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# **CAREER PLANS AND MILITARY PROPENSITY OF YOUNG WOMEN: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH 1997 YOUTH ATTITUDE TRACKING STUDY (YATS) RESPONDENTS**

**FINAL REPORT**

**May 1999**

**Susan G. Berkowitz**

**Mary Achatz**

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Defense Manpower Data Center

Contract No. DASW01-96-C-0041

Submitted to:

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Drs. Susan Berkowitz and Mary Achatz had primary responsibility for most scientific aspect of this project. Dr. Berkowitz led the development of the interview protocol. Both Dr. Berkowitz and Dr. Achatz supervised the data collection process and ensured the high-quality of the interviews. They also were responsible for the analysis of the interview transcripts and authored the substantive chapters of this report. Dr. Shelley Perry directed the project through data collection, resolved logistical and technical problems associated with the data collection, and authored the study methodology appendix to this report. Study interviewers were: Dr. Mary Achatz, Dr. Susan Berkowitz, Ms. Pamela Giambo, Dr. Denise Glover, Ms. Jennifer Hamilton, Ms. Juanita Lucas-McLean, Ms. Alina Ota, and Dr. Shelley Perry. Mr. Wayne Hintze directed sample selection and Ms. Tracy Hagerty managed data collection operations and production of the interview transcripts. Finally, Dr. Jerome D. Lehnus, senior scientist with the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC), provided thoughtful and supportive direction for this project.

This study provides insight into young women's attitudes whose relevance to recruiting policy is immediately apparent. The study also provides a broad perspective on young women's consideration of careers, and the relevance of those considerations to military service. We are fortunate to have Dr. W. S. Sellman, Director for Accession Policy, and Dr. Anita Lancaster, Assistant Director for Program Management at DMDC, encouraging us to look beyond immediate issues to develop a fundamental understanding of young people's transition from high school to the world of work.

Finally, sincere thanks go out to the nearly 100 young women who opened up their lives to us. With their invaluable participation, we were able to gain insight into their decisionmaking processes which led us to a better understanding of today's youth. Without their participation, this project could not have been done.

## Acknowledgments

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS) began in 1975 as a relatively modest telephone survey of 16-21 year old males. It has grown into a complex annual telephone survey of 10,000 men and women aged 16-24. YATS is designed to produce nationally representative statistics regarding the opinions, attitudes, and beliefs of American youth on a variety of issues. As a result of careful training and monitoring of interviews, respondents are presented with exactly worded questions, and responses are precisely recorded according to specifications developed for the interview. This structure ensures uniform data collection procedures that, in turn, allow for valid comparison of YATS findings across years and demographic groups. "Propensity," the self-stated likelihood that a youth will enter military service, has been the central YATS measure since 1975. Research has shown that propensity predicts actual enlistment. Consequently, military recruiting commands and other personnel managers in the Department of Defense (DOD) closely monitor YATS propensity measures.

However, the highly structured, tightly controlled YATS interview process, which secures the integrity of propensity statistics, does not permit probing into the *meaning* of the responses. Although YATS allows us to estimate precisely the percentage of youth indicating they will "definitely" or "probably" enter military service, it provides limited insight into the considerations or thought processes which cause youth to respond in a particular manner.

To gain insight not provided by the standard YATS interviews, we conducted the first "in-depth" interviews with young men following the fall 1995 YATS administration. A 45-minute, semi-structured interview protocol was developed. Major topical areas included the career decision-making process, consideration of military enlistment, and knowledge of the military way of life. The interviews allowed respondents to present in their own words a "natural history" of their own decision-making process, reflecting their individual experiences. The interview protocol included the liberal use of probes to clarify or uncover the deeper meaning of responses and used questions that offered respondents opportunities to provide details about their career decision-making process. Interviews were conducted by senior-level and mid-level researchers. Recordings from each interview were transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts constituted the data for analysis. The current study of young women builds on our experience with the in-depth interviews with young men.

Historically, tradition and legal and practical constraints have limited the participation of women in military service. In 1966, Congress removed a 2 percent ceiling on female participation in the

military, but the proportion of female personnel remained below the ceiling for several years<sup>1</sup>. Women represented less than 1 percent of accessions in Fiscal Year (FY) 1964, 5 percent in 1973, and approximately 12 percent from 1978 through 1987<sup>2</sup>. Women accounted for 17 percent of nonprior service enlisted accessions in FY 1996<sup>3</sup>. While young men's propensity for military service has fallen sharply since the end of the Cold War, women's propensity for military service has fluctuated only slightly<sup>4</sup>. Thus, women are becoming increasingly relevant to the military as they represent a growing portion of youth interested in, and entering, military service.

### **Research Questions: What We Wanted to Learn**

The questions we wanted to answer in this in-depth study were, to a large extent, the same questions as those for the earlier set of interviews with men. What is the nature of career planning and decision-making and how does consideration of military service fit in? What factors affect interest in military service? How should we interpret responses to questions about propensity for military service? What does a YATS respondent mean when she says she will "probably" enter military service?

Our questions for young women, however, went beyond these. We also wanted to know to what degree women's career planning is affected by considerations of traditional "female" occupations or of raising a family. Do women perceive the military as a man's province where women would not fit in? Are they less likely to consider military service because they lack female role models who have served? Do they anticipate prohibitively strenuous physical challenges in military service? Do they fear harassment or gender-based discrimination?

### **Overview of Report**

Career planning patterns among young women are discussed in Chapter 2. Related topics, such as career choice, family plans, and social ties are discussed for several "clusters" of young women. Chapter 3 describes characteristics of young women in different propensity groups (Joiners, Shifters, Fence-Sitters, and Non-Joiners). It also discusses women's perceptions of sexual harassment in the military. Chapter 4 summarizes Chapters 2 and 3, and suggests implications of the findings for military recruiting.

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<sup>1</sup> Population Representation in the Active Duty Military Services Fiscal Year 1984. P. II-17.

<sup>2</sup> Population Representation in the Military Services Fiscal Year 1996. Appendix D, Table D-9.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Jerome Lehnus, Defense Manpower Data Center, personal communication with project director, April 1999.

Appendix A provides a detailed description of the methodology. Appendices B through G are samples of materials used in the study. Appendix H provides a summary of results of in-depth interviews with young men.

**Career Plans and Military Propensity of Young Women:  
In-Depth Interviews With 1997 Youth Attitude Tracking Study Respondents**  
*Introduction*

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## 2. MAKING LIFE PLANS

In our in-depth telephone interviews with 96 young women selected from the pool of 1997 respondents, we asked a series of questions exploring how, and on what basis, they had decided or were deciding what they would be doing in the short-term and longer-term future. We were interested in discerning overall decision-making styles or paths followed by these young women and determining how these styles or paths, in turn, intersected with decisions about joining the military. Factors that figured into characterizing a young woman's approach to decisionmaking include the amount of forethought, planning, and information-gathering that went into the decision to pursue a particular path; the realism of the young woman's plans and expectations—for example, if the young woman had an accurate grasp of the investment of time and resources needed to meet her goals; and the extent to which and ways in which the young woman sought advice and guidance on future life plans and from whom.

We were also interested in exploring how gender, and conceptions of gender roles, might be influencing decisions about careers and life plans. More specifically, we wanted to know whether and how the young women's current family situation or projected future family status, especially any plans for marriage and children, figure into their decisionmaking. In addition, we wished to examine ways in which these young women weigh gender-related considerations in selecting career paths.

### Overview

Although the richness and variety of these young women's lives and plans defy easy categorization, we were able to identify six reasonably distinctive clusters of respondents, fleshed out in considerable detail in this chapter. Broadly speaking, clusters are defined by the “overlap” of three sets of factors (1) **Socioeconomic background**: the socioeconomic status and educational level of the young woman's parents'; (2) **Career plans and aspirations**: the level and relative salience of the young woman's educational goals and career plans; and (3) **Gender roles**: the young woman's current family status or projected future plans for marriage and children. Although demographic factors influence the specific ways the patterns are expressed within each of them, the clusters cut across racial and ethnic groups, small town versus metropolitan status, and region of the country. Each cluster, characterized by a common core of attitudes and approaches to life planning, is defined by the particular way these three sets of factors come together.

However, before we introduce and define the individual clusters, it is useful to provide an overview of our findings in the context of the broader literature on career decisionmaking. Regardless of the cluster into which they may fit, one broad overarching theme stands out as influential to the vast

majority of these young women's decision-making and life-planning processes *the importance of social relationships in making plans.*

This plays out in several ways. These young women tend to evaluate plans according to their likely impact on specific networks of relationships with family and friends. They ask, "What will it mean for my relationship to my parents, or my friends, if I do this or that?" For example, many of these young women select colleges on the basis of whether they already know other people who attend the school or have friends or relatives who will be going there. For respondents in all clusters, plans are also strongly influenced by the desire for continued physical and social proximity to family and friends, sometimes even when the relationships are acknowledged as problematic or this means limiting opportunities. Similarly, new environments—including the military—are perceived as daunting less for how they may test abilities to master new skills than for the social challenges they may present in getting to know and learning to get along with new people.

Overall, the desire for continued social connectedness as a primary motivation in making life plans and career choices figured less importantly and much less pervasively in a similar set of interviews with young men of the same age conducted 2 years ago. The young men who expressed such a desire tended to come from more restricted social environments and working-class backgrounds and to have modest career goals and aspirations (Berkowitz, et al., 1997). By contrast, the desire not to sever key social relationships is expressed by all categories of young women, across all three racial and ethnic groups, including those of both middle-class and working-class backgrounds who have high educational and career aspirations.

The finding that relational considerations are generally more important to women than men is consistent with much of the literature on gender differences in development. For example, Carol Gilligan and her colleagues (1982) found that as young women enter adolescence, they often lose their distinctive voices and become preoccupied with what other people think of them, not viewing issues and situations in terms of abstract general principles but through a relational logic. In an extension of this same theme, Osipow and Fitzgerald concluded that "although the almost dizzying social changes of the past quarter century have rendered the opposition of career versus home meaningless for most people, the tremendous salience of women's traditional role as homemaker continues to permeate virtually every aspect of their career development." Career development studies often focus on how family expectations affect women's career aspirations and achievements (Osipow and Fitzgerald, 1996), whereas the same considerations are missing from the literature on males.

Gilligan and her colleagues question the assumption that the more conventionally male abstract mode of relating to things is inherently superior. A similar critique is at the root of criticisms leveled at theories of career development that view the desire to maintain relationships as an impediment to social mobility. Such theories tend to regard the valuing of connectedness over independence as hindering a young person's chances for academic and career advancement by interfering with free choice through limiting geographic mobility. Seen as broadly flawed in their applicability to working-class males and racial and ethnic minorities as well as young women, these theories are criticized for suffering from a distinct upper-middle-class male bias based on a:

“Powerful tradition in mainstream social science that sets forth a single, optimal route to development. . . . According to this vision, the ideal individual develops through an education of widening horizons and increasingly complex choices, gradually becoming confident enough to take risks and choose among options. Most developmental theory does not conceive of the individual's life within communities or other groups. Instead, development is assumed to occur, as a result of separation from . . . one's original contexts: to become truly individual means becoming free from ties that bind (Steinitz and Solomon, 1986: pp.7-8).

Our current findings, demonstrating the importance of contextual and/or relational considerations to all groups of young women, provide additional data questioning the value of decontextualized rational decision-maker models for understanding career decisionmaking and life planning processes. Our earlier work emphasized the limitations of such models for young men from working-class backgrounds across all three major racial and ethnic groups (Berkowitz, et al., 1997).

In the section that follows, we introduce the first and largest of the clusters: the Strivers. Our discussion of the Strivers provides the analytic pivot of the chapter in the sense that subsequent clusters are discussed in terms of how they compare and contrast with the young women in this cluster.

## **Strivers**

Strivers account for about one-third of respondents and are evenly distributed across the three racial and ethnic categories. Strivers are young women from families of modest means and modest educational attainment who hope to achieve social mobility through higher education. They have high career aspirations and plan to put off having families until they have completed their education and gotten launched in their careers.

### ***Family Background and Circumstances***

Most of these young women's families are of relatively modest means. Some are poor. Strivers talk about how their parents "don't have a lot of money," indicate that paying for college presents financial problems, and often discuss how hard their parents have to work to support their families and just make ends meet. *One of the Strivers' most prominent characteristics is their desire to do better than their parents financially and their parents' wish to see their daughters have a better and more financially secure life.* Lorraine, a 17-year-old White high school senior, says, "I've always wanted to pursue my education more than high school, because in today's society you can't get a good job without having a college degree. And I want to make, you know, the best of myself that I can do. I don't want to settle for a factory job or anything like that, because that's not me."

Charlene, a 17-year-old Black high school senior, who would be the first in her family to complete college, describes herself as "having a good, good head on my shoulders and a lot of support from my family," who "told me that they wanted me to be more than them." Marta, the daughter of Hispanic migrant workers wants to attend college, "Because I don't want to be like my parents, right now, working in the fields, changing jobs. I want to improve myself and just have a better future for myself."

For Strivers, education is the vehicle to social mobility. Most of these young women's parents have high school educations. Among the Hispanic Strivers, a few parents have eighth grade educations or less. Among several of the Black Strivers, as well as some of the Whites, there is a disparity, sometimes considerable, between the mother's and father's educational levels: fathers have a high school education or less, mothers may have several years of college. *However, with few exceptions, neither parent has finished 4 years of college, and in many cases the respondent is or would be the first in the family to go to college.* In some cases, older siblings or cousins have attended or are attending college, serving as role models as well as "emissaries" into the world of higher education. In others, older siblings have dropped out or not gone on to college, focusing the family's aspirations for educational mobility all the more on these daughters.

