said that they would not join a reserve unit.

Conclusion

The survey results reported in this IP indicate that, across the Services, in 2008, there were few demographic differences in retention attitudes and general intentions. Specifically, in the Navy, the Marine Corps, and the Air Force, female and minority officers were as likely as their white male counterparts both to be satisfied with the military way of life and to report that they intend to remain in the armed forces. The exception was female Army officers, who reported being less satisfied with the military and less likely to stay in their Service. In terms of career intentions, the data show that, across the Services, minority officers were as likely as their white peers to view the military as a career, with black Army officers being more likely than their white counterparts to report positive career intentions. In contrast, in all four Services, women were less likely than men to report positive career intentions. That is, women were less likely to report that they saw the military as a career. 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 officer ranks.

Notes

¹In IP #24 we present actual retention *behavior* among officers (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.

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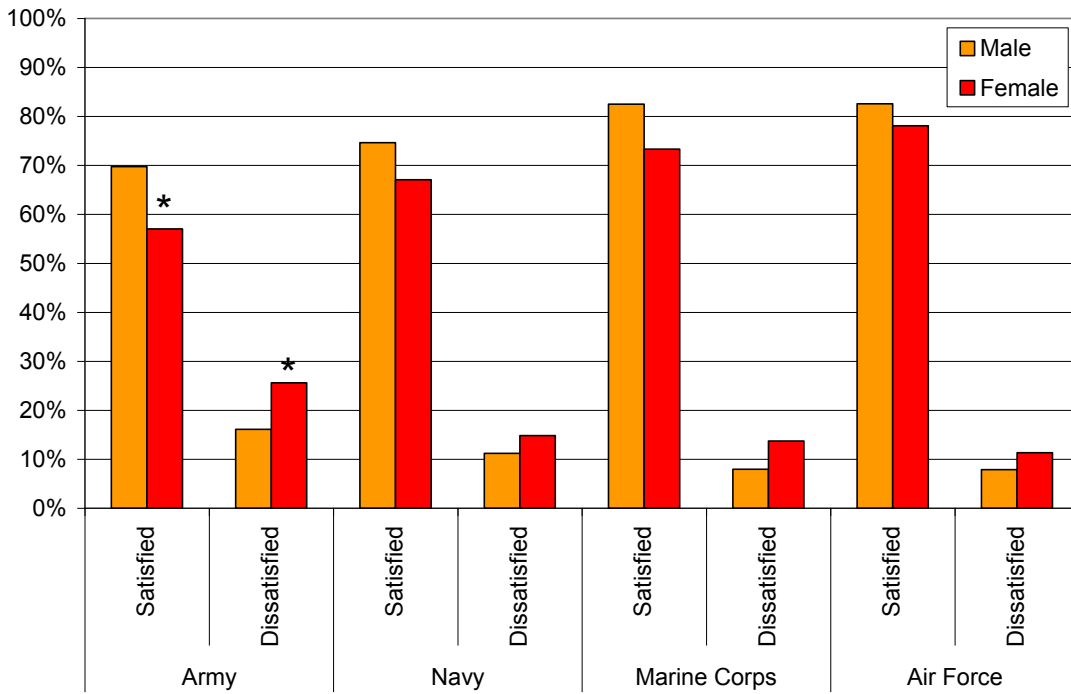
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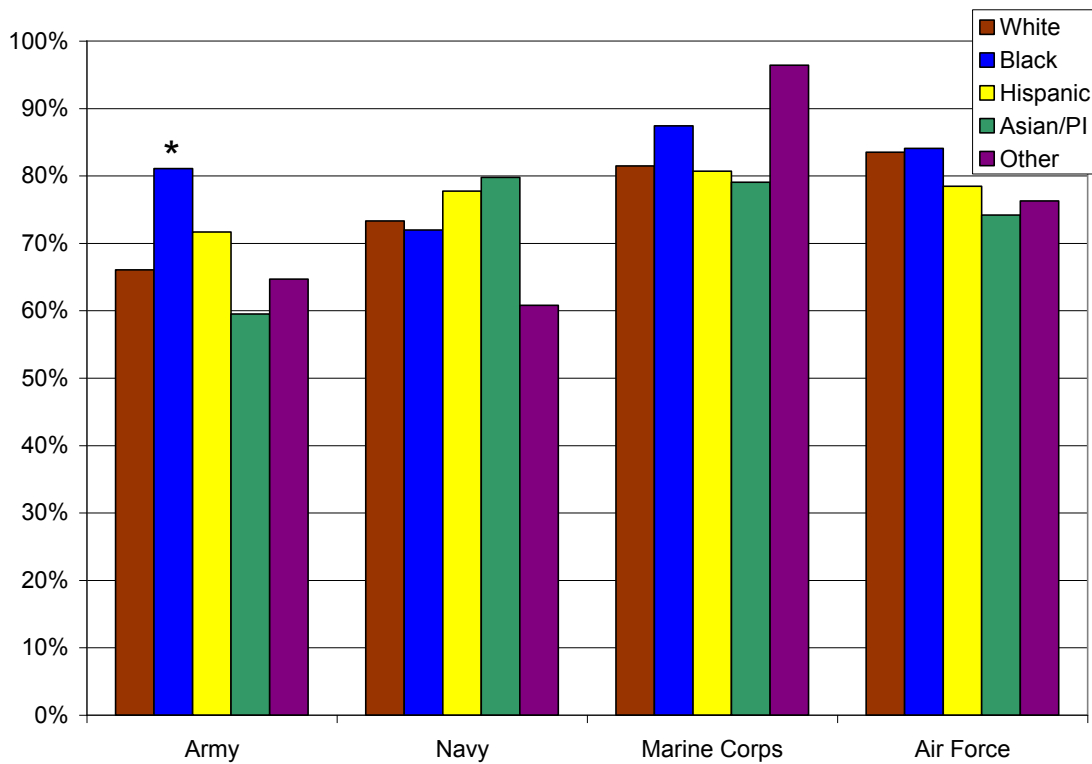
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Figure 1. Satisfaction with the Military Way of Life, by Service and Gender



