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# Private Military and Security Contractors

## A Social-Psychological Perspective



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# Agenda

**Social Identities**

**Military Culture &  
Readiness**

**Social Comparisons**

**Mental Health**

# Social Identities



- ▶ We all have numerous identities arranged in a hierarchy of importance to us.
- ▶ Identities with greater importance are more likely to invoke attitudes and behaviors consistent with them.

(Woodruff, Kelty & Segal 2011)

# The Function of Identities in a Total Force Context

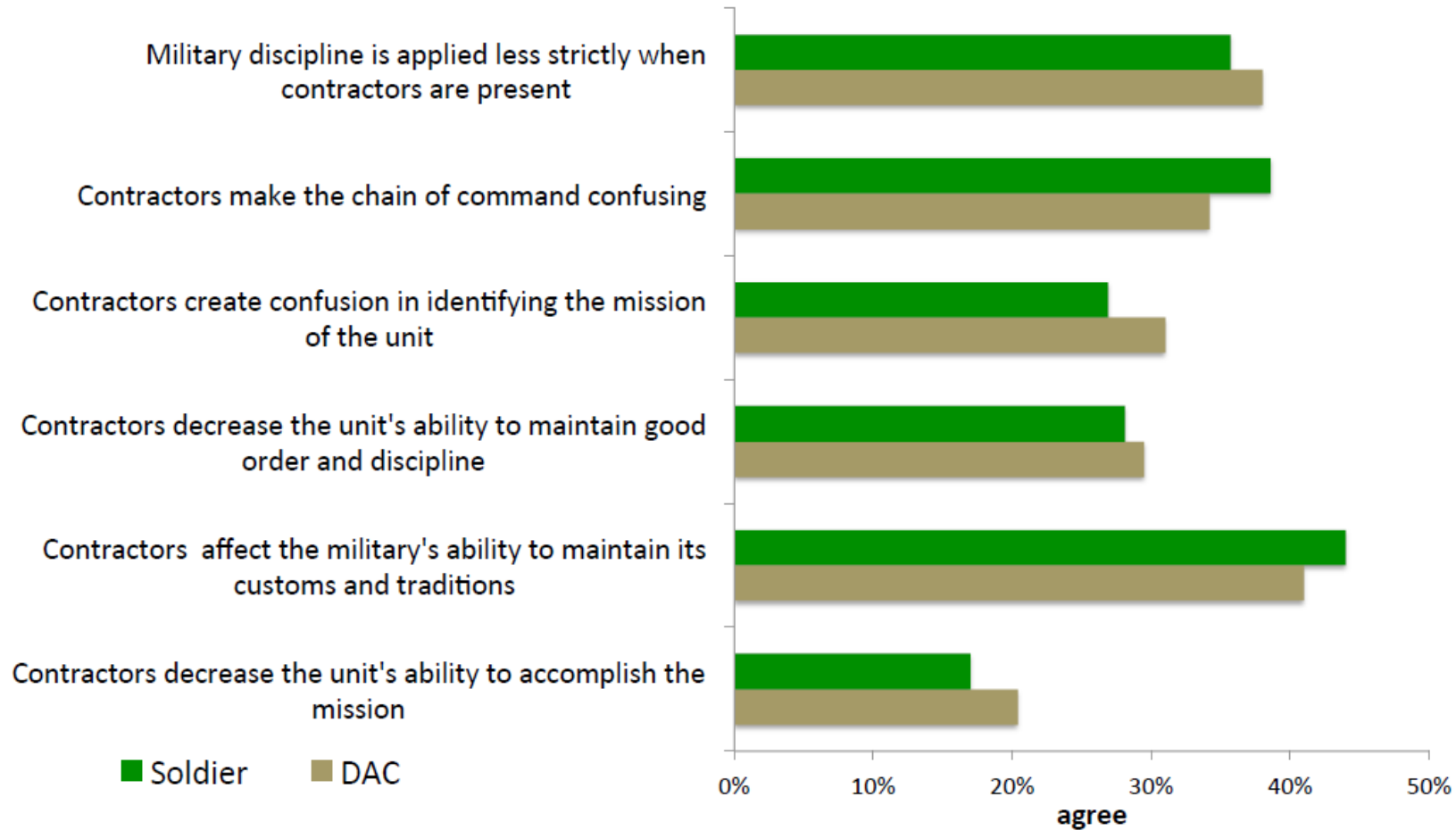
- ▶ Militaries formally re-socialize members into new identities.
- ▶ Theoretically, we expect these identities to serve as informal mechanism of social control.

*“Security contractors’ identities and operational responsibilities resemble largely those of constabulary or postmodern peacekeeping soldiers.”*

Franke 2016, p. 283



# Culture & Organizational Effectiveness



(Kelty & Bierman 2013)

>30% report negative effects on discipline, chain of command, and mission clarity.