A Hispanic Striver, one of 12 children, reports that none of her sisters attended college even though, like her, they got good grades in school. She wants to succeed in college both for herself and for her mother, because her mother's "the best. . . . She'd do everything for me, you know, to go to school." A White Striver reports that her sister started college but dropped out and now does not have a well-paying job. Her sister "really wants me to go [to college] . . . and she kind of influenced me a lot because what she's doing is not going to college anymore. If I go to college and have an education . . . I figure it will be better."

*Several Strivers describe themselves as the stronger students in their families, the ones who have done particularly well in school, and of whom a lot is expected.* Lorraine says: “. . . school is my thing. I like school. I’m not afraid to go to school and to try. And it’s just always been my thing.” Her older brother, married and with a baby, was not interested in school, so never went to college, and “I think that he regrets it, you know.” Sofia, a 17-year-old Hispanic high school senior, who hopes to become a surgeon, tells a similar story:

I’ve always gotten good grades since forever. And my brother, on the other hand, he’s been the type of person who just does his own thing. And my Dad was real disappointed about that . . . my brother has done a lot of bad things and ran away and everything. I’ve never done anything like that.

For Strivers, unlike young women who grow up in securely middle-class, well-educated families, going to college was not a foregone conclusion. *A number of Strivers grew up in families with an ethos that supports furthering their education even though the majority of their peers were or are not planning or expecting to attend college.* A 17-year-old Hispanic young woman notes that her parents had always inculcated a strong sense of the value of higher education: “. . . since I was a little girl, I’ve always wanted to go to college . . . they [her parents] have always wanted us to go to college. We always had that in our head, to go to college.” Says Charlene, “I’ll be the first one to go to college in my family . . . and so they’ve just really been on me and sticking behind me. They really want me to graduate and everything. . . . They are my number one supporters.” One White Striver reports that her parents so strongly drilled into her the need to go to college: “That’s all I ever thought about throughout high school is that I’m going to go to college . . . while all my friends were like not thinking about it.”

*While almost uniformly described as supportive of their aspirations, Strivers’ parents may lack the financial resources to pay for college and/or the kind of knowledge and contacts useful in guiding their daughters’ educational and career decisions.* A 17-year-old Hispanic high school senior is one of six children. Her hard-working parents usually leave the house at 4:30 A.M., only to return from work exhausted in the evening. She does not talk to her parents about choices of schools and possible majors because “they are into their own jobs so that they are not going to know about anything else . . . they don’t have information or skills” about these sorts of things. Moreover, “we like hardly ever see them. For about a couple of hours and then we go to bed.”

This young woman believes her parents will support her plans to eventually attend a 4-year university: “They will feel good about it if it’s for my future. . . . They are also looking into our future . . . trying to build our future by working and doing what they need to do.” Because she believes

her parents cannot be helpful in guiding her educational and career choices, she turns to her teachers for advice on colleges and programs.

*Teachers serve as important role models and mentors to several of these young women, who might otherwise lack the self-confidence as well as the information to pursue their dreams of higher education.* A 20-year-old Hispanic college student, daughter of migrant workers, is the oldest of six children, and is the first in her family to graduate from high school. Now married, and in her third year of college, she is majoring in computer science and also wants to become a sixth grade teacher. Her own sixth grade teacher had advocated for bilingual children and encouraged them to take tests to qualify for special programs. “In the sixth grade I had a teacher . . . she was really good . . . she had a lot of bilingual kids in her class and got really mad and said we are going to do a gate test, okay, and we’re going to find out if you pass. So we all passed. I was like, hey, I’m smart.” This experience opened her eyes to the possibilities of higher education. She taught her younger siblings to speak and read English, and has tutored in, as well as benefited from, educational programs for migrant children.

In addition to her high school-educated parents, who “want me to go to college to better myself,” Deirdre, an 18-year-old Black college freshman majoring in business, talks about the important influence of a teacher she had in the ninth grade who encouraged her students to strive:

I guess she (the teacher) was always pushing us. She was, like, you gotta do this, and she always pep-talked us. . . . I really liked her a lot. Her words, you know, the way she talked to us and told us what was ahead, and always pushing us to do more than we’re supposed to, I think, bettered me into . . . preparing me for, like, college and stuff like that. . . . If it wasn’t for her, I mean, yeah. She helped me a lot.

If not a teacher or parents, then older siblings or cousins, or some combination, may have helped steer these Strivers toward pursuit of a college education. A 19-year-old Black Striver currently enrolled in a 2-year college has been influenced to pursue higher education by her mother and her cousins. Her mother tells her to regard her cousins, all of whom went to graduate school, as role models. One cousin who recently graduated from law school “is the one that’s really pushing me, too . . . saying don’t ever give up and go ahead and do what I want to do.”

### *Readiness for Decisionmaking*

*Strivers mostly speak in positive, confident tones when asked about their readiness to plan for their future.* Says a 17-year-old Black high school senior who works part-time in a factory and hopes to become a lawyer: “I’m ready now . . . because the thing I want to do, I want to do for a long time. . . . I’ve thought about it a long time.” A 17-year-old Black high school senior, who lives with her grandmother and younger brother and assumes a good deal of responsibility in the household, feels well prepared to make good decisions for the future because:

The way I grew up, more independent than anything. I feel like now I have a job and I know how it is a little bit to be out in the real world. And I feel like I can manage my money and be able to do it successfully so that in a couple of years—well, more than a couple years, I’ll be doing what I want to do.

Deirdre “just feels” that she is ready to make good life decisions: “I just have the instinct that I know what I want. And I’m eager to do what I want to do, and I’m ambitious, so I just want to do what I want to do and I’ll work hard to get it.” Several Strivers express a determination to do whatever it takes, overcome any obstacles, to achieve their goals: One White Striver who hopes to become a pediatrician notes: “I know what my goals are. And I know what I want to be. I’m going to try not to let anything get in my way.”

*Other Strivers, while feeling prepared to make some decisions, acknowledge they still need guidance and advice from their families and others.* Linda, a 17-year-old Black high school senior lives with her aunt and uncle, who will be financing her college education. She has wanted to become a veterinarian ever since her mother first commented that this would be the perfect profession for her. She notes: “I’m ready to make decisions and everything, but it doesn’t hurt to have a little help now and then saying this is my opinion or this is my opinion.” Sofia, who hopes to become a surgeon, is “ready to say what I plan to do . . . to decide I want to go to college, what job I want to shoot for and stuff like that,” but by no means “ready to just go out on my own without my parent’s help.”

A few Strivers do express misgivings about their present readiness to make decisions. Says one 17-year-old White high school senior who recently transferred from a large urban high school to a smaller and safer rural high school, “I’m not sure about being ready or not for the decisions that I’m making. I know that they’re decisions that I’m making for right now. I’m guessing that I guess whatever I make now, I’m probably going to want to see how heavily it’s going to weight on anything I’d want to do after that.”

A 19-year-old White college sophomore currently majoring in pre-veterinary biomedical science, and financing her own college education, is seriously considering switching her major to high school teaching because she is worried about the debt that would accumulate after 8 years of going to school on loans. Since she enjoys working with children, being a teacher might be a viable, less costly alternative. She is planning to take off a semester to work and decide what she wants to do. “So, I think I’m old enough and mature enough. It’s just making the right decision that’s hard.”

### ***Career Choices***

*Strivers are bent upon pursuing careers in fields they will enjoy and find engaging over the long run. Monetary rewards are salient for a few, but deriving satisfaction from one’s work, and the ability to help people are far more important in guiding their occupational choices.*

Strivers talk about finding a career in a field in which they will enjoy working for the rest of their lives, one they will “never get tired of.” A 21-year-old Black college student is currently changing schools to fit her plans to go into fashion merchandising. She started out as a marketing major because “everyone said marketing was where the money was,” but “it really wasn’t what I wanted to [do].” She continued:

I decided to make my own career by something I just liked to do, instead of money. People go to college and get careers for money. And I’ve made, you know, a decision to go for something I’ll be happy with, happy to go to work every day.

Strivers are also interested in pursuing careers that will enable them to help people and make a contribution to society. The 19-year-old student described above, who is considering switching from pre-veterinary science to teaching, consulted with her high school teachers. “They just really enjoy what they’re doing and I think I would be the same way.” Teaching would be important because it would “mean training future leaders and future workers.” Even Strivers who are planning to enter high status occupations, such as law, are not drawn to the prestige per se, but to the chance to help others.

*In terms of their career choices, a number of Strivers claim to have “always known,” or known from a very early age, what it is they want to do. Charlene was influenced by a neighbor in her desire to become an obstetrician: “Ever since I was a little girl, I’ve been fascinated with . . . childbirth. . . . My neighbor was an obstetrician. And so we used to go over there and he used to tell us about it and ever since then I wanted to be an obstetrician and deliver babies.” As for becoming a lawyer, a 17-year-old Black Striver notes: “I’ve always felt . . . that’s always what I wanted to be. I talk a lot. And everyone said, you’ll be a good lawyer, because I like to plead my case.”*

Others, who have not “always” known what they wanted to do, have gotten ideas about future occupations from other adults, the Internet, career courses taken in high school, or some mixture of these. When she was in ninth grade, a 17-year-old Hispanic high school senior had a friend whose mother worked as a radiology technician. According to the senior, “When she [her friend’s mother] was talking about it, I was really fascinated . . . and . . . went down to the hospital where she works and spent a couple weeks with her to see what it was all about.”

*The point is that many Strivers have a real world reference point for their choices—a role model or at least someone they can talk to about what it is like to work in their chosen occupations.* Moreover, many have carefully researched the particulars of their fields. For example, the young woman influenced by her friend’s mother observed radiology technicians in two other hospitals, and as part of her senior project in high school, researched various aspects of the career, including salaries, growth potential, and educational requirements. Her mother (with an 8th grade education, from Mexico) helped her do this research.

### ***Family Plans***

*Strivers speak in a single, clear voice on the issue of marriage and children: having a family may eventually figure into their plans, but is not on the immediate horizon.* Strivers feel it is critical to first complete their education and get firmly established in a career before even thinking about having children. Two Strivers are already married, and a few others are engaged to be married or involved in serious long-term relationships, but in all these cases, their partners have agreed that these young women’s education and career come first.

An 18-year-old Black high school senior announces that “kids are the furthest thing from my mind . . . right now. I’m just more worried about going to school right now.” Echoes another 19-year-old Black Striver, whose mother had to interrupt her own education after she had children, “Children is like the last thing on my mind. . . . My mom always tells me don’t have kids, go to college and . . . get all your college out of the way and then have the kids. . . .”

*Many Strivers stress the need to be economically established and set in their life course before starting a family.* Notes a 17-year-old Hispanic high school senior: “My education and my succeeding come first. If I’m not going to succeed, why have a family?” Says Deirdre: “I plan to have a family, and, in doing so, I think that I need to secure my life and my goals before I would even think about having a family.”

**Career Plans and Military Propensity of Young Women:  
In-Depth Interviews With 1997 Youth Attitude Tracking Study Respondents  
*Making Life Plans***

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Linda, the 17-year-old Black high school senior who hopes to become a veterinarian, calculates that at about age 29 she will “get married, have kids . . . do all that good stuff.” However, she is determined that she first be financially independent:

Definitely I want to be . . . well in my career. . . . I want to be well off so that I don’t have to depend on anyone. Then I’ll have already started paying for a house or be in the process of buying a house. Things like that. Couple cats, couple dogs, a car.

This theme of not wanting to have to depend on anyone but oneself is particularly salient among the Black and Hispanic Strivers, many of whom clearly expect that they will play a major, if not the major, role in providing financially for any future families. For instance, with two older siblings who are already married and starting their families, one 17-year-old Hispanic high school senior is intent on not having children now so she can go to college. She would like to study zoology, but might go into computers instead to earn enough money to provide for a future family. In her experience, it is overwhelmingly the mothers, and very few of the fathers, who stick around to take care of their families. An 18-year-old Black high school senior, wary of involving herself with any man who does not have equally high aspirations and earning potential, notes: “Marriage—that has to come later on, when I know that I can trust that person.” She has seen too many other young women her age with young children who just got married and are already separated and waiting to get a divorce.

*Many Strivers have not yet given much thought to the particulars of how they will mesh career and family demands. However, a few Strivers have chosen specific careers at least partly on the basis of their presumed suitability for successfully integrating work and family demands. A 22-year-old Black college student is getting a 4-year degree in nursing because she believes it will afford her flexible working hours and is an occupation for which there will always be a demand. She says, “I always wanted a job that when I do have kids I can at least pick the times that I want to go to work and can spend my time at home with my child at that certain age when they are young.” Along similar lines, a 17-year-old White high school senior who initially wanted to be a pediatrician has decided to become a nurse instead. She is reluctant to invest 8 to 10 years in a medical education because “I want to have a family life too, a husband and kids, stuff like that, so I didn’t know if I wanted to . . . wait that long before I decide to have kids and a family. So I figured the 4 years and becoming an RN and then pursue from there if I wanted to.”*

*While most Strivers believe they will probably get married and have kids someday, some suggest if this does not happen, it will not be the end of the world. Reports an 18-year-old Hispanic high school senior, whose father died unexpectedly 6 years ago, “I would like to have a family, but if that*

doesn't work out, that's not going to be a problem. Basically, I'm going to go ahead and do what I have to do, in order to survive, myself, then, if a family works out, that's great."