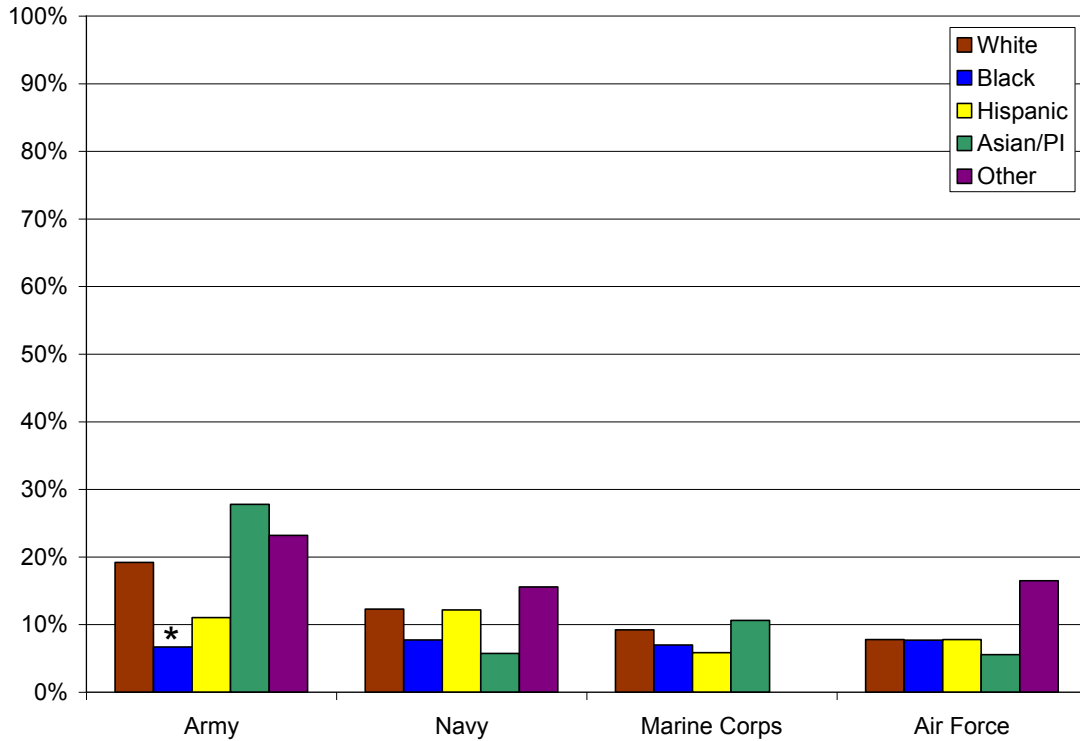
SOURCE: November 2008 active-duty SOFS.

