

Finding 12 Identity

Respondents of color report their race/ethnicity has the strongest influence on their overall identity, but many are uncertain about whether their race/ethnicity or another demographic characteristic is influencing their negative experiences.



Somedays you go like, I give up, I don't know what fight I'm fighting today. Is it race or is it rank?

- Black Military Spouse

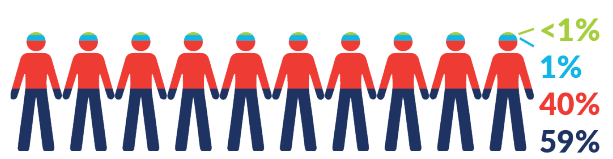
While research often naturally focuses on the influence of race/ethnicity in the lives of people of color, many respondents* have other characteristics and identities that also shape their military life experiences. In addition to their racial/ethnic minority status, **74% of active-duty and 59% of Veteran family respondents* identify as female**¹, and **6% of all active-duty and Veteran family respondents* identify as non-heterosexual**.² Open-ended responses and focus group conversations demonstrate how these and other identities³ (including those unique to the military) intersect and complicate how participants are seen and understood in their military and Veteran communities.⁴

Figure 1: Respondents* Gender Identity²¹
% of respondents who identify as...

Active-duty Family Respondents²²



Veteran Family Respondents²³



■ Female ■ Male ■ Trans (man or woman) ■ Gender non-conforming/non-binary/diverse

*Unless otherwise noted, respondents indicated having at least one racial/ethnic identity other than white.

The sample size limited intersectional analysis within this report; however, broadly understanding how respondents’* intersecting identities manifest is important context, particularly regarding those who hold multiple historically-marginalized identities.⁵ For example, considering the “Black female service member experience” as distinct and unique from the “Black” or “female” service member experience paints a more accurate picture of respondents’ lived experiences. Additionally, doing so illuminates how intersectionality compounds marginalization and informs more effective strategies for improving the service experiences of diverse subgroups.⁶