Interestingly, several of those who expressed greatest ambivalence about this aspect of their futures are Hispanic and have had to shoulder domestic responsibilities in their natal households. One 17-year-old Hispanic high school senior, who lives at home and helps her mother a great deal with household chores and caring for her three younger siblings, is not sure she ever wants to get married: "I don't know if I want to get married, and I'm not too sure if I really want to have any kids. I feel like I've already experienced that."

### ***Ties to Family, Friends, and Place***

*Despite their desire for social mobility, most Strivers are unwilling and psychologically unprepared to break ties with family and friends, even only temporarily, to realize their aspirations. Several are planning to first go to a community college for 2 years and then transfer to a 4-year college, both for financial reasons and because this will delay the painful rupture of social relationships they expect will occur when they do make the break.*

Many Strivers plan to attend or are enrolled in local colleges or universities so they can continue to live at home or, at the very least, return home on the weekends. In many cases, their decisions about where to attend college are based less on an assessment of the curriculum or educational quality of the institution, than the fact of proximity, and that they know specific people who have attended or are attending the school. Lorraine, who hopes to become a lawyer, has already been accepted at a nearby university, where she plans to enroll in the fall. She considered attending a small, private college in another state, and she spent a good deal of time gathering information about the school from teachers and counselors. In the end, however, despite her preference for the other college's academic program, she opted for the local university because "I don't want to be that far away from my parents." Moreover, "a lot of my friends, you know—well, two especially—are going to (local university) as well. And . . . all three of us are going to roommate and get an apartment (together)."

Charlene, who plans to major in pre-medicine, has chosen to attend a local college so she can "still have my mother to lean on" and "support from friends and family to keep me going." She is firm in her desire to remain connected to her community and her church while in school, believing their social support would help keep her motivated to fulfill her goals.

Although some Strivers, particularly those from small towns and rural areas, recognize that they will probably have to leave home eventually if they are to realize their plans and dreams, many are decidedly uneasy about that prospect and putting it off as long as possible. A 19-year-old Black community college student, who had wanted to go to an art school in a large city in another state but was afraid to leave home, has settled on a local university instead. She concedes, “I guess I had to get used to moving because I’m a homebody really. And I’m trying to push myself away a little.” Believing her desired career as a fashion designer would best be pursued in one of two major cities, she hopes, once she graduates, to be able to make the break and move.

Sofia plans to go to a local junior college for 2 years, then attend a major university in her home state, study pre-medicine, go to medical school, and become a surgeon. Although she had wanted to go straight to a 4-year college, “I don’t think I’m really ready to leave my home town.” In particular, she is loath to leave her friends, many of whom will be attending the local junior college, but none of whom are planning to go off to “a real college.” Suggesting the pioneer position she will occupy if she does follow through on her plans, she notes: “I don’t really know anybody else that’s going off to a real college.”

### ***Strivers: A Summary***

- Strivers, from working-class and lower-middle-class families, want to do better than their parents financially; their parents want them to have a better and more financially secure future. Many have families who support and encourage going to college, even though most of these young women’s peers are not college-bound. Many are enrolled in or planning to go to 2-year colleges before transferring to a 4-year university.
- Strivers often are or will be the first in their family to go to college, the strong student in their family, and the child who is the focus of the family’s aspirations for social mobility.
- Although generally supportive of their goals, Strivers’ parents often lack the resources to pay for college and/or the information and savvy to be helpful in guiding choices of colleges and career paths. However, partly in compensation for this, several Strivers have attached themselves to adult mentors and role models (e.g., older cousins, teachers, and neighbors) who have taken a special interest in them and encouraged them to strive.
- Most Strivers—some perhaps naively optimistic—feel ready to make good decisions about their futures, often stressing the power of will and hard work to overcome all obstacles.
- Aspiring to futures as physicians, lawyers, nurses, teachers, and physical therapists, Strivers want satisfying careers they will enjoy over the long run and that will enable them to use their talents and help people.
- Most Strivers plan to marry and have children eventually, but not before they finish school and are launched in their careers. Emphasizing the need to be able to support their children comfortably, several clearly expect to be the economic mainstay of their future families.

- Despite their desire for social mobility, most Strivers are deeply attached to their families, friends, and communities, from whom they draw support and confidence, and they are not willing to break ties or travel far away to realize their aspirations.

## **Middle-Class College-Oriented Women**

Sixteen young women fit into this cluster, which is also more or less equally distributed across racial and ethnic groups. These young women have grown up in better-to-do and better-educated families than the Strivers. At least one, and often both, of their parents have graduated from college. All are either planning to go to college or are already enrolled, usually in 4-year schools. They have professional career aspirations and plan to put off having their families.

### *Family Background and Circumstances*

*Regardless of race or ethnicity, Middle-Class College-Goers come from families in which their going to college was taken for granted from an early age. It was never really a decision. Nancy, a 20-year-old White college sophomore has “always just assumed I was going to college. I mean, pretty much since I was younger, just because of like, I mean, I don’t know. I just pretty much thought that’s what I was going to do for whatever I want to do.” Echoes Marisa, a 17-year-old Hispanic high school senior, an “A” student, both of whose parents went to college, “Oh, I always knew my whole life that I was going to college, I just never knew which one.”*

For most of these young women, not only was going to college taken for granted, it was part of a familial process. Says Adrienne, a 19-year-old White college sophomore:

I always knew I was going to college. My parents had always been saving. My parents were always, you know, were like, ‘Okay, well, after you get out of high school, you go to college.’ And I was kind of like, ‘Okay.’ It was kind of like, senior year came around and we just started applying to schools.

When asked to explain the “we,” Adrienne said, “er, well, ‘I,’ I guess, ‘We’—my mom had, well, I guess I could consider my parents in it ‘cause they paid for all the applications that got sent in.” Others in this cluster talked about how their parents have been actively involved in helping fill out scholarship forms and financial aid applications.

*Middle-Class College-Goers’ parents are covering at least part of their daughters’ college costs and are involved in guiding college choices in a variety of ways. They may set parameters within which the choices can be made—for example, as in Adrienne’s case, by limiting their daughter’s options*

to in-state schools—or rule out certain possibilities. One young woman’s father vetoed the idea of junior college because “a lot of people I know kind of get trapped in the junior college thing,” so she will attend the local state university.

At the same time that they set some limits, middle-class college-educated parents encourage their daughters to think through the ramifications of their choices. In selecting colleges, Nancy’s parents advised her “to get as much information as I could on all the options and not to rule any out. And then it’s my decision, not to let anyone else influence me.” Although wavering at first, she ended up choosing an expensive, small, extremely selective private liberal arts college over a larger, less selective private university where she had been offered a sizeable swimming scholarship. Despite the considerable difference in cost, her parents backed her choice “because even though it’s a hardship to go to school anywhere, it’s more important that we be happy and stuff.” In contrast to most Strivers, for whom practical and financial considerations impose often overriding constraints on educational choices, Nancy and her family exemplify a more upper-middle-class approach that gives stronger weight to purely academic considerations and finding the right fit between the individual student and the institution.

### *Anomalous Cases: Delayed Plans*

For a few of the young women who would otherwise fit into this cluster, personal circumstances have intervened to delay fulfillment of educational and career plans. Angela, an 18-year-old White high school graduate from a military family, is married and living with her husband on a remote Air Force base in Oklahoma. An excellent student and self-described “book nerd,” she turned down a full scholarship to a junior college because it did not have a program in her chosen field. Where she lives now, is several hours drive in each direction to the nearest college. Angela is working at a department store job she hates, learning to kick box, and basically marking time until her husband’s tour of duty is over, at which time, she believes, her life plans will take over. Determined “not to get stuck,” she has landmarks for where she wants to be at different points in her life and is making plans for the next 10 years.

A 21-year-old Black college student, a “military brat,” is attending community college part-time and working on a military base to provide a household for her 12-year-old sister, who has been living with her since their mother died, about a year before. Her stepfather just got out of the Army and will probably take her sister back next year. In the best of all possible scenarios, she would rather have gone to a university and lived in a dorm, but her grades deteriorated during her mother’s protracted illness the last few years of high school. Her current plans call for finishing college, to fulfill a promise to her mother, then joining the military. As with many of the Black respondents in this cluster, her mother’s

example is a dominant influence on her life. Her mother, one of 10 children, grew up in “the projects,” but used the military as a vehicle of social mobility:

Ever since my mom has been in the military, we never lived in the projects and we’ve always done better than that. What my mom taught me . . . and what her sisters might teach their kids are very different. So my goals in life opposed to a lot of people that I know are very different.

Her stepfather started as a paralegal and then became a lawyer, also through the military. With these role models to emulate, she proclaims: “I don’t want to be average.”

### ***Readiness for Decisionmaking***

*Compared to Strivers, Middle-Class College-Goers from college-educated families tend to be more considered in assessing their readiness to make good decisions for the future and more aware that their life decisions are influenced by other important persons, especially their parents.* This is probably true, in part, because they tend to be further along in school and also have greater familiarity with the professional worlds they seek to enter. Moreover, coming from more privileged backgrounds, they may also be less naïvely ideological about their abilities to conquer all obstacles and more aware of the potential ramifications of choosing one academic or professional path over another.

In talking about how prepared she feels to make good future decisions, Adrienne emphasizes her financial dependence on her parents:

Most of the time I do [feel ready]; I mean, I’m going to be 20 in the spring . . . when I want to make decisions [I do], but when I don’t, I always have Mom and Dad to fall back on. . . . But, I mean, my parents are paying for school. So, you know, they still have a large part in the decisionmaking.

A 17-year-old Black high school senior believes she is ready to make good decisions “to a certain point,” but she “wouldn’t mind having some help with some of it.” She feels many of her friends who think they can make good decisions just because they are 18 are deluding themselves. She also emphasizes her current reliance on her parents and looks to college as an arena in which to test out her own decision-making capabilities. She says, “I figure I need to know a lot more about myself and how I would react under pressure, or in different situations. As of now, in most things like that, my parents kind of make most of the decisions.”

An 18-year-old White college freshman, daughter of an Army officer, feels she is “in the middle,” neither totally prepared, nor totally unprepared to make good decisions. Her father has fostered

her independence by insisting she find out the answers to her questions rather than coming to him. However, she anticipates making some mistakes along the way. In her words, “So pretty much I know where to go, but I know I’m going to be making my own mistakes, because I don’t know too much of the real world, so to say.”

Two 17-year-old Hispanic high school seniors both feel unprepared to make good decisions because they are unsure of what they will want to major in once enrolled in college. Says Marisa:

I think I know what I want to do with my life, but I’m not sure. Like, I know I want to go to college, and, you know, go through the whole getting your degrees and everything, but I don’t know exactly what field I want to go into.

Her compatriot, similarly uncertain about her future college major, feels pressured to make a decision prematurely. She says, “I think at points I am ready to go on, and everything, but—hold on a second.” Both these young women plan to take a range of college courses to find out the fields to which they are best suited.

In parallel fashion, several of the young women already part or most of the way along in college do not feel fully prepared to make good decisions on the specific direction their careers will take once they graduate. However, their answers reflect a different level of maturity and sophistication than those of the high school seniors described above.

Claire, a married 20-year-old Hispanic college senior, about to graduate with an education degree and a psychology minor, is not ready for the future “in the sense that I haven’t totally researched everything I’m interested in pursuing and I’d like to have a greater foundation of where I want to go next. . . . I feel I’m capable of it [making good decisions] but at the same time I don’t know where I’m going to be in a couple of years.” Eventually hoping to become a university professor, she knows she will need to acquire more education. However, before committing to a particular field, Claire wants to investigate the feasibility of combining that career with any future plans to have children. She also wants to spend time volunteering with someone already doing the job “to make sure it’s something I want to spend 4 more years of my life studying . . . And the rest of my life doing.”

Christine, a 19-year-old Black college sophomore whose mother is a social worker, knows she wants to go to graduate school in social work, but is unsure of the specific area of specialization. She feels she is “not yet” ready to make “really good decisions” because “I know I want to be a social worker but there are many avenues I can go down as far as, you know, work in corrections, the hospital, adoption, foster care.” Her mother and professors want her to go on for her doctorate, but she is unsure how long she will stay in school.

A 21-year-old White Midwesterner who dropped out of college when her father passed away 2 years ago, believes she is in a good position to make career-related decisions, but does not feel the same way about her personal life: “When it’s more of a mental thing, not emotional, then I can make clear decisions.” She is currently working full-time for a media company and attending school at night. Although she plans to eventually get her degree and teach high school, she is in no particular hurry to complete her schooling. She is, however, struggling over how to proceed with her boyfriend, who wants to get married, while she is not sure she even wants to continue the relationship.