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



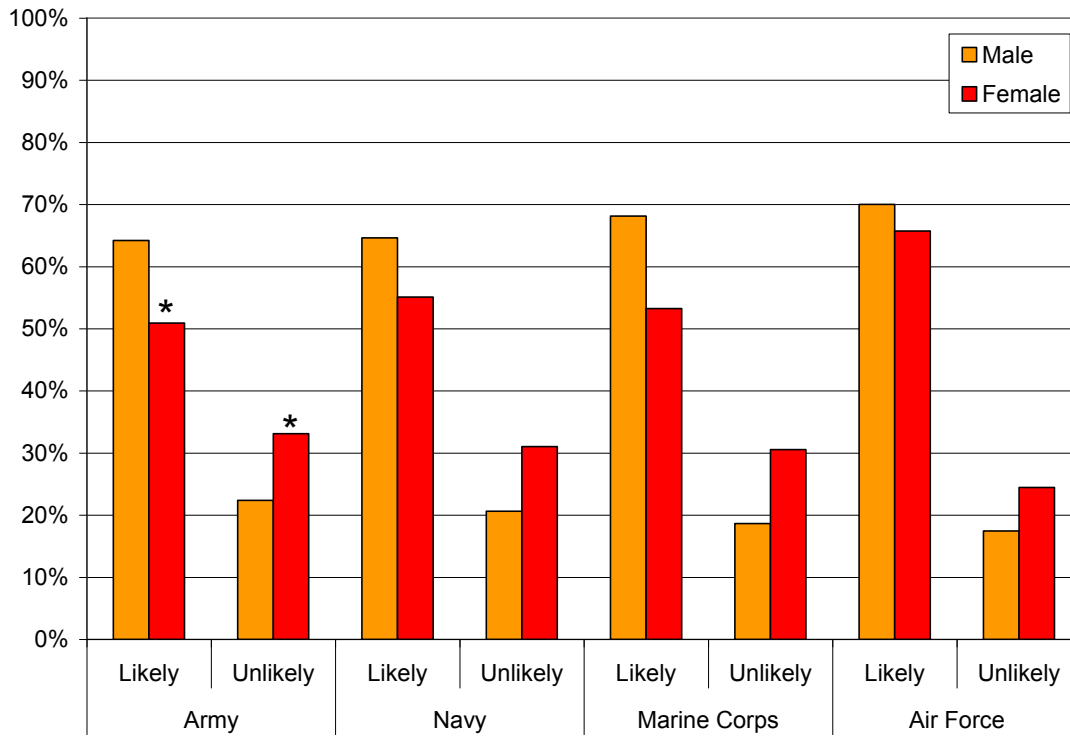
SOURCE: November 2008 active-duty SOFS.

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

Affective Commitment					
	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	
Male	1.99	1.99	1.82	1.86	
Female	2.28*	2.19*	1.96	2.04*	
White	2.03	2.02	1.84	1.89	
Black	1.92	2.06	1.82	1.88	
Hispanic	2.14	1.95	1.77	1.91	
Asian/PI	2.22	1.95	1.87	1.77	
Other	1.69	2.11	1.69	2.23	
Continuance Commitment					
	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	
Male	2.39	2.52	2.59	2.62	
Female	2.35	2.20*	2.71	2.52	
White	2.35	2.46	2.59	2.64	
Black	2.49	2.45	2.61	2.58	
Hispanic	2.64*	2.63	2.73	2.46	
Asian/PI	2.24	2.52	2.75	2.43	
Other	2.71	2.43	2.48	2.69	
Normative Commitment					
	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	
Male	3.38	3.57	3.36	3.50	
Female	3.53	3.58	3.42	3.48	
White	3.41	3.59	3.38	3.46	
Black	3.45	3.60	3.52	3.63	
Hispanic	3.38	3.36	3.17	3.57	
Asian/PI	3.40	3.48	3.39	3.57	
Other	3.03	3.78	3.00	3.53	