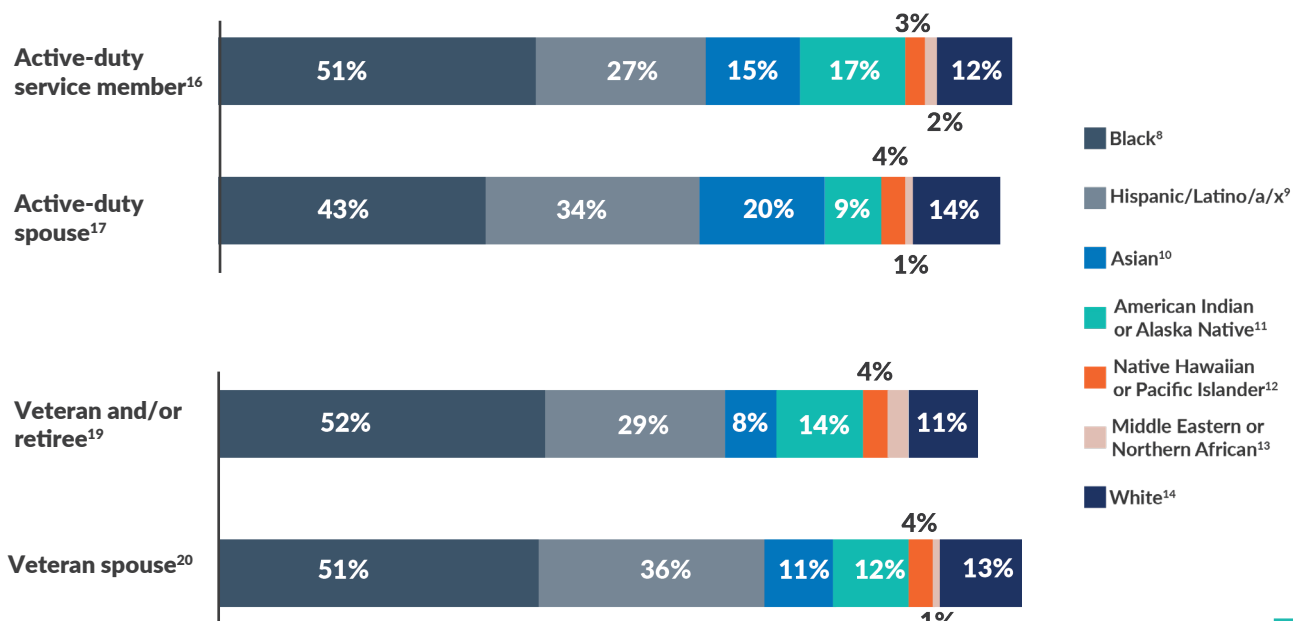


The officer community in the Marine Corps is small and the “typical” officer is often a heterosexual white male and his family is of Caucasian descent. [...] there are several instances when spouses of other officers have assumed that my husband is enlisted, one spouse even apologiz[ed] for making such an assumption.

- Asian Military Spouse

Figure 2: Respondents of Color by Racial/Ethnic Identity⁷

% of respondents who identify as...¹⁸



*Unless otherwise noted, respondents indicated having at least one racial/ethnic identity other than white.

Most family respondents of color report their race/ethnicity influences their overall identity, but those who say it influences their overall identity to “a great extent” report challenges connecting with their military/Veteran community.

Three in four active-duty (78%) and Veteran (74%) family respondents* report their race/ethnicity influences their overall identity. Similar to their civilian counterparts²⁴, Black active-duty family respondents* report their race/ethnicity influences their overall identity most often (88%), followed by Asian (78%) and Hispanic/Latino/a/x (72%) family respondents*.²⁵ Among respondents* who identify strongly with their race/ethnicity, half (50%) report feeling “comfortable” or “very comfortable” in their military community.²⁶ However, 48% of active-duty family respondents who identify their race/ethnicity influences their overall identity to “a great extent” report they have considered/did consider leaving the military because they felt isolated or unwelcomed in the workplace.²⁷ Civilian and military personnel research finds that people of color often choose to behave more “white” in professional contexts to avoid being excluded and gain acceptance from their peers.



Several open-ended responses detail how not looking or acting white holds respondents back from building connections with military peers.²⁸ **These experiences may influence how respondents of color, particularly active-duty respondents, connect with their own military/Veteran identity.** A notably greater proportion of Veteran family respondents* (58%) report their military/Veteran affiliation has a strong influence on their identity, compared to their active-duty family counterparts (47%)²⁹; however, little variation exists by race/ethnicity among either population.

*Unless otherwise noted, respondents indicated having at least one racial/ethnic identity other than white.
The appearance of U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) visual information does not imply or constitute DoD endorsement.