### *Career Choices*

*Like the Strivers, college-going young women from middle-class families are searching for careers they will enjoy and find engaging over the long run. They want something more than mere job security or humdrum routine. As Claire put it, “I want to pursue something I’m going to have a passion for, something like a dream, not something just to maintain myself.” Says Marisa, “I want a job that will keep my interest, like something that I’ll be happy to have for the rest of the time, not something I’m like stuck into, you know?”*

*Compared to the Strivers, fewer of the young women in this cluster claim to have “always” known or to have known from a very early age what it is they want to do. However, a few have had a longstanding passion for their chosen fields. Music has been Adrienne’s first love since the fourth grade. A music education major, she plays the flute, the saxophone, the clarinet, and the piano, and is in the marching band at her university. She states: “I just can’t imagine doing anything else.” However, Adrienne is also planning to take a double major in business, a fallback in case she does not like teaching, marries another music educator, or decides to go into business for herself after retiring from teaching.*

Angela, the 18-year-old newlywed temporarily trapped on a remote Air Force base in Oklahoma, has had her mind set on becoming a pharmacist since about the eighth grade. She has “always known” she wants to be in medicine, because chemistry and other medicine-related subjects were her strongest subjects in school. She considered, but then rejected, the option of becoming a surgeon because, “I didn’t want my whole life to be taken up by medicine. . . . I guess I get stressed out . . . like if I feel like everything is on me . . . so that’s why I decided on pharmacy.”

*As is true of the Strivers, in selecting careers, many of the young women in this cluster are drawn to occupations—such as social work, medicine, teaching, and occupational therapy—that will allow them to help people and make a contribution to society. This desire is expressed in a particularly*

forceful way by several of the Black respondents, whose mothers are strong professional and personal role models for them.

Christine wants to be a social worker just like her mother. What most appeals to her about the field is “helping people,” especially “helping kids.” Having a mother with direct job experience in her chosen field has enabled Christine to gain a preview of what she can expect. She has visited her mother’s workplace on Mother-Daughter Day, and they have talked at length about the nature of social work. Sometimes they “rehearse” scenarios: “like sometimes she gives me a situation of, she’ll make up names or something, and she, um, tells me, asks me what I would do. . . . And she’s like, well, that’s what, you know, most of being a social worker is all about, making good decisions, helping people out.”

A 19-year-old Black college sophomore, originally from Nigeria, is enrolled in a pre-medicine program, with the hope of eventually specializing either in reconstructive surgery or family practice. She was inspired to become a doctor by her mother, a nurse.

My mom, she’s a nurse. She treats people. I feel I can learn more by helping people. We have so many illnesses, sicknesses, and disease, and some people don’t even have the money so I feel like when I get all my requirements to be a medical doctor I can help those who don’t have the money for medical treatment. I will treat them free. This is why I am interested in going into the medical field.

Majoring in biology, a 20-year-old Black college junior is planning to go to graduate school in physical therapy, a field in which she first became interested while accompanying her father on post-surgical visits to a physical therapist. Although it was her father’s illness that initiated her interest, her deeply religious college-graduate mother is clearly the stronger influence in her life, encouraging her to strive, even if it means others will talk about her: “God and Jesus were talked about, and who’s perfect?” More specifically, while “my Mom is for whatever I’m for,” her mother strongly supports her choice of a career, on the grounds that jobs in health care are plentiful and reasonably secure.

Though not as singular a force as mothers in these young women’s lives, other relatives can also influence career choices. A 17-year-old Black high school senior intends to get a bachelors degree in Business, with a concentration in Accounting, then obtain her CPA. Her father owns his own business, where she has worked during summers. At first, she had thought of becoming a mathematician; then people advised her that if she were to be an accountant she could combine a love for numbers with working with people. Moreover, she feels that accounting, with a slow season and a busy season, can accommodate her desire not to be too busy to spend time with her future family.

### *Future Family Plans*

*Although most of the young women in this decision-making cluster expect to eventually marry and have children, they are not planning to have families for a long time, usually until at least the “magic” age of 30. Like the Strivers, they want to be firmly settled in their careers and lives before taking on these responsibilities. Even those who are already married have other immediate priorities, like finishing school and getting started in their chosen fields.*

For a few of these young women, the very thought of getting married and having children is just too distant and too abstract. At 17, Marisa sees having a family as “way too far ahead” in the future to concern her right now. Adrienne acknowledges that she will probably end up getting married and having kids “somewhere down the road,” but first she will find a good job and begin her teaching career.

With at least 7 more years of education facing her, a 19-year-old Black pre-medicine major may “find someone to marry” when she goes to medical school. However, since she expects to be a busy person, she feels her husband’s job will have to be less busy than her own, so he can take care of the children when she is not around. Although she is already married, Angela, the aspiring pharmacist, does not plan to have children for 10 to 15 years. Having a child right now would interfere with meeting her “landmarks,” and she believes she and her husband would be poor parents at this point in their lives.

*Several of the young women in this cluster emphasize the importance of being able to provide for their families when they do have them and express a strong desire never to have to depend on a man. This view is most forcefully articulated by the Black respondents.*

A 19-year-old Black college sophomore explains her decision to put off having a family as follows: “I definitely know that you have to have money to do the things you want in life. You can have a family without money, but I would rather have a job and a career first so I will be able to do what needs to be did for my children.” Similarly, Christine’s mother, widowed at an early age, has advised Christine to stay in school as long as possible so her career plans do not get derailed by having children. Her mother also raised her not to depend on a man. She taught Christine:

Even if you do get married, you still need a, you know, strong something to fall back on yourself. . . . And I want to do that and if I have kids, or children inside that marriage, I want them to, you know, don’t have to worry about . . . well, where’s the money going to come from.

A 17-year-old Black high school senior thinks she will be ready to start a family about the time she is 30. Her steady boyfriend, while supportive of her plans to defer having a family, thinks “it’s

funny” she is so goal-oriented, “because I’ve mapped it out to an age time and he’s like you can’t decide like that.”

A few of the respondents, not planning to start their families for awhile, recognize that having a child could drastically upset their timetables. Claire, with ambitious plans for teaching and graduate school, does not plan to have any children until she is 30. However, if “an accident were to occur” and she were to become pregnant, that would change a lot of things because she would want to be part of her child’s development:

I would probably have to put my studies on hold for some time, at least until the child could go to school. It would be hard with a toddler, too. Anyone with a little child that needs to be able to study and do all the things I do now. I think it would slow me down. I would hope to keep pursuing that, but I don’t know how long.

Only one respondent, an 18-year-old White college freshman, hopes that if she does get married, she will work outside of the household only until the kids came along, and then, finances permitting, would like to stay home with her children while they are young. Staying home with one’s children is “something important that kinda didn’t happen” in her own life. Her mother, an Army officer’s wife, had a lot of responsibilities that took her away from her children, leaving the respondent to take care of her younger brother and tend to many of the household chores. She does not want the same for her children.

*Like the Strivers, a few of the young women in this cluster say they never want to have children.* Says a 21-year-old White respondent, employed in a media company and going to school part-time:

I know this sounds selfish but I don’t see myself with kids. All my friends see me and go you’d be such a great mom. I’m like yeah, that’s just because you all have kids, leave me alone. You want me to be part of your little cult thing with kids. I don’t want it.

### ***Ties to Family, Friends, and Place***

*Although perhaps not so much or in quite the same way as the Strivers, many of these Middle-Class College-Goers are also very bound to family and friends in specific places.* Several chose colleges where they could stay in reasonably close geographic proximity to their families, although, compared to the Strivers, many fewer are actually living at home while in school. Others, like the Strivers, are attending or planning to attend colleges where they already have friends. Most hope to remain permanently in their home area or return there once having completed their graduate degrees.

While no one explicitly imposed this condition on her, Nancy, who is “really close to my family,” restricted her choices to colleges in the New England state where she grew up. She wanted to be close to her twin sister, who will not fly on airplanes, and also near her family, though “not too close.” This did not impose major limitations, however, because her home state is dense with institutions of higher education of all kinds.

Christine attends college in the same community where she grew up and will only consider applying to graduate schools in the immediate area. While aware that she is limiting herself, she simply does not want to go very far away, because “I depend on my mother.”

A 19-year-old chose her current undergraduate university for two major reasons: Her cousin had gone there, and it is close enough to her parents’ home (about 45 minutes) that she can travel back and forth to visit easily. Going home to see her family is what she does in her spare time, when she is not working or attending classes. However, she is hoping to attend an out-of-state graduate school.

Marisa is looking forward to going off to college away from the small town where she has grown up and is anxious to meet new people whose “whole life story” she does not already know. However, she is not so brave as to venture into an entirely unknown environment. Many other friends are going to the same university, and she has already chosen a roommate. Of the importance of attending a school where she already has friends, she notes, “It’s good that they [her friends] are going to be going there. . . . I’d just rather have someone there, in case, like, I just don’t make any friends or anything.” Another 17-year-old Hispanic high school senior also cannot imagine attending a college, or for that matter, going anywhere where she does not already have friends. It is important “just so when you walk in the doors at first, you have someone you know that you can talk to . . . or there’s someone that you’ve kind of grown up with, with you.”

*Interestingly, it is the handful of young women in this decision-making cluster who grew up in the military who most clearly deviate from the pattern of not wanting to be far from home or to venture to new places without the comfort and security of familiar persons.*

An 18-year-old White college freshman spent many years overseas and moving from place to place as the daughter of an Army officer. She thought nothing of selecting a college in a different part of the country from where she had gone to high school, although she does have relatives in the area. But even though she knew no one when she first arrived, she was able to take the initiative in making new friends by drawing on adjustment skills she learned growing up as a military brat. However, now that she has established a circle of friends, she does not want to disrupt her life by moving again. In contrast, the other military brat in this cluster, a 21-year-old Black college student caring for her younger sister, will

probably return to the military once she graduates from college. The military is the only life she has ever known, and she now finds staying in one place for very long boring.

### ***Middle-Class College-Goers: A Summary***

- Middle-Class College-Goers come from better-educated families in which going to college was always taken for granted. Their parents, paying for at least some portion of their college education, play a more active and influential role in guiding decisions on colleges and career paths.
- Middle-Class College-Goers tend to be more measured than the Strivers in assessing their readiness to make good decisions, partly because they are more knowledgeable about the nuances of educational and career choices and more aware of the influence of key adults, especially parents.
- Like Strivers, Middle-Class College-Goers envision careers as physicians, social workers, physical therapists, teachers, pharmacists, and accountants. They want to work in interesting fields for which they “have a passion” and that will enable them to help others and contribute to society.
- Middle-Class College-Goers want to be settled in their careers and lives before taking on parental responsibilities, usually at about the “magic” age of 30.
- Middle-Class College-Goers are not quite as tied to family, friends, and places as Strivers, though most have chosen colleges close to home and expect to settle in their home areas. However, for the most part, staying close to home has not severely limited their options.

### **Non-College-Oriented Young Women**

There are 15 young women in this cluster, who range in age from 17 to 24. Six are Hispanic, five are Black, and four are White. They come from working-class or lower-middle-class families and tend to have educational and career aspirations that can be satisfied with a year or two in a vocational school or community college program. Most have no immediate plans to have families.

### ***Family Background and Circumstances***

Although similar to the Strivers’ families in parental educational attainment and socioeconomic status, in other respects, the family backgrounds of the young women not bound for college are more varied and complex. In this cluster, parents *supportive of their daughters’ aspirations do not appear to place the same emphasis on pursuit of higher education.* Moreover, relative to the Strivers, fewer of the young women in this cluster speak of their families as cheering them on or as being “behind them all the way.”

*In several cases, family responsibilities and economic circumstances have prevented these young women from pursuing educational or career aspirations in a single-minded or “straight-line” manner.* For example, after graduating from high school, Lorena, a 21-year-old White respondent volunteered to help out during a time of family financial difficulties by staying home and watching her younger sister. She was then accepted at an out-of-state college, but could not raise the money to go. Finally, she persuaded her mother to buy her a bus ticket to another state, where she went to live with relatives. A 17-year-old Hispanic high school senior, now attending an adult high school in the evening, is the oldest of six children. She had seriously considered military enlistment, but now feels she is needed at home to assist her mother in caring for her 1-year-old sister and a new baby on the way.

Betty Lou, a 21-year-old White respondent from a tiny town in Maine, who always did well in school, provides a good example of how strong family linkages can undermine aspirations for social mobility. The oldest of four children, she has worked ever since she was 16 and grew up shouldering a large part of the responsibility for watching her younger siblings. She describes the complexities of her extended family as follows:

I have a very large family. There’s me and my brother, John [pseudonym] and my father and my mom. She separated from my dad when I was 3, Johnny was 1. Then she went with my two younger brothers’ father for like 13 years and he lived with us but she never married him or nothing and they split up and then she remarried my stepfather now. She doesn’t have any kids with him, thank God.

Betty Lou dropped out of college after a year and a half because her money ran out and her living situation became untenable. Since quitting college, she has been working in a convenience store. Her mother tells her she could be doing more with her life, and her stepfather (the father of her two younger brothers) in another state offered to help her find a job in an accounting firm, doing the kind of work she really wants to do. However, her fiancé, a construction worker, opposes the idea of her returning to college, because he fears she would leave him for someone else.

### ***Readiness for Future Decisions***

Young women in this cluster represent a broad range in perceived readiness to make decisions for the future.

*A number say they are ready to make good decisions because they are still young and will have time to correct for any mistakes.* Since graduating high school nearly 2 years ago, a 19-year-old Hispanic self-described tomboy has been living with her aunt and uncle in another state, taking basic courses at a community college part-time, and working at a record store at the mall. She is an avid ice

hockey and roller hockey player. She feels she is at a good point to make sound life decisions because “I’m still young and everything.” She would like to join the Navy, if she can pass the ASVAB (she took it in high school, but was not serious about enlisting then, so “blew it off”) and lose the required amount of weight.