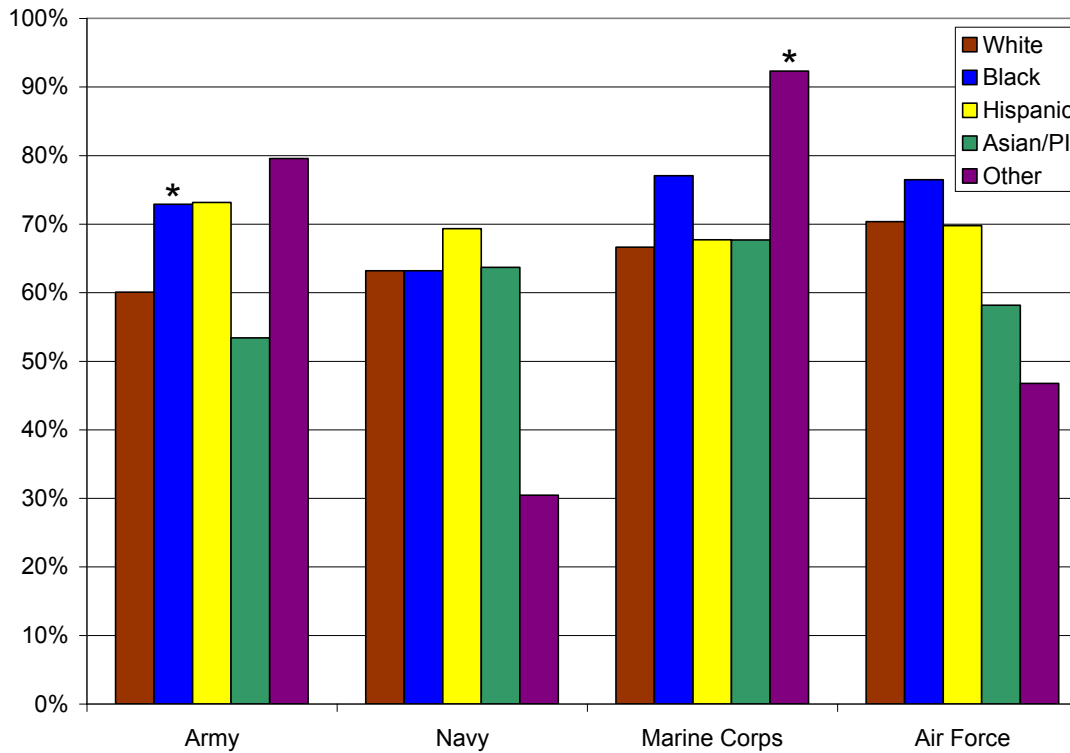
NOTE: The range is 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating higher levels of commitment.

Figure 4. Retention Intent, by Service and Gender



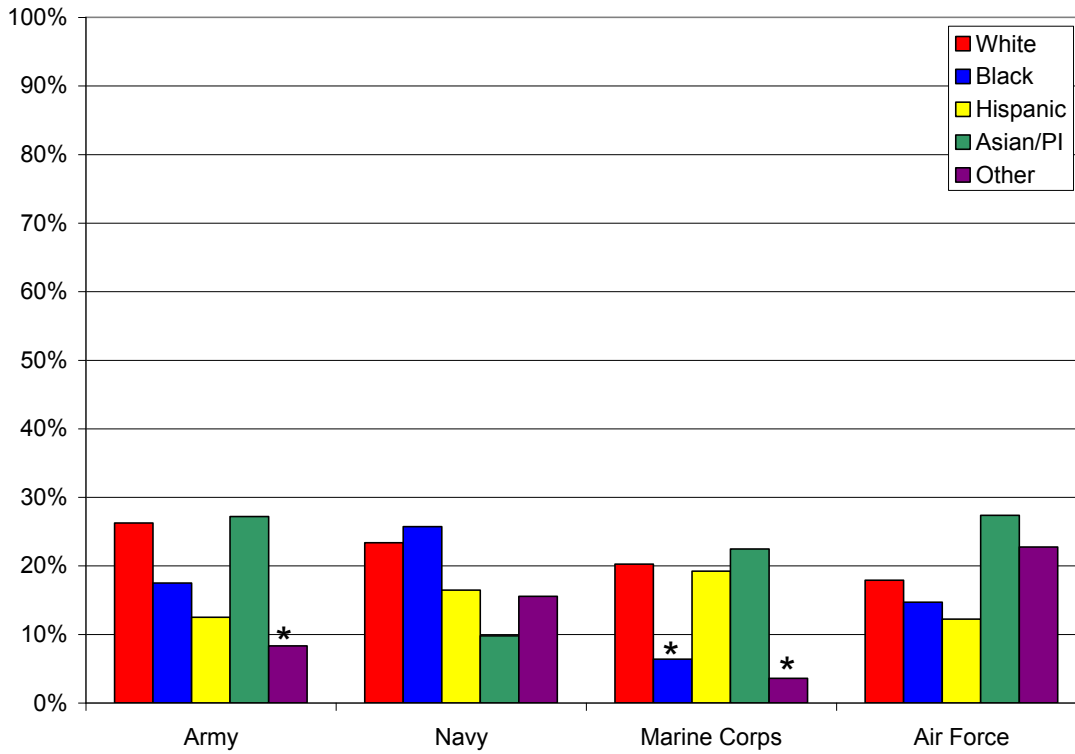
SOURCE: November 2008 active-duty SOFS.