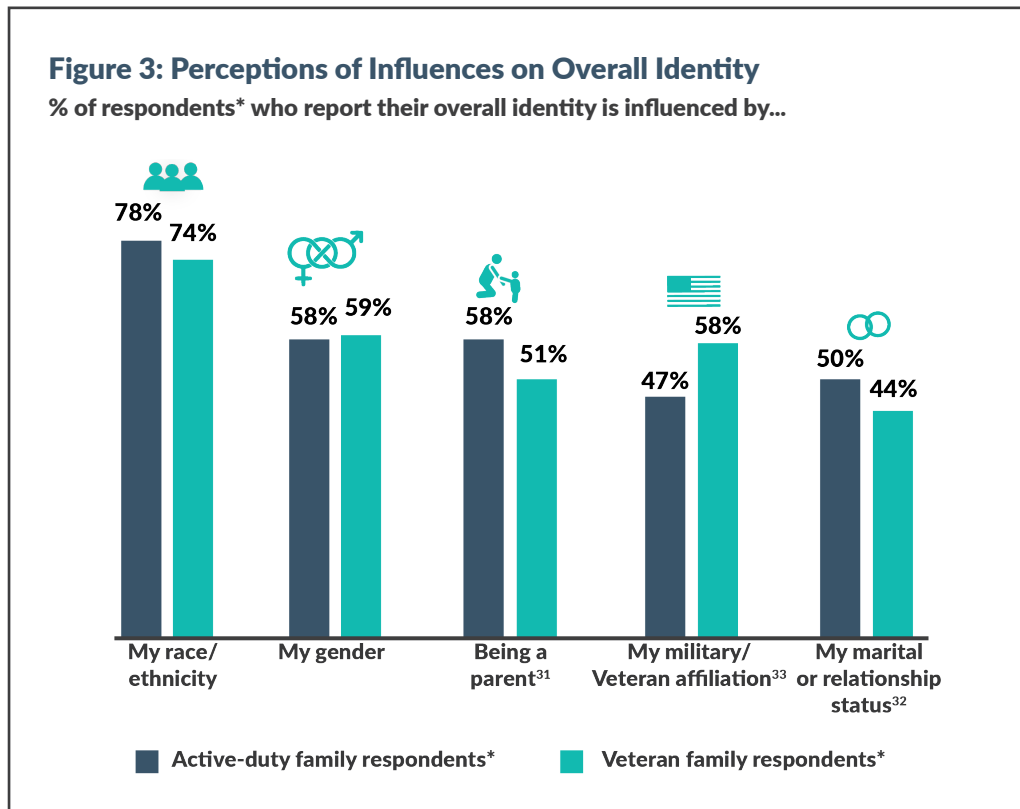


[The] times I've reached out to try and better explain a topic or the perspective others may be missing I received backlash. It's almost as if my honest feedback and attempts to address concerns are boiled down to a joke. [...] replies start with "pulling the race card" or "pulling the gender card." [...] And it's pervasive. So much so that at times I actively avoid the service member veteran community because I find it toxic.

-Black Reserve Service Member

Gender, being a parent, and marital/relationship status also commonly influence how family respondents of color identify.

Survey and open-ended responses demonstrate that respondents' military life experiences are not solely shaped by race/ethnicity.³⁴ Overall, 67% of Black, 57% of Asian, and 55% of Hispanic/Latino/a/x family respondents* report their gender influences their overall identity³⁵, while parental and marital/relationship status are also salient parts of how nearly half of active-duty and Veteran family respondents* identify.³⁶



*Unless otherwise noted, respondents indicated having at least one racial/ethnic identity other than white.

The intersection of these identities exacerbates respondents' challenges, particularly for those with multiple historically marginalized identities.

Consistent with literature on female Veterans, **survey respondents and focus group participants with multiple historically marginalized identities describe feeling isolated, disconnected, and sometimes dismissed by their military peers.**³⁷ Overall, a smaller proportion of female active-duty service member and Veteran respondents* report feeling like valued members of their military community, compared to their male peers (63% vs. 72% among active-duty service member respondents and 55% vs. 71% Veteran respondents).³⁸ Additionally, proportionally fewer female active-duty service member respondents* than male respondents* report feeling a sense of belonging (63% vs. 73%).³⁹ Factors that further compound these experiences include military markers of difference, such as rank, time in service, military occupational specialty, and military service era.⁴⁰ Survey respondents and focus group participants who hold multiple intersecting minority characteristics frequently express frustration because it is often unclear whether their race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, rank, national origin, or a combination of characteristics are the reason they are treated differently.



I feel like I don't belong and no one understands me and my culture. All my coworkers and superiors are white males - I am a female and Latina. It is hard to connect with them.

-Hispanic/Latino/a/x Service Member

*Unless otherwise noted, respondents indicated having at least one racial/ethnic identity other than white.



Finding 12 Endnotes

¹ n=900 active-duty family of color respondents; n=581 Veteran family of color respondents

² n=1,064

³ Additional minoritized identities that likely disproportionately impact military families of color include immigration

status, national origin, native language, etc. and should be explored in more depth in future research.

⁴ Meade (2020); Carlson, Endlsey, Motley, Shawahin, & Williams (2018)

⁵ Crenshaw, Kennedy, & Bartlett (1991); Sasson-Levy (2017)

⁶ Christoffersen (2017); Crenshaw, Kennedy, & Bartlett (1991)

⁷ Question text: "How do you describe yourself? Please select all that apply." The race/ethnicity question was a multi-select question, and totals may sum to more than 100%. Respondents who selected "some other race or ethnicity" are not reflected in this table. "Family" unit statistics aggregate the spouse and service member (or Veteran) respondents; those who selected both identities are de-duplicated.

⁸ The answer choice offered to respondents was "Black or African-American (for example African American, Nigerian, Jamaican, Ethiopian, Haitian, Somali)." For the sake of consistency and brevity within this report those selecting this answer choice are referred to as "Black" throughout the report.