A 17-year-old Hispanic respondent, uncertain about the future because her family may move back to Mexico, nevertheless feels ready to make good decisions because she is young enough to make mistakes and still has time to correct them. As she said, “That way there is more time, you can plan it better, and if it’s wrong, you can always think it over and do it again.” If the family does remain in the United States, the most likely scenario would be for her to work for a while to save the money for college or possibly work and go to college at the same time.

*Other young women in this cluster say they are ready to make decisions because they have to be, or, as one 19-year-old put it, “It’s time.”* For example, an 18-year-old Black high school graduate, currently living at home with her mother, is enrolled in cosmetology school. She feels she could now make good decisions because: “I’m grown now. I can’t depend on nobody. I have to depend on myself.” After graduating high school, she “laid back for a year . . . to kind of . . . get some rest,” and took a few temporary, part-time jobs. Right now she is anticipating completing her cosmetology training in several months and is also looking for a part-time job.

A 21-year-old Black trade school graduate, on her own now for several years, has only recently come to consider herself ready to make good life decisions. For the past 8 months, she has been working as the manager of an apartment complex for the elderly and disabled, a job that involves a lot of responsibility and one in which she is learning a great deal. However, she acknowledges she spent quite a few years floundering before reaching this point. Just out of high school, she was on the verge of enlisting in the military, but backed out at the last minute because she “got scared” of the commitment. She then moved to a large city in search of jobs, where she discovered the dearth of opportunities for a high school graduate with no skills and experience. As a result, she enrolled in a 4-year college, but transferred to a trade school thinking she could learn the same skills in a shorter period of time. She now regrets that decision.

### *Career Choices*

*Overall, the young women in this cluster are less career-focused than the Strivers or the Middle-Class College-Goers and more motivated by short-term pragmatic considerations in selecting their fields. Their approaches to the future are not as planned out, and they are more apt to “fall into” jobs and take the path of least, or lesser, resistance.*

Silvia, an 18-year-old Hispanic high school senior, attending a small Catholic single-sex school, comes closest to the Strivers and college-goers in expressing a strong attraction for her chosen fields, though she is unlike them in wanting to minimize the time spent in school. Silvia is interested in joining the National Guard or pursuing a career in travel and tourism. Since she was a little girl, she has dreamed of being in the National Guard and helping people. She also wants the experience of being away from home and likes to travel and see new places. As a member of a college search club at her high school, Silvia resisted pressure to go to a 4-year college “like everybody else” after realizing she really does not like school enough to make that kind of time investment. Silva says:

And I’m like, okay, cool. I can get it (school) over with real fast, and I’m going to have a good job. . . . When you’re in high school, it’s like you have to think what do I really want to do for the rest of my life. And that’s when I decided that [travel and tourism] sounds fun, travelling all the time, meeting new people . . . to me, it sounded fun. And to me, it still does.

A 17-year-old White high school senior has undergone reconstructive surgery on her face three times to repair the damages inflicted by a former stepfather. She is also enthusiastic about her chosen field. Enrolled in a vocational program in security and law enforcement at her high school, she is applying for scholarships to a local community college hoping to become an emergency medical technician or go into law enforcement. She believes that having been the only girl in her high school law enforcement courses has prepared her to enter a male-dominated field. She was only recently introduced to her biological father, and when she found out he had been a police officer and several of her half-siblings are also in law enforcement, she was all the more convinced of the “rightness” of her decision.

Those who express a “passion” for their chosen fields represent the exception rather than the rule, however. *More of the young women in this cluster seem to have made career decisions based on circumstances or coincidence rather than an initial strong interest in a field.*

Lorena, the 21-year-old working as a nursing assistant, is considering three possible future paths: enlisting in the military, going to school to get her R.N., and studying accounting. Right now she is “just kind of sitting back . . . waiting to see what happens.” After returning to the area where she had lived as a child, she more or less fell into a job at a nursing home, where she was trained as a certified

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nursing assistant. Her colleagues are amazed she has not yet gone back to school to get her nursing degree since she has a photographic memory for medical terms. Her father served in Vietnam, which has renewed her thoughts about entering the military. She is also considering following her mother's lead and taking some courses in accounting. It is not clear how she will choose among these possibilities.

*Several young women in this cluster would like to someday own their own businesses.* However, perhaps as a function of age, they appear to have a hazy sense of what would be required to run such a business. A 17-year-old Hispanic high school senior currently attending night school is thinking about using her daytime hours to go to school and get her cosmetology license. Then she would work in her godfather's beauty shop, earn some money, get a reference, and open her own shop. She would also eventually like to become a dancer, possibly open a dance hall or nightclub. An 18-year-old Black high school graduate currently enrolled in a cosmetology program, also looks forward to one day opening her own beauty shop and possibly combining cosmetology with fashion merchandising. After observing that her mother, the general manager of a bus company, comes home from her job exhausted and "gets hassled a lot," she is anxious to be her own boss and "do what I feel when I want." However, this young woman will probably heed her teachers' cautionary advice to acquire some work experience before attempting to open her own shop.

Looking towards the future, the 21-year-old Black apartment manager who now feels ready to make good decisions would also like to own her own business eventually. However, having come to her present job as manager of a housing complex somewhat by chance, for the short-term she would like to first build experience in that field, which suits her as someone who is business-oriented, but also a "people person." At some future point, she would like to get a cosmetology certificate and own her own beauty shop.

*The young women in this cluster tend to accommodate to their circumstances and move on from there, rather than persist in the effort to achieve their original goals at all costs.* For example, although sorry at having had to cut short her education, Betty Lou, the 21-year-old White college dropout living in a tiny town in Maine, accepts her current situation. If she and her fiancé had moved to a larger town, she might have tried to get a job in a bank. For now, she is content to work as a convenience store clerk. Describing her acceptance, she says, "I guess school is important to me, but it doesn't bother me if I don't go. . . . I'm not going to get that far without schooling, but it's okay." As to her future: "It just comes, whatever comes. Hopefully, I will be married by then."

### ***Future Family Plans***

*All but one of the young women in this cluster have no immediate plans to have a family. For the most part, their reasons for deferring marriage and children are not as well articulated or as closely linked to educational and career plans as are those of the Strivers and Middle-Class College-Goers.*

For example, an 18-year-old Black high school senior, who wants six children, does not plan to get married and settle down until she is “stable and ready,” at about age 25. A 17-year-old White high school senior does want to get married and have kids “later on in life,” but “I just feel I need to get myself stable, myself, before I have to worry about taking care of anyone else.”

Only Silvia, the Hispanic respondent who wants to join the National Guard and/or go into travel and tourism, has given much thought to how her occupational choice will fit with her desire to have a family. She has also discussed the issue at length with her mother. Silvia feels a career in travel and tourism is compatible with her plans not to have a family for another 5 or 6 years, by which time she hopes to have acquired enough seniority not to have to work nights or weekends. When she does have children, she wants to raise them in a “calmer” neighborhood than the one where she now lives, send them to private school, and be someone they can respect and whose example they can follow.

Betty Lou, the engaged White 21-year-old in Maine, will probably get married within the year and have children soon thereafter. Sounding older than her 21 years, she sees herself as repeating the life of the women around her: “My stepsister’s made it, and I guess I can do the same thing. She’s been through the same thing I have. She worked and worked and ended up having a kid before me though.”

### ***Ties to Family, Friends, and Place***

*Most of the young women in this cluster are deeply enmeshed in ties that keep them closely bound to specific places. Some are so enmeshed they have never contemplated the idea of going anywhere else.*

*The major motivation for staying in place is to maintain or cultivate ties with family.* Despite her unhappy past and an awkward current situation, in which her abusive former stepfather is granted supervised visitation privileges with her two younger half-siblings, the 17-year-old White high school senior who wants to go into law enforcement wants to remain in the local area. In the past few years she reconnected with her biological father (who has since passed away) and discovered “a whole new family”—five half-brothers and sisters—whom she would like to get to know.

In moving back to the area where she had grown up as a child, Lorena, the nursing assistant, was motivated primarily by a desire to get back in touch with her father's side of the family and renew ties with her old school chums. While she has enjoyed getting to know her paternal relatives again, she is starting to feel strong pangs of separation from her parents and siblings, one reason why she may decide against enlistment. For her, the hardest part of being in the military would be "being away from your family and kind of going somewhere where you probably don't know anybody and having to start all over again making friends and stuff."

Betty Lou, for her part, cannot imagine moving "clear across the country" for any reason, including the prospect of a much better job: "There's no way I would do that!" Her fiance and her father, who are "best friends," go hunting together, and her fiance wants to stay close to his elderly parents, who need his help. She spends much of her time visiting with her large network of extended kin. She concludes "I'm happy where I am."

*The major exceptions to this pattern of not wanting to leave the local area are three Hispanic young women. One is from a military family, and all three are seriously considering enlistment. One, a 17-year-old whose father was in the Air Force for 20 years, is anxious to get out of the small town where she lives. She feels growing up in the military has taught her how to make new friends, so "anywhere I go I can just get along easily with people." A 19-year-old working part-time at the mall and taking community college classes, hopes to enlist in the Navy. She is attracted to danger and adventure, and wants to gain independence from her loving, but overly protective relatives. Silvia is attracted to the idea of going new places and meeting new people.*

### ***Non-College-Goers: A Summary***

- Although of similar parental socioeconomic status and educational levels, the non-college-going young women do not enjoy the same level of family encouragement and support as the Strivers, nor do their families stress the importance of education to same degree.
- Some non-college-goers come from difficult, complex family situations and have been waylaid or sidetracked in their lives and career plans by family responsibilities and financial difficulties.
- The non-college-goers overall are only somewhat confident of their readiness to make good future decisions, not as inclined to plan, and more likely to stress external rather than internal criteria of readiness (being ready because "it's time" or they have to be).
- With respect to their career paths, non-college-goers have tended to take the path of least or lesser resistance, often "falling into" whatever jobs happened to be available. Most are preparing for or working at jobs that require minimal post-high school training (nursing assistant, beautician, and store clerk), although several hope to someday own their own businesses.

- With one exception, the non-college-goers have no immediate plans to have families. However, their reasons for deferring marriage and children are not clearly articulated or as closely linked to educational and career plans as are those of the Strivers and Middle-Class College-Goers.
- Most non-college-goers are enmeshed in family ties that keep them closely bound to their local areas. The only exceptions are three young women, all Hispanic, one from a military family, who are seeking to travel and experience new, less restrictive environments.

### **Diffuse Decisionmakers**

Of the 15 young women in this cluster, 4 are Single Mothers and 2 are shortly expecting a child. They range in age from 18 to 21. Seven are Black, five are White, and three are Hispanic. Like the Strivers and the non-college goers, these young women generally come from working-class and lower-middle-class families. With a few exceptions, their parents have not been to college. As a group, they possess very little sense of direction, have vague and sometimes unrealistic plans and aspirations for their futures, and seem to be waiting for some unnamed external force to energize their lives and plans.

#### ***Family Background and Circumstances***

*Compared to respondents in the other clusters, quite a few of these Diffuse Decisionmakers have experienced complicated family situations and difficult living environments while growing up. A soft-spoken 19-year-old Black high school graduate expecting a child, is living in a foster home, where she will remain for about another year. She has been moved from one foster home to another over the course of her life, alluding to “bad things” that have happened to her along the way.*

Marina, a troubled 19-year-old White community college dropout, now lives with her father and father’s girlfriend. Her parents are divorced and her mother is still in Estonia, where the family used to live. Marina moved out of the house the day she turned 18 and back in several months later after having problems with a roommate. She does not get along with her father’s girlfriend and would really rather have her own place. After “growing up fast” in Eastern Europe, arriving in this country at the age of 15, she found American teenagers immature and tended to gravitate towards older friends. She sometimes goes to a friend of her mother’s from the old country for advice and keenly feels the lack of her mother’s presence during her formative teen years.

An embittered 19-year-old White respondent living in rural northern California says of her parents: “I don’t have any.” Her mother, a college graduate out of the picture since this young woman was 8, lives in Las Vegas. Her father, with whom she has had no contact since she was 13 or 14, is “a

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creep” who resides somewhere in the state of Washington. She is in occasional telephone contact with her mother, but otherwise has “nothing to do with” her parents:

My family is a really complicated one. My mother married brothers. All my brothers are my cousins and my cousins are my brothers and my dad is my uncle and my uncle is my stepfather.

This young woman now resides with her grandmother and was home schooled by her aunt, with whom she also lived for a time after being in foster care. She did not attend the last few years of high school and therefore has few peers to socialize with and only one friend she has known for more than a few years.

*Many of the Diffuse Decisionmakers seem to be operating in a vacuum when it comes to receiving useful adult guidance or having role models or mentors to whom to turn.* When their parents or relatives give advice, it is sometimes conflicting and often offered in the spirit of throwing a life raft to a drowning individual. Other adults who might step into the void—neighbors, teachers, guidance counselors—are not much in evidence, and when they are, do not appear to have much impact.

*Several of these young women are living with parents or other relatives who are trying to be helpful, but with little apparent effect.* Felice, a 21-year-old Black single mother of a 3-month-old daughter, holds a cosmetology license. Felice is not currently working and spends most of her time renting videos and watching television. Her grandmother and the aunt and uncle with whom she lives are trying to help by suggesting different possible courses of action and looking out for job openings. Although each has a different idea of what she ought to do, this is “not a problem” because she has been impervious to any advice, taking no concrete steps in any direction, and showing no apparent preference for any path.