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



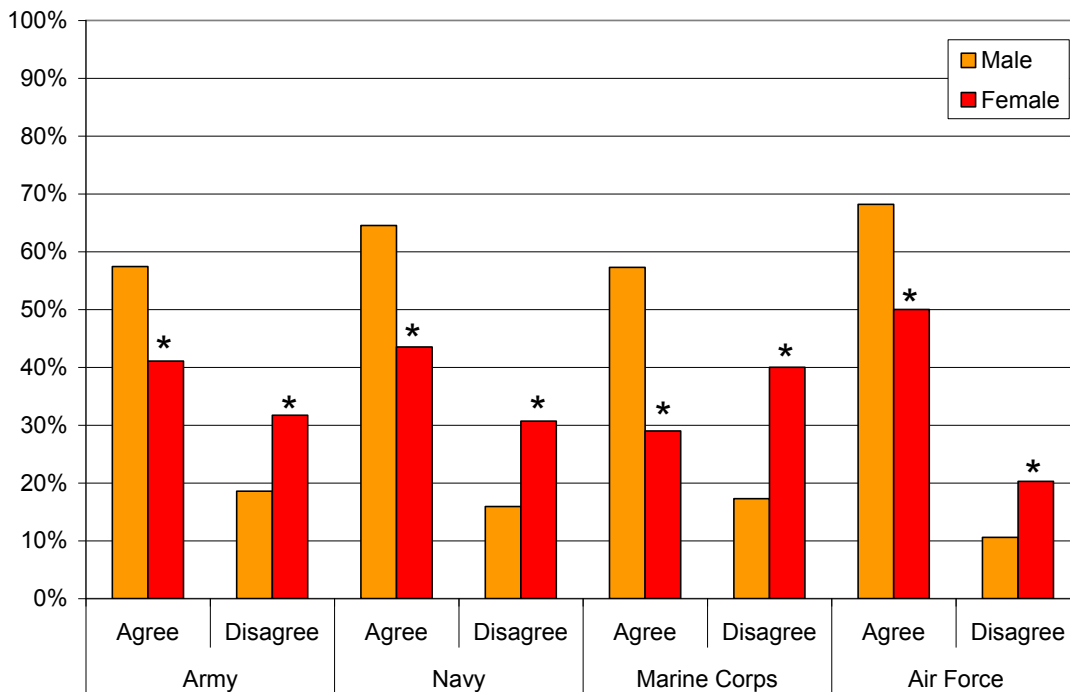
SOURCE: November 2008 active-duty SOFS.