# Social Comparisons

## U is for Uniforms.

It is summer in Iraq and temperatures are running about 120 degrees. The man on the left is a contractor. His uniform consists of shorts, aloha shirt, sandals and a visor. He makes a six figure salary. The man on the right is in the military. His uniform consists of ACUs, a kevlar helmet, vest with throat guard, pecker protector, shoulder protectors, ballistic plates, ammunition, knife, pistol, knee pads, ballistic glasses. He doesn't make six figures.

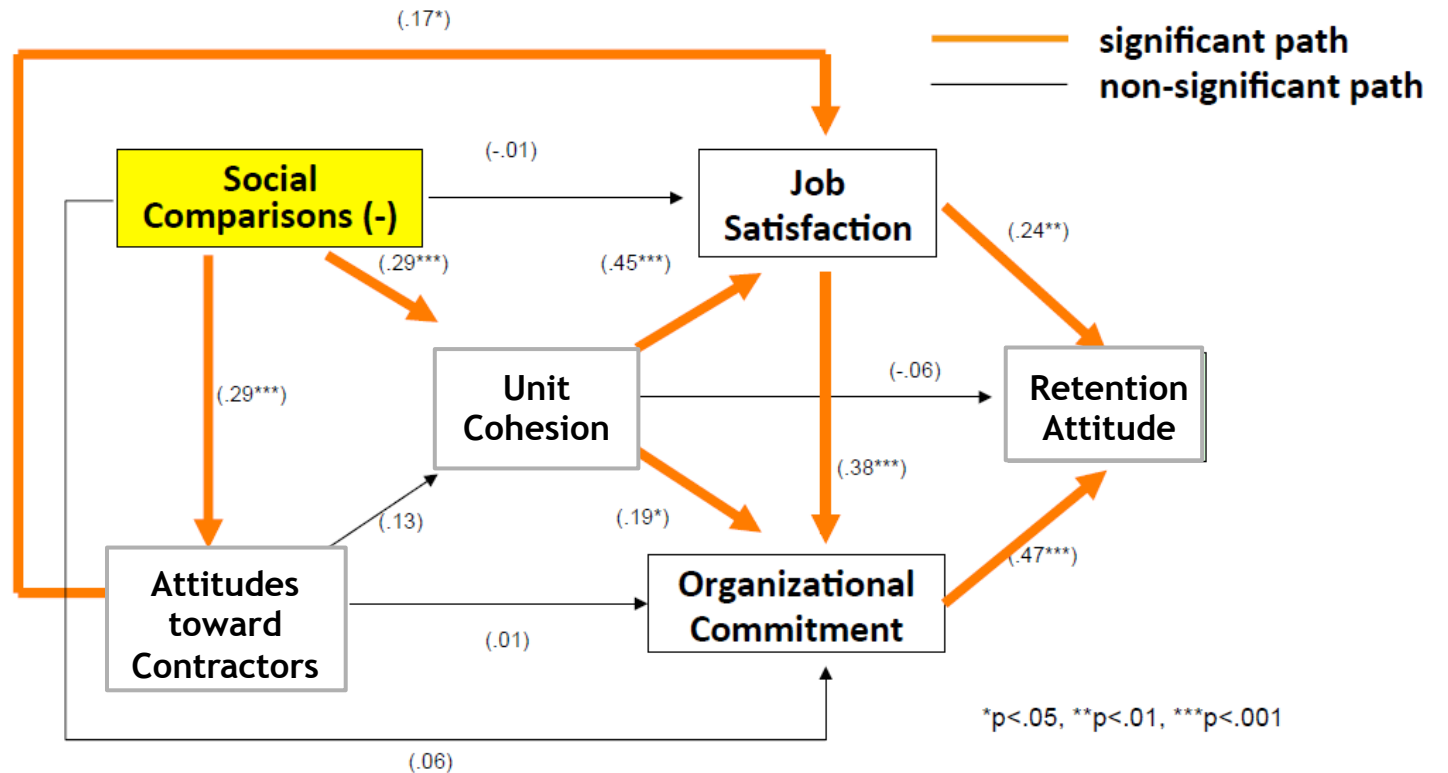
Who would you rather be?

I'll go with the left.



# Social Comparisons

- ↓ Cohesion
- ↓ Job Satisfaction
- ↓ Organizational Commitment
- ↓ Retention



(Kelty 2008, Kelty 2009, Kelty 2016, Kelty & Bierman 2013, Kelty & Schnack 2012, Kelty & Segal 2007)

The mere presence of contractors decreases retention.