A 17-year-old White high school senior from a small town in the Midwest works bussing tables at a local restaurant and in her free time “sits home a lot.” With no idea of what she wants to do after high school, she has applied for jobs at several local drugstores and is taking a “careers course” through a correspondence school. Her parents are encouraging her to enlist because it would delay having to worry about finding a job and would get her “a really good future.” Her older sister, who rejected the same advice, has since moved away and gotten a job as a waitress, disappointing her parents, who wanted her sister to “make something of herself.”

An 18-year-old Black high school senior from the Bronx, New York City, attends a commercial arts high school. She does not know what she wants to do and would like “an orientation or something” about jobs and careers, but has not approached a guidance counselor for help. All the counselors at her school are too busy signing program cards every semester. Nor has she sought, or

apparently received, any guidance from her parents. During the interview, her mother was heard yelling at her to pick up her clothes. She has engaged an employment agency to find her a job working in a drugstore, and apart from this, gets her ideas for what she might do in life from a girlfriend.

### ***Readiness for Decisionmaking***

*Most Diffuse Decisionmakers do not feel ready to make good decisions about their futures and are looking either to the very short-term or very long-term future in planning their lives. Many lack confidence in their abilities to master new skills and adapt to new environments.*

An 18-year-old Hispanic high school senior with a 2-year-old son, who lives with her mother and younger sister, is looking “real far” in the future: about a year. Now that she has a son, it is hard “to be not working, to not have a career.” A 19-year-old Black mother-to-be who grew up in a series of foster homes, is unsure of what she will do in the next few years. With her immediate future a vacuum, she is looking ahead to “until it will be time for me to retire”—as though to dissolve the entire question of what she will do with her working years.

Bativa, an 18-year-old Black respondent from New York City, has been working at Burger King and attempting to complete her GED. When not working, she sleeps. She will continue to work at Burger King for a few months until she gets “everything I need . . . clothing, stuff like that, jewelry, shoes, whatever.” She describes herself as “going day-by-day;” there is no sense in planning, she feels, because the future is inherently uncontrollable:

Because you never know what could happen. So I just don't be thinking [about the future] and people say ‘Oh, I got to . . . in the couple of next few years I'm going to be doing this.’ You don't know what you're going to be doing, so I don't really think about it. So I just do what I got to do for right now.

Bativa lacks confidence in her ability to handle new tasks. She is looking for a job that is not too difficult and confesses she would feel mortified if she had to return to her parent's home a failure after attempting to venture out on her own.

Marina, from Estonia, acknowledges she is unprepared for making decisions about her future, “never really sure about anything,” and given to abruptly changing her mind: “Each time I think I'm going to do this, and then I get this other idea, do this.” Within the space of the past week, she had first decided to go to aesthetics school (like cosmetology, but focusing on skin rather than hair), then decided to go back to community college instead. Marina, too, lacks self-confidence. As she puts it,

“Since people say I’m not stupid or anything, I’m just lazy. . . . I need support from people sometimes with my homework and stuff. It seems like I can’t do anything by myself.”

*While expressing a desire to provide stable futures for their children, the single mothers in this cluster feel just as unprepared as the others to make good decisions.*

Kenya, a 20-year-old Black single mother of a 1-year-old daughter, who lives in a major metropolitan area on the West Coast, does not lack for ideas about things she might do in her life. She also has an ambitious set of goals she wants to achieve in the near future that include completing her apprenticeship hours in cosmetology, owning a business, enrolling her daughter in some classes, and helping out her mother financially. However, not only has Kenya yet to take any concrete steps toward realizing any of these goals, but entertaining so many possibilities has only led to paralyzing confusion:

I just have all kinds of ideas in my head and try to figure out what I can do with all these ideas. . . . There’s a lot of things to do. And when you start to look for what you can do or what you can accomplish, it opens up so many doors you have to slow down because you realize you cannot accomplish it all. Then you’re confused. So you kind of just sit.

Felice, with a 3-month-old daughter, is looking “short-term” at least 10 years into the future, with an eye to obtaining a stable job with a good benefits package that includes retirement and a savings plan for college for her child. On the surface, it seems a sign of maturity that she is thinking so far ahead and planning for her child’s needs. The problem is that the next 10 years are a series of vague possibilities—all seen as equally plausible—that include finding “any kind of job,” enrolling in a nursing school owned by her best friend’s husband’s grandmother, going back to doing hair, or attending school at night. Out of school for several years, Felice worries about her ability to get along with others in a new environment and is afraid she will be unable to learn new skills.

### ***Career Choices***

*Diffuse Decisionmakers have vague, and sometimes unrealistic, conceptions of the work world and the different types of jobs available as well as the skills and credentials needed to perform different sorts of work.* Felice, for example, might do the “work that the Motorola people do, at the plant, whatever they do” or “business management”—an airy, but largely content-free concept that sounds good.

Within 3 years, Bativa (now employed at Burger King) would like to be working on Wall Street “or someplace like that” at a well-paying job at a big company, perhaps as a secretary or receptionist. When she found out that data entry was “nothing but just finding names or whatever,” she decided she could do that. Bativa believes being a secretary would not be “difficult like a lot of other things you could be doing.” Her sister-in-law, who works as a secretary/receptionist, “tells me what she do, answer the phones or whatever. And when I call her she puts me on hold and stuff. So I know most likely what they do.” She is impressed that her sister-in-law earns \$15 per hour, whereas she only makes \$5/hour at Burger King. However, since thinking ahead is pointless, Bativa has no plans to prepare herself for secretarial work.

An 18-year-old Black high school senior from a Washington, DC, suburb has grandiose visions, but little concrete sense of what she will need to do to realize them. She is looking for a job

. . . doing anything that makes a lot of money. . . . I want a nice job . . . a job with a company rather than a firm. Oh, yeah, with a company, possibly a manager or something big, a big job.

However, she is not clear as to what specific type of work she wants to do. While well aware of the “external trappings” she desires in life—within 10 years, she would like to own a house and a nice car, have a stable life, and be a “businesswoman”—she is vague on the steps she would have to take in the interim to reach this point.

*Not surprisingly, Diffuse Decisionmakers often simultaneously entertain a range of often incompatible, and wildly divergent, possibilities for their futures and have done little to prepare themselves for or even gather concrete information about the different sorts of careers they are considering.* One young woman, a White 17-year-old high school senior living on the West Coast, might become an actor or a veterinarian or join the Coast Guard. However, she is not looking very far in the future and will only consider going to college if she cannot find a “good job” with “good pay” once she turns 18.

The commercial arts high school student from the Bronx has never considered looking for a job in commercial art. She has engaged an employment agency to look for drugstore clerk positions<sup>1</sup> and is also thinking about majoring in computers, but has not spoken to a neighbor who works in this field. Seeming to prefer impersonal to personal modes of obtaining information, she has also sent for descriptive materials from three or four colleges whose names she copied down from the bulletin board at

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<sup>1</sup> It is fairly common in New York City for large employment agencies to serve as middlemen, locating entry-level clerical and sales positions in return for a fee, paid by the employer, the job-seeker, or both.

school, though she has not applied to any of them. Her list included two colleges whose names she no longer remembers as well as a small, private, elite “artsy” college in New England that is painfully out of her league.

### ***Family Plans***

*All but one of the six young women in this cluster who have or will shortly have children implied that their pregnancies had been unplanned. All are living with their relatives, and none mentioned their children’s fathers (or any other male partners) in discussing their life plans. Although these young women express the desire to create stable futures for their children, having a child has not (yet) mobilized them into taking concrete steps in this direction. Not surprisingly, since so little of their lives is planned, they are also largely silent on the subject of whether they intend to have more children.*

Kenya is the exception to this pattern. Among the single mothers in this cluster, only she suggested that she had made an active decision to have her child: “I know it would have been easier had I not had my baby, but I wanted her. I’m a strong believer in doing what I feel like I need to do for myself.” In discussing why she did not enlist in the military, Kenya also raised the issue of her relationship (or non-relationship) with her daughter’s father, as well as her bitter feelings toward her own biological father. She explains that she was upset that in order to enlist she would have been required to ask her daughters’ father’s permission to relinquish temporary custody of their child to her mother. Kenya does not consider him “a true father” and was worried that, while she was away, her mother would have gone against her wishes and re-established contact:

My thing is . . . if you don’t take care of her . . . pay child support . . . do anything for her, you do not see her. My Mom, on the other hand, is ‘Okay, your Daddy doesn’t do anything for you.’ And that’s why I can’t stand him until this day.

Kenya does not plan to have any more children for at least 5 years and even imagines she might return to school, possibly in the medical field, once her daughter is in school—an idea she got from watching a television show where one of the characters had gone to medical school at the age of 35.

*Not surprisingly, there is no clear or consistent pattern among the other Diffuse Decisionmakers when it comes to their plans for marriage or children. The 17-year-old White high school senior from the Midwest, is engaged, but does not foresee getting married or having children for several years. Others are not currently involved with anyone or are in relationships that may or may not lead to further commitments.*

For the past several months, Marina has been swept up in an intense romantic relationship that has totally consumed her life. Her boyfriend lives in a tourist town on the coast of Mexico, where there is a lot to do. She started spending most of her time with him there, stopped working, and dropped her courses. But then she started to feel worthless because she was not doing anything. Her father was also worried about her, so she came back to the United States. Her boyfriend is now planning to move to be with her. Marina says,

I'm doing my decisions very differently, because . . . I'm in a relationship, a serious one. And the reason I haven't been working or going to school is because . . . I was kind of too crazy about that. And I was depending on my boyfriend a lot . . . but I don't like the fact that I have to depend on somebody. . . . I'm still in love, but I think definitely now, I got the point, you know.

Marina is fighting her tendency to become dependent on men and to lean on others. She does not want to depend on a man for fear of ending up like her father's girlfriend, who was married to a wealthy man, then left with nothing when they divorced.

A 19-year-old White respondent living in California has been dating someone for 4 years, but is waiting to see if he gets a state job and a house before she is willing to commit: "If he does something then we'll get married, if he doesn't do anything, forget it." When she does become a mother, this young woman definitely wants to stay home with her children: "I believe women belong at home." With strong essentialist views, she believes that men and women think differently and that the military, sports, and hard jobs should be reserved for men, while women should do more "dainty and delicate things" that are not too mentally or physically taxing.

### ***Ties to Family, Friends, and Place***

*The Diffuse Decisionmakers are also not inclined to leave the places they know.* The single mothers and single mothers-to-be, with relatives keeping a roof over their heads and helping them care for their children, have obvious reasons for staying in place. However, even those without such compelling motivations are not inclined to venture very far. *Their reasons for wanting to stay close to home often center on fears of not being able to master new environments rather than reluctance to give up the positive aspects of their existing ties to family and friends.*

For example, Bativa, whose family does not take her seriously, does not want to leave home: "I just don't want to be away from home for too long around a whole bunch of people I don't even

know.” In her mind, the same concerns apply to joining the military and attending college. She says:

When you go to college, people be scared the first day you go, because there’s a whole bunch of people you don’t even know. You got to live with them. . . . And you go to the Army you don’t know these people, and you have to live with them, eat with them, sleep with them, bathe with them. . . . I (only) do that with my family.

Even if she were to continue to live at home while attending college, she believes she would still be faced with the unappealing prospect of “being with a whole bunch of different people.”

*A few young women in this cluster say they will leave their local area only if all else fails.*

For example, although she will find it hard to leave the only place she has ever known, a 17-year-old White high school senior might enlist if her fiancé were also to do so, and she has been unable to find a satisfactory job. Another young woman, a 17-year-old White high school senior, whose friends are “not very bright and will probably be working at Mc Donald’s the rest of their lives,” might leave if she cannot find a “good paying job” after graduation.

### ***Diffuse Decisionmakers: A Summary***

- Compared to those in other clusters, more (though by no means all) of these Diffuse Decisionmakers have experienced difficult, traumatic family situations and appear isolated and unconnected from meaningful sources of social support. They lack, or are unable or unwilling to accept, helpful adult guidance and direction. Those who have already graduated from high school have tenuous connections to the work world.
- The single mothers and mothers-to-be in this cluster talk about the need to secure stable futures for their children, but as yet have not taken concrete steps or made realistic plans in that direction. Most live with, and are highly dependent on, family members (mothers, aunts and uncles, and grandmothers) for their own and their children’s livelihood and support.
- Diffuse Decisionmakers feel unprepared to make good decisions, tend to think about the future either in very short-range or very long-range terms, and take a passive approach, believing there is little sense in planning or preparing because external events are uncontrollable.
- Diffuse Decisionmakers have vague, often unrealistic conceptions of the work world and the skills and credentials needed for different jobs, and may simultaneously entertain wildly divergent and mutually incompatible job possibilities.
- The single mothers and mothers-to-be in this cluster did not mention their children’s fathers and are silent on whether they intend to have more children. There is no clear and consistent plan among the other Diffuse Decisionmakers as to future plans for marriage and/or children.
- Diffuse Decisionmakers want to stay close to home, more out of fear of new and unfamiliar environments, than reluctance to give up the positive benefits of current ties to family and friends. A few might consider leaving their communities if all else were to fail—e.g., they were unable to find any sort of job.

## Striving Single Mothers

There are nine respondents in this cluster, ranging in age from 18 to 21. With one exception, they come from families of modest means and limited educational attainment. As seen, these nine cases do not represent all Single Mothers in the total sample: what defines the young women in this cluster is that having a child may have slowed them down or caused a detour in the course they had originally planned, but has not derailed their lives and career plans.