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



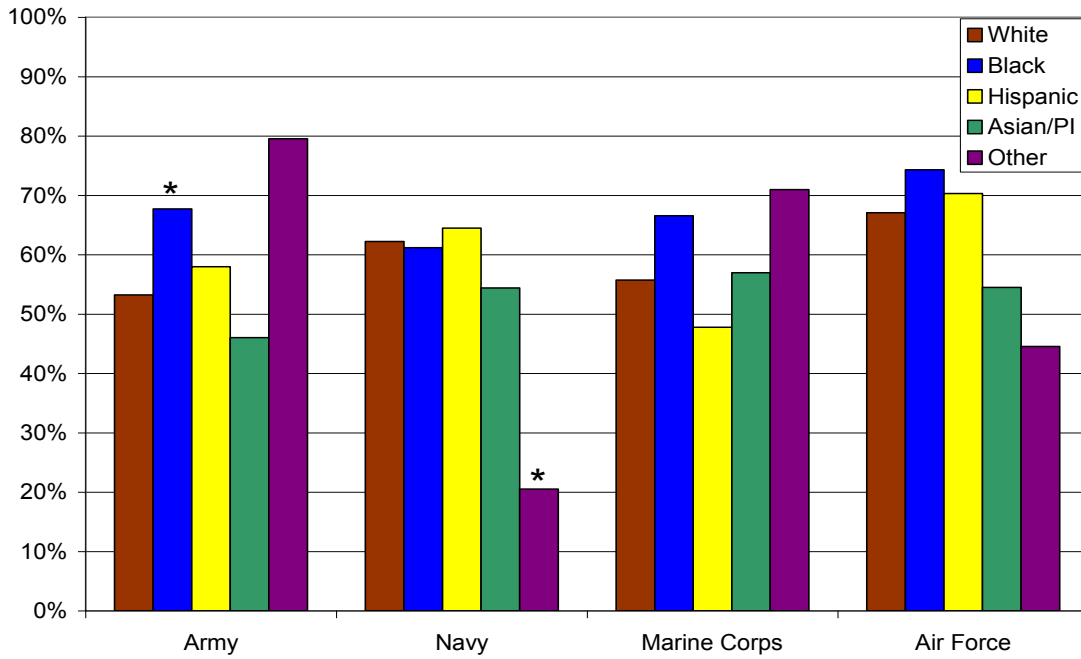
SOURCE: November 2008 active-duty SOFS.

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



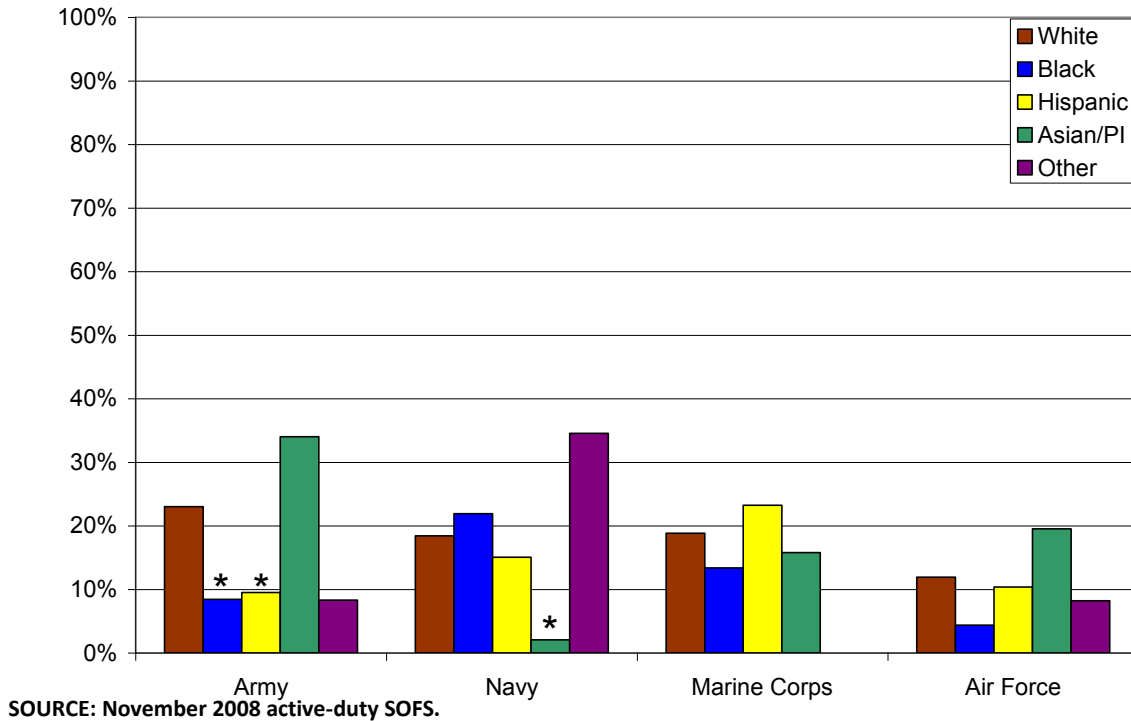
SOURCE: November 2008 active-duty SOFS.