# Mental Health

- ▶ High levels of mastery are not necessarily better for mental health. (Bierman & Kelty 2014)
- ▶ Among deployed civilians, moderate level of cohesion reduces negative effects of threats to one's life on anger, but cohesion does not buffer against internalized distress (anxiety & depression). (Bierman & Kelty 2018)
- ▶ Social support buffered the negative effects of stress on negative mental health outcomes of military personnel, but not civilians. (Kelty et al. in preparation)





# Findings

1. **Social identities** based on civ-mil statuses influence key behaviors related to operational readiness, but little empirical work has been done to test this set of claims.
2. Uniformed service members and federal civilians working for military organizations raise concerns about the effects of civilian contractors on **military culture and readiness**.
3. The **social comparisons** that arise from the integration of civilian contractors in military organizations negatively impacts cohesion, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and retention.
4. **Mental health** consequences of deployed civilians are not well understood; non-linear effects of stressors on mental health, and civ-mil differences in mental health outcomes.



# Future Research

1. Assess the effectiveness of social identities as informal social controls in civ-mil organizations
2. Identify the effects of a blended civ-mil force on women and racial minorities.
3. Examine the effects of structural and interactional contexts on the mental health of military and civilian personnel during and post deployment.



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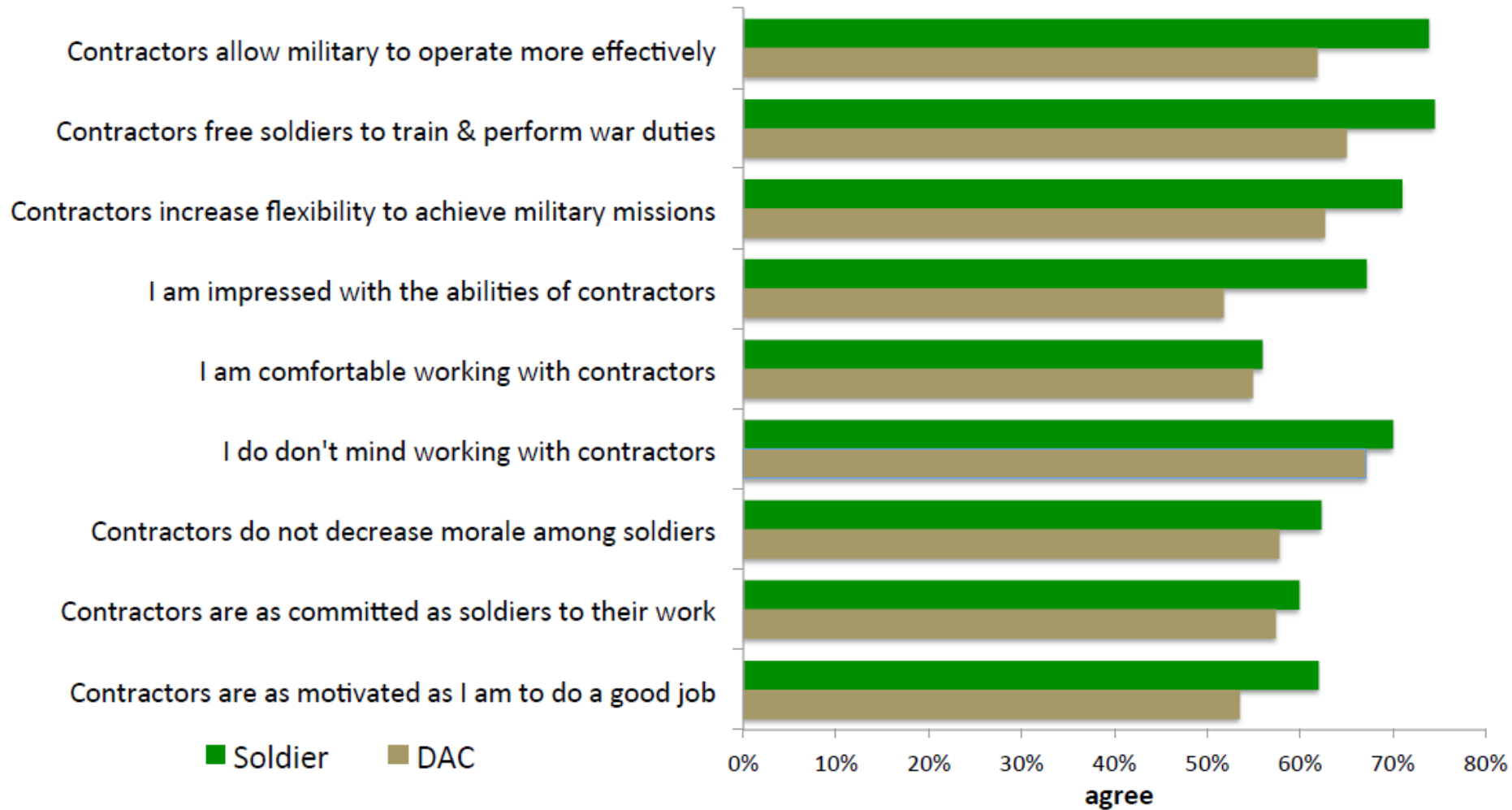
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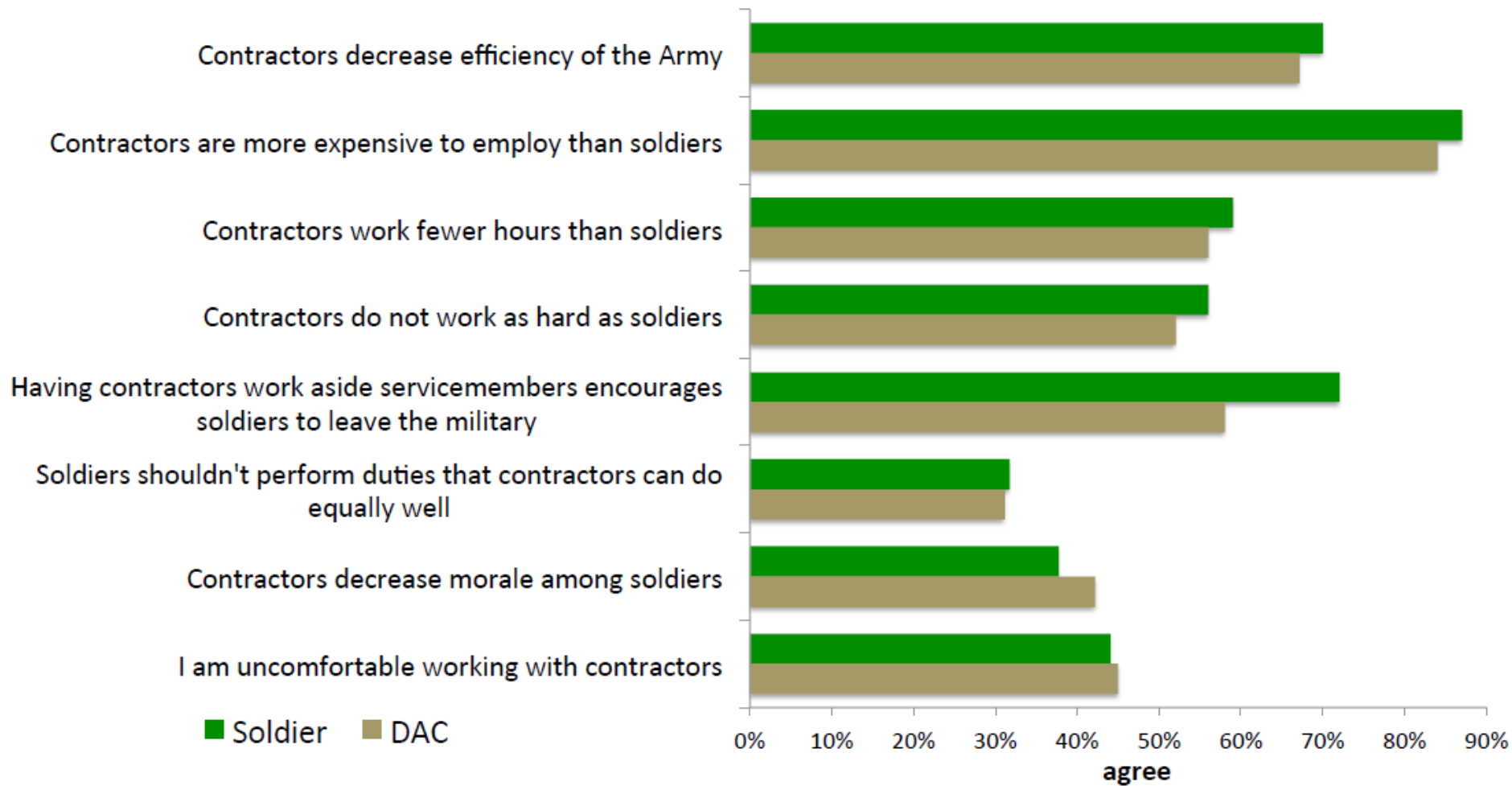
# Back-up Slides

# Positive Attitudes Toward Contractors



- Contractors improve effectiveness, flexibility, and free soldiers to perform core duties

# Negative Attitudes Toward Contractors



- Contractors perceived as decreasing efficiency and retention, and more costly