### *Family Background and Circumstances*

Most of the Striving Single Mothers are currently employed or enrolled in school at least part-time and are living with relatives. Most heavily depend on their families for help with taking care of their children. However, there are some differences across racial and ethnic groups in how comfortable they are about maintaining this pattern of co-residence over time.

*Three of the White Striving Single Mothers, who are currently residing with their parents and siblings, are looking forward to establishing independent households very soon. A 19-year-old with a 3-year-old son lives with her parents and younger sister on a dairy farm outside a small rural community in the Midwest. She is completing a course to become a licensed practical nurse and also waitresses part-time. Her son is in daycare a few days a week, and her mother watches him on the other days. Her younger sister also helps out with her son. She plans to move “into town” and get her own place as soon as she graduates. Despite the financial advantages, living at home is “really stressful” because her parents “think they have a say in how I should raise my son, and it’s really hard to differentiate against it.”*

Myrna, a 21-year-old White high school graduate with a 9-month-old daughter, works full-time as a manager at a department store. Currently, she and her daughter live with her mother, stepfather, and two younger stepsisters. Myrna, too, is looking forward to moving into her own apartment soon, just her and her daughter. However, she does not plan to move very far away.

Kathryn, a 21-year-old White single mother of a 10-month-old son, would otherwise fit into the Middle-Class College-Goer cluster. Her parents are college-educated. Directly out of high school, she was accepted at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, but chose not to go. She currently attends college part-time, majoring in special education, and works part-time as a service representative for the telephone company. Although she and her son have their own apartment, she lives close to her parents and is part of a closely-knit, supportive family network.

*Both of the Black respondents in this cluster are embedded in extended kinship networks with other female family members and plan to use this support to help them gain further education and better lives.* An 18-year-old high school graduate with a 1-year-old daughter plans to go to technical school locally for 2 years, then transfer to the state university and move in with her female cousin. Her family, especially her aunt and grandmother, support these plans; indeed, they appear to be the main forces encouraging her to succeed. Her grandmother will watch the baby while she goes to school and “keep” the child if and when she does transfer to the 4-year school. After she graduates and gets a “good job” in the city, she will bring her daughter to live with her.

*The Hispanic respondents in this cluster are most apt to be living with or maintaining a close ongoing connection to their children’s fathers.* An 18-year-old Hispanic high school senior with a 2-month-old son, who hopes to graduate through independent study this year, lives with her child’s father. She is scheduled to return to work part-time as an attendant at a facility for developmentally disabled teenagers. She is close to her mother and grandmother, who raised her, but rarely sees her father or half-brothers and half-sisters.

### ***Readiness for Future Planning***

*In contrast to those in the Diffuse Decisionmaker cluster, these Striving Single Mothers feel ready to plan for their futures; if they were not ready before, having a child has changed all that. However, most have had to alter their original plans or go more slowly than they would otherwise have liked in light of their mostly unplanned pregnancies.*

Says Myrna: “I had planned on going to college and doing all that before I had kids, but I don’t mind. I ended up getting married, and that kind of changed plans around. And then I got divorced. So I just never got back to any of that.” Although she had never really envisioned a career in retail, she is still employed at the same store where she has been working since high school. Having worked her way up through the ranks, she has a daytime, weekday position with full benefits, an ideal arrangement under her present circumstances. A self-described “workaholic,” Myrna has had to turn down several promotions that would have required travel. She has also gotten grants to go back to school, but sees no way she can fit it into her schedule right now. She hopes to return to school when her 6-month-old daughter gets a bit older.

A 19-year-old White single mother had always planned to attend technical school to become a nurse but had not planned on motherhood: “Just not the little boy. He was an accident.” The major effect of her son has been to slow down her progress: She has been in school for 2 years, whereas under

ordinary circumstances, she probably could have completed her program in a year. “But it’s okay,” she said, “I worked through it.” Right now she believes she will go back to school in about 5 or 6 years to get her R.N., once her son is settled in school.

At the time of the interview, Rosalba, a 21-year-old Hispanic respondent with a 3-month-old daughter, had just returned from maternity leave to her full-time job in the service department of a car dealership. Having a child has forced her to make some large decisions:

. . . basically everything I do now is not only going to affect myself, but it’s going to affect my child, because I’m a single parent. So, I have to start making good decisions, because obviously the bad ones are going to affect both of us.

Much of what Rosalba will be doing in the immediate future can best be described as “repair work” on her life, in anticipation of a different long-range future. The only reason she has returned to the dealership, which is not what she wants to do, is to get out of debt. After that, she is hoping to go back to school to get an associates degree in finance.

Like Rosalba, Kathryn—currently attending college and working part-time—is clear about her son’s impact on her decisionmaking: “I have a child and that makes it pretty much obvious that I need to kind of get some sort of future set for myself. Not only for me, but for him, especially. That’s why I’ve decided to go back to school.”

### *Career Choices*

*As a group, these Striving Single Mothers are pragmatic in choosing careers. Most are not considering fields that will require a major investment of time in further education. However, some are selecting fields that will afford them the option of returning to school at a later point for an additional credential or degree.*

*A few of these young women have “fallen into” a field, then discovered they liked it and decided to go further. Myrna, for example, never expected to stay in sales; it just worked out that way. However, now that she has established herself, if she does go on in school, it will make most sense for her to pursue a degree in marketing. A White single mother from “a little country hole” in the South was working at a fast food restaurant when her social worker at the Department of Human Services told her she could get her into a program to become a licensed practical nurse. Although she had never really considered nursing before, she decided becoming a LPN would be a good career, at least temporarily, and is now deliberating on whether to go on directly to get her RN.*

*Nursing is a common career choice for these Striving Single Mothers.* Several are enrolled in LPN courses and may or may not decide to go on to get their RN degrees.

A 20-year-old Black single mother of a 10-month-old son, in the rural South, also hopes to enter a nursing program, after she has had the time to save up the money for tuition. Her mother, who wants to help her “make something of herself,” is willing to contribute towards college. A female cousin, a pediatrician in a large urban hospital, has also provided encouragement and talked about the rewards of working in the medical field.

*Not surprisingly, several of these single mothers have chosen career paths they feel will mesh well with their parental obligations.* Rosalba, who is “good with numbers,” wants to go back to school for an associates degree in finance, then get a job in a bank. Working “bankers’ hours” will allow her to spend time with her daughter as she is growing up. Having a job that would require her to work late hours and weekends, she feels, would “defeat my purpose in having a child.” Similarly, Kathryn considered special education an ideal choice not just because she wants to help children, but also because it will allow her to be home in the evenings and to spend holidays with her son. She says: “I’m going to be able to be with my child when it’s important.”

### ***Family Plans***

*The Striving Single Mothers have a fairly wide range of relationships with their children’s fathers.* Some maintain no ongoing connection; others have continuing ties and two are planning to marry their child’s father. Several of these single mothers express the desire to have more children in the future.

Myrna sees her daughter’s father (who is not her ex-husband) nearly every night, when he comes over to visit. However, he is unable to contribute very much financially: “He can send \$20 or \$30 here and there, but I don’t get child support or nothing from him. Because he don’t really work a stable job. He works seasonal, so just whatever he can give me.” Moreover, he is already having another child with someone else, which further limits his resources. It is clear Myrna is not counting on him in any major way and does not see a future to their relationship.

A 20-year-old Hispanic single mother of a 10-month-old daughter is living with her child and a roommate, but expects to marry her child’s father, with whom she has had a longstanding relationship, before too long. Her fiance is an electrician who makes “good money,” so she is in a financial position to go back to school, but he works 50 hours a week, which leaves him no time for

helping with child care. In addition, he is embroiled in a custody dispute over his 5-year-old daughter from a prior liaison. This young woman plans to have another child in about 2 years.

With no ongoing contact with her son's father, one 19-year-old White single mother is currently involved in a serious relationship and waiting to see how it unfolds before making a long-term plan. Kathryn, who makes no mention of her child's father, does plan to have other children after she graduates and "halfway gets her career going."

### ***Ties to Family, Friends, and Place***

*Most of the Striving Single Mothers, entwined in social networks that help them successfully manage their lives by providing crucial help in caring for their children, are understandably reluctant to leave their communities and risk dislodging their support systems.*

Myrna will not consider leaving her hometown while her daughter is still small. An assortment of friends and relatives looks after her daughter while Myrna is at work, and she has "a good support system" of family, friends, and fellow church members to go to when she needs advice. While anxious to move her daughter out of their current close quarters—where they live with her mother, stepfather, stepsisters, and a menagerie of animals—Myrna plans to remain in the same neighborhood. Another White single mother also wants to move out of her parents' farmhouse, but would relocate only a short distance away into the nearby small town, where she and her son will probably live with one of her sisters. Although desirous of asserting greater independence from her parents, she is not interested in being far away from family members and the support they provide.

The Black single mothers in this cluster, both from small towns in the South, are planning to venture out of the local area to further their educational goals and eventually hope to settle in more urban places, with better job opportunities, where they already have relatives. In the meantime, however, both will rely on their female kinfolk to keep their children while they are in school. If they succeed in meeting their goals, their social mobility will come about through a collective family effort.

### ***Striving Single Mothers: A Summary***

- Striving Single Mothers are all in school and/or working at least part-time; they have a footing and a direction in life. Most are living with parents and siblings or other relatives and receiving considerable support and help with child care. Their pregnancies were nearly always unplanned.
- Striving Single Mothers maintain a wide range of relationships to their children's fathers, running the gamut from no communication at all to daily contact. Whatever the current status of their

relationships, several of these young women wish to have more children at a more propitious future time.

- Striving Single Mothers now feel ready to make good future decisions, although they have had to slow down their educational and career paths or alter their plans to accommodate their parental responsibilities. Some have been inspired to take steps to put their lives and careers on track by the realization that they are no longer making decisions just for themselves.
- Striving Single Mothers are practical-minded in choosing careers that do not require a large initial investment of time in further education, but allow for going on in the future. Some have “fallen into” their current line of work, then discovered they liked it. Several are pursuing fields (e.g., nursing, teaching, and banking) they believe will allow them to successfully integrate work and parenting responsibilities.
- Most Striving Single Mothers strongly depend on ties to family and friends for help in caring for their children and do not wish to dislodge their support networks by leaving their communities. The only exceptions are two Black respondents who plan to leave their children in their female relatives’ care while pursuing educational opportunities not available in their isolated rural southern towns. However, both expect to stay with relatives in urban centers while attending school.

### **Young Wives and Mothers**

This is the smallest of the clusters, with only five respondents, three Hispanic and two White, ages 18 to 22. All are married and have at least one child or are shortly expecting one. Like all groups but the Middle-Class College-Goers, these young women come from families of modest means, with parents who do not have much formal schooling. None of the five has been to college. Two are not currently in the paid labor force, one working part-time and two employed full-time, at low-end jobs. Their husbands also have high school educations and working-class jobs. What distinguishes this group from the Striving Single Mothers as well as other married respondents is that their joint roles as wives and mothers define their lives and self-conceptions.

#### ***Family Background and Circumstances***

It is difficult to generalize about these young women’s family circumstances. It is better to let them speak for themselves.

Veronica, a 20-year-old Hispanic wife and mother, with two small daughters, is married to a prison guard and lives in a small western town. She coaches cheerleading at the local high school several afternoons a week—more as a hobby than a job—and is extremely close to her parents and siblings, who all live nearby.

Carol, a 22-year-old White wife and mother with an 18-month-old daughter and another child on the way, has not worked outside of the household since late in her first pregnancy. Her husband is a truck driver. Carol's teenage years were mostly spent caring for sick parents. Her alcoholic father took ill when she was in junior high school and died shortly before her 16th birthday. Two weeks after Carol turned 16, her mother was diagnosed with leukemia and died a little over a year later. Carol then went to live with an aunt and uncle, but the uncle got sick, so she moved in with an older cousin and his family and helped take care of their four small children. Late in her senior year in high school, Carol moved in with her fiancé, and after several months of wild partying, they settled into domesticity.

An 18-year-old White high school graduate whose husband is serving in the military is doing volunteer work at her church and expecting a baby soon. Both she and her husband are devout Christians. She trained in cosmetology with the intent of working to save up enough money to go to college and become a teacher. However, all plans had been shelved since she and her husband have moved to a new community, where they are struggling to make ends meet and socially isolated from all but fellow church members.

A 19-year-old Hispanic wife and mother works as a secretary to support herself and her 1-year-old son. She is temporarily living with her parents while her husband is in Colombia looking into setting up a new life for them there. Becoming a wife and mother was initially a difficult adjustment, which meant the abrupt end of her teen years, but she is now reconciled to her new status: "The teenage things, I don't feel them anymore. I just feel like being a mother and a good wife, and I want to be someone in life."

### ***Readiness for Decisionmaking***

*These young women have already made key decisions by virtue of having married and had children at a young age. They have organized their lives around these key decisions in much the same way that the Strivers have focused their planning around career goals.*

Veronica does plan to go back to school sometime in the next 3 to 5 years, once her youngest child, now 6-months-old, gets a place in pre-school. Meanwhile, she is in no hurry, as her daughters are her primary focus, and she enjoys the ability to be "spur of the moment" and not have to adhere to a fixed schedule. When she was much younger, Veronica had briefly considered enlisting in the military, having been duly impressed after visiting a local military academy. However, long before she got married and had children, she rejected the idea on the grounds that she lacked the requisite discipline.