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



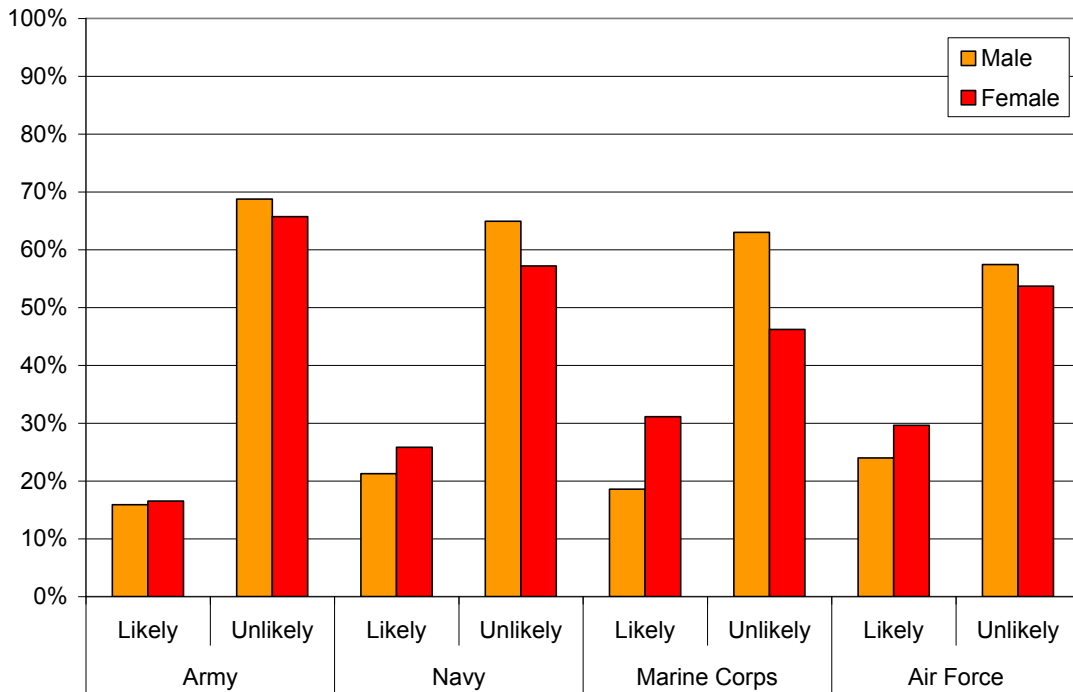
SOURCE: November 2008 active-duty SOFS.