⁹ The answer choice offered to respondents was "Hispanic or Latino/a/x or of Spanish origin (for example Mexican or Mexican American, Salvadoran, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Cuban, Colombian)." For the sake of consistency and brevity within this report those selecting this answer choice are referred to as "Hispanic/Latino/a/x" throughout the report.

¹⁰ The answer choice offered to respondents was "Asian (for example Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipino, Korean, Asian Indian, Japanese)." For the sake of consistency and brevity within this report those selecting this answer choice are referred to as "Asian" throughout the report.

¹¹ The answer choice offered to respondents was "American Indian or Alaska Native (for example Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe, Mayan)." For the sake of consistency and brevity within this report those selecting this answer choice are referred to as "American Indian or Alaska Native" throughout the report.

¹² The answer choice offered to respondents was "Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (for example Native Hawaiian, Tongan, Samoan, Fijian, Chamorro, Marshallese)." For the sake of consistency and brevity within this report those selecting this answer choice are referred to as "Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander" throughout the report.

¹³ The answer choice offered to respondents was "Middle Eastern or Northern African (for example Lebanese, Syrian, Iranian, Moroccan, Egyptian, Israeli)." For the sake of consistency and brevity within this report those selecting this answer choice are referred to as "Middle Eastern or Northern African" throughout the report.

¹⁴ The answer choice offered to respondents was "White (for example German, Italian, Irish, Polish, English, French)." Because the intent of this report is to highlight the experiences of military families of color (including multiracial/ethnic families), respondents who selected "white" in addition to at least one other non-white identity are included in discussions of their non-white identity. Findings regarding white respondents who did not identify at least one other racial/ethnic identity are specifically indicated as such in the text or footnotes.

¹⁵ n=909

¹⁶ n=303

¹⁷ n=622

¹⁸ Total active-duty family respondents * (n=909); total Veteran family respondents* (n=586)

¹⁹ n=437

²⁰ n=180

²¹ Question text: "What is your gender?" Due to rounding, totals may not sum to 100%.

²² n=900

²³ n=581

²⁴ In a 2019 Pew Research study, 52% of Black respondents said their racial/ethnic identity is "extremely important" to how they think about themselves, compared to 31% of Hispanic and 27% of Asian respondents; Horowitz, Brown & Cox (2019, April 9)

²⁵ n=370 Black, n=256 Hispanic/Latino/a/x, and n=151 Asian family of color respondents

²⁶ 30% of family of color respondents say they are "neutral," 38% are "comfortable," and 12% are "very comfortable"

in their military/veteran community

²⁷ n=190

- ²⁸ This challenging cultural and psychological negotiation between rejecting and adopt the norms and practices of an institution's dominant culture as a member of the culture minority, known as acculturation, may further impact foreign-born and immigrant respondents, as well as those who speak English as a second language; Berry (2015).
- ²⁹ n=523 Veteran family of color respondents; n=822 active-duty family of color respondents
- ³⁰ Question text: "To what extent does each of the following influence your overall identity? Select all that apply."
- ³¹ 64% of Asian, 64% of Hispanic/Latino/a/x and 58% of Black family of color respondents say being a parent influences their overall identity.
- ³² 58% of Hispanic/Latino/a/x, 51% of Black and 50% of Asian family of color respondents say their marital/relationship status influences their overall identity.
- ³³ 71% of active-duty and 44% of Veteran family of color respondents identify as military spouses or spouses of veterans.
- ³⁴ Le Menestrel & Kizer (2019)
- ³⁵ n=370 Black, n=256 Hispanic/Latino/a/x, and n=151 Asian family of color respondents
- ³⁶ n=822 active-duty family of color respondents; n=523 Veteran family of color respondents
- ³⁷ Meade (2020); Strong, Crowe & Lawson (2018)
- ³⁸ n=138 male active-duty service member of color respondents; n=81 female active-duty service member of color respondents; n=162 male Veteran of color respondents; n=141 female Veteran of color respondents
- ³⁹ n=139 male active-duty service member of color respondents; n=83 female active-duty service member of color respondents
- ⁴⁰ Meade (2020)

Finding 12 References

Unless otherwise noted, images are sourced from Blue Star Families Stock Photos, DVIDSHub.net, Unsplash.com. The appearance of U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) visual information does not imply or constitute DoD endorsement.

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