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



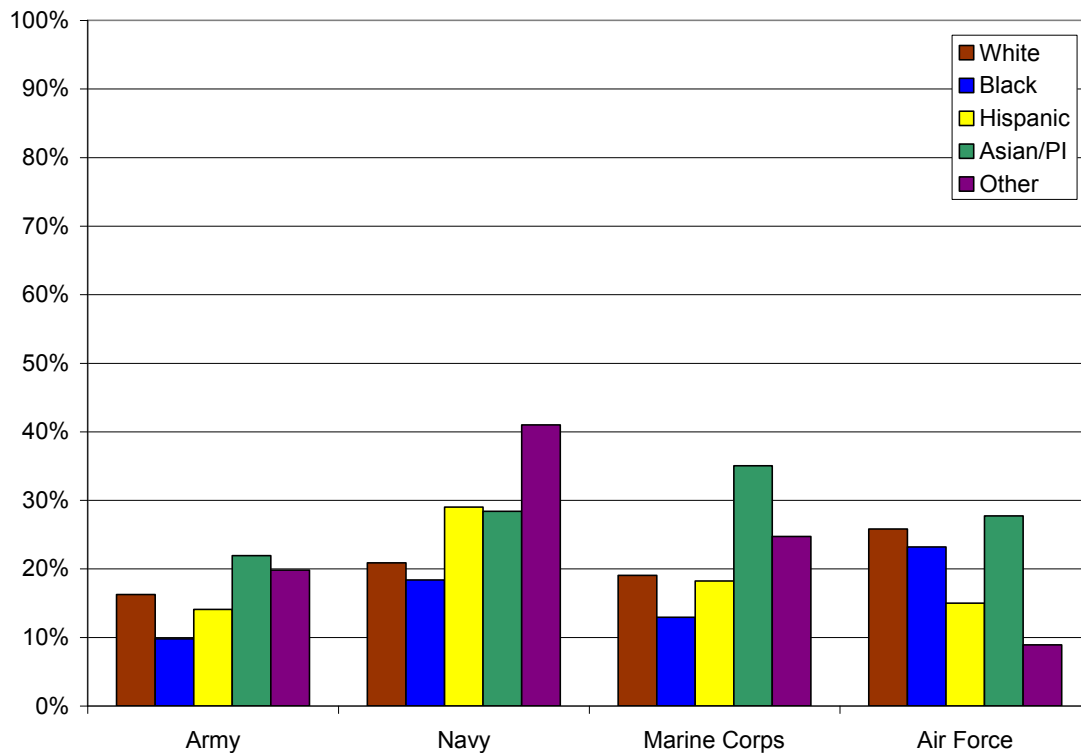
SOURCE: November 2008 active-duty SOFS.

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



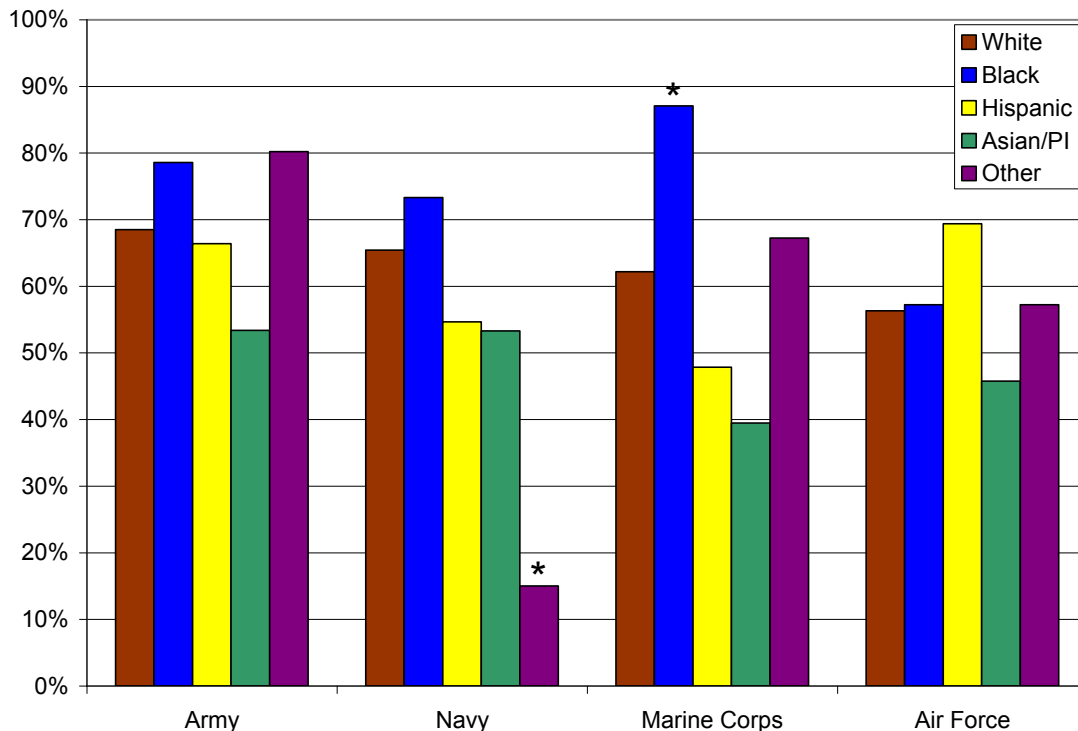
SOURCE: November 2008 active-duty SOFS.

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.