Carol's traumatic experiences in life have taught her not to take anything for granted and to rely on her own sense of what is right rather than being swayed by other people's views. She says: "I do what I want to do no matter what other people think. I don't stick to form. I don't have schedules that I go by. I take one minute and one hour at a time." Right out of high school, Carol turned down a college scholarship because she felt she would not have been able to handle the freedom. Determined to have a child, she suffered two miscarriages and accumulated significant costs before her daughter was finally born. Working as a waitress while pregnant with her first child, she decided to quit and stay home once she figured out how much money daycare would cost. Although Carol asked members of both her husband's and her own families for their opinions on whether she should return to work, "I usually end up going with what I want anyway. See, I don't know if people can tell you if you are doing the right thing." Carol did careful research before coming to her decision because she did not want to have to renege on it later on. Pregnant again, she does not envision going back to work for about 7 years, until both children are in school.

Now that a baby is on the way, the 18-year-old White high school graduate whose husband is in the Service, is not sure if she wants to work or stay home with her child. She plans to stay home for at least 6 months. After that, especially if her husband can not find a good job in the civilian world once his tour of duty is up, she might go to work, but would prefer just to care for her child.

The future choices for the Hispanic wife and mother working as a secretary hinge on whether her husband is successful in establishing a base for their new family in Colombia. If he is, she hopes to begin school there as soon as "everything is straight," since she has had enough of living like a single mother and working at a job she does not like in order to support herself and her son.

### ***Career Choices***

*For all these young women, career aspirations currently occupy second place to meeting their obligations to their husbands and children. However, three (of five) view this as a temporary stage after which they hope to pursue further educational and career goals.*

All three of the Young Wives and Mothers who hope to return to school and establish themselves in "real careers" are Hispanic. Two of the three would like to enter helping professions that are extensions of their current roles and activities. Veronica is considering becoming a physical therapist or a massage therapist, fields in which she has developed an interest while learning to minister to her younger daughter, who was born with a brain malformation. Inspired by a teacher she once had, a 19-

year-old Hispanic mother of two, now a full-time daycare worker, hopes eventually to become a second grade teacher.

The Hispanic wife and mother planning to relocate hopes to return to school once she and her husband are reunited in Colombia. She wants to pursue some aspect of the medical field, in part to make up for disappointments caused her parents when she did not join the Marines, as she had been planning to do before she got married and had her child. She had originally thought of becoming a pediatrician or a veterinarian, but will probably have to tone down her aspirations in light of her family obligations: “I’ve always thought that whenever you have kids, that’s not something that will stop you from doing anything. But it (becoming a veterinarian or pediatrician) is a long career.”

*The other two Young Wives and Mothers are hazier about how they envision their futures beyond domesticity.* Carol imagines that she will probably return to work in 6 or 7 years, once both her children are in school. However, she has no idea what type of work she will do, since jobs for people who only have a high school education are so limited. For her part, if she were forced into the labor market, the 18-year-old wife expecting a child will probably either go back to doing hair or get a paid job at the church where she now volunteers. Any plans to attend college will have to be deferred. She says: “I’ve got plenty of years. I can go to school when I’m 30 if I want.”

### ***Family Plans and Roles***

*Having put their roles as wives and mothers at center stage of their lives, it is not surprising these young women’s ideas about gender tend to be more traditional than those of the respondents in the other clusters.*

Most of Veronica’s strongly held views on gender appear to be projections from her own situation. She believes men are physically stronger, and women are mentally stronger, so “it kind of averages out.” The military would be harder for a woman with a family than for a man in the same circumstances because women are still expected to be the primary caregivers for their children. Whereas if her husband were to join the military, “I would support him in that and be able to take care of our girls, and he wouldn’t have to worry about where his kids are and if they are happy.” In the civilian work world, however, she believes women have an advantage. They get maternity leave, and bosses tend to be more understanding when mothers have to miss work because their children are sick. She also feels that men “these days” are highly vulnerable to unfounded accusations of sexual harassment; her husband has to be “really careful” of how he behaves with his female co-workers at the prison.

The 18-year-old devout Christian now expecting a child describes her ideas about gender as “kind of old fashioned.” She believes women should not be in the front lines in combat because they would not be able to cope emotionally. She longs for the “good old days,” when—as she has heard tell—enlisted men could support huge families (14 kids) on their salaries and their wives never had to go to work.

Although Carol has opted to make her children “her life” for the indefinite future, her views on gender are more liberal, perhaps because she had some defining experiences when she did work outside the home. Carol believes that even though women can do anything men can do, society still operates on an unfair double standard. Also, she thinks female bosses tend to be more understanding and more willing to talk things out and try to come up with solutions to problems. Carol had a particularly bitter experience with a male manager who gave her a hard time about wanting to go home when she miscarried at work.

### ***Ties to Family, Friends, and Place***

*All but one of these Young Wives and Mothers are deeply embedded in community ties and have no desire nor impetus to move.*

Veronica is firmly embedded in a network of ties in her small community and is very close to her parents and siblings. Even before she had a family, she would not have considered joining the military, in part because she could not have imagined being away from her family and friends and getting exposed to so many different people. In her mind, the hardest part would be learning who you can and cannot trust.

Despite, or perhaps because of, her turbulent past, Carol, too, would never want to be away from the life and people she has known. She cannot conceive of being in a situation where she could not call up her cousin and said “Come on over. You’ve just got to see this or that.” Carol had at one point entertained the idea of enlisting in the Navy, and, although acquiring some sort of education beyond high school would have been valuable, it would have been “a smart thing” but not the “right thing.” Moreover, had she gone into the military, she would not now have her husband, her daughter, or her present friends.

While waiting for her husband to set things up in Columbia, the 19-year-old Hispanic young wife and mother’s aunt and grandmother care for her son while she works. If there were no family members who could watch him, she would not work, because this is the only way she can have peace of mind. Her parents, who will stay in the United States, do not want her to move to Colombia, nor do her

friends, who had grown attached to her baby. With mixed feelings about the move, she is deeply torn between her loyalties to her parents and her feelings of obligation to her husband:

What I think is that when you have your life starting like I am, I have my husband, my baby, it's really not up to them [her parents]. . . . I think I could take pretty much positions with my life now, and I have to go where my husband goes. . . . I love my parents a lot but like now it's me starting my family.

The 18-year-old mother-to-be is not very well integrated into the community where she and her husband now live, mainly cleaving to her church. She avoids associating with the other Army wives because it is too painful to know that after a certain point she is never going to see them again. Under other circumstances, her husband might consider re-enlisting, but once you have a family, she feels, it is too hard to keep getting uprooted and moved from place to place.

### ***Young Wives and Mothers: A Summary***

- Even those Young Wives and Mothers working full-time outside the household are currently focused primarily on their roles as wives and mothers, which occupy the central place in their lives and decisions. Their ideas on gender, as viewed from the prism of their domestic roles, tend to be more traditional than those of the other respondents.
- Although all of these young women's current priorities revolve around caring for their husbands and children, three of them plan to return to school and pursue careers (as a teacher, a physical therapist, and a health care worker) at some future point. None sees being a housewife as a lifelong role.
- Four of these Young Wives and Mothers are closely tied to family and friends in their home communities and have a difficult time imagining leaving them for any reason. One of the four is ambivalent about the wrenching prospect of moving to Colombia with her husband and baby. The only young wife and mother who is not very well integrated into the community recently relocated there with her husband after he enlisted in the Army. She eschews contact with the other Army wives because she does not want to make ties she knows will have to be broken.

### **Conclusions: Young Women's Life Plans**

These respondents offer a panorama of life stories of considerable richness and texture. While not selected to be representative of all young women their age, they were chosen systematically enough to encompass a broad range of social types. Thus, in a certain sense, their stories do provide a kind of "mirror" into the variety of lives and decision-making patterns of young women their age across the nation.

We can divide the respondents into two groups of roughly equal size according to whether or not they are college-bound or college-going. Strivers and Middle-Class College-Goers together account

for just about one-half of the respondents. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the similarity of their educational and career aspirations, Strivers are much like the Middle-Class College-Goers in their attitudes and approaches to their future life plans. Although not interested in getting rich, the young women in both clusters see education as the key to achieving financial stability and the primary vehicle to finding a satisfying career they can enjoy and “never get tired of” for their entire working lives. The young women in the two clusters are also alike in deferring plans for marriage and children (or at least children) until after they have completed their education and are initially established in their careers.

Where the young women in these two clusters do differ, primarily, is that the Middle-Class College-Goers come from college-educated families, where it was taken for granted they would be attending college. Their parents, who hold the purse strings, tend to be involved in helping to select the schools they will attend or setting the parameters within which the choices can be made, and remain active in their daughters’ decision-making processes throughout their college years. Most of the young women in this cluster, many of whom hold part-time jobs to help defray their college costs, accept and even embrace this involvement both as a function of their parents’ financial role and superior wisdom.

By contrast, Strivers, often the first in their families to go to college, come from less financially secure and less well-educated backgrounds. Their parents, while usually offering their daughters moral and social support in pursuing their dreams, may lack the resources, time, or knowledge to provide the same kind of informed, “hands-on” guidance as the college-educated parents. Some Strivers have been able to compensate for this by finding other mentors and role models, both inside and outside their families, to help guide their choices. Nevertheless, in this, as in other respects, Strivers are at a disadvantage relative to their more securely middle-class peers.

Furthermore, as relatively few of their parents can foot the bill for college, finances often become an overriding consideration guiding their decisions, which may lead to taking less than optimal routes to their ultimate goals. For example, many Strivers are planning to enroll in or are already enrolled in 2-year colleges with the intent of continuing on to 4-year universities. While this seems a reasonable and economical path to follow, studies suggest a not inconsequential percentage of those who intend to transfer to 4-year schools never do so. In this sense, Strivers may be unwittingly putting themselves in greater jeopardy of not completing school.

Moreover, as seen, if they are to eventually meet their goals, some of the Strivers will at some point have to break away from the local ties and social support that have so far nurtured, motivated, and sustained them. Sofia, for instance, the 17-year-old Hispanic Striver who hopes to one day become a surgeon, does not know anyone else going to “a real college.” Yet sooner or later, she will have to make

her way among the children of the upper-middle-class who have been primed for medical school their whole lives and do not know anyone not going to a “real college.” While colleges and universities may be less class-bound than they used to be, it is still young women like Sofia who will have to do the lion’s share of the adjusting. This raises the larger, as yet unanswerable, question of how many of the Strivers will actually be able to realize their dreams for social mobility. Having high aspirations at 17 does not automatically translate into receiving a degree in surgery at 27. For anyone, there are any number of potential roadblocks in the way, and more of them for young women like Sofia.

The Strivers and Middle-Class College-Goers have similar career aspirations. They want to become physicians, lawyers, teachers, social workers, nurses, counselors, or physical and occupational therapists, or to work in accounting, advertising, public relations, or fashion design. For the most part, these are not grandiose plans, nor are they unusual or unconventional careers for females. These young women’s career choices lean heavily towards the “helping professions,” not because the women feel compelled to enter predominantly female professions, but because the ability to help people is what attracts them even in entering high prestige occupations like law or medicine. Few are drawn to power and prestige for its own sake.

We have seen how the Strivers differ from their more securely middle-class compatriots. But what differentiates the Strivers from the other half of the respondents, who come from parental, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds very much like their own? This is not a simple question. To some extent, it is a matter of circumstance: as seen, several of the Striving Single Mothers might have been Strivers had they not become pregnant and decided to keep their child. While Strivers are clear in their desire to postpone childbearing until after they have finished school and are settled in their careers, actually becoming pregnant could change that for some. Similarly, a major family crisis that necessitated their leaving school could also alter their life course in a manner similar to that of several of the young women in the non-college-goer cluster.

However, there are also important differences in personality and motivation, as well as in the nature and strength of family and community support, that separate the Strivers from the non-college-goers. Strivers are more determined, more focused, and more strongly motivated to achieve and to have careers than most of the young women in the other non-college-going decision-making clusters. To use old-fashioned parlance, they have more ambition. Overall, they have also enjoyed greater success in school. Their families and other important persons in their lives provide encouragement and support even if they cannot supply financial backing. Strivers are often the repositories of their families’ hopes for social mobility, the first ones to have broken an academic “ceiling”; many have managed to steadfastly keep alive the desire to go to college in spite of contrary pressures in their larger environment.

By contrast, the non-college-goers are more content to sit back and let things happen, more likely to acquiesce to a less-than-ideal status quo. In fairness, though, the non-college-goers have also experienced greater family problems and pressures, and in some cases, have had weighty adult responsibilities thrust on their shoulders at a relatively early age, which have made it harder for them to pursue clear career paths.

The sharpest contrast is between the Strivers and the Diffuse Decisionmakers. The young women in these two clusters even speak differently, not only in the sense that Strivers are less likely to use poor grammar or slang, but also in the tone of their talk. Strivers are positive and forward-looking. Diffuse Decisionmakers are prone to vague, elusive language (“this or that or something”) and to phrase things in a passive way that denies their own agency: things happen to them.

Strivers are connected to social networks of family and friends that help to fuel their aspirations, motivations, and confidence while Diffuse Decisionmakers are often isolated and cut off from similar viable sources of support and information. This is not a geographic, but a social isolation: young women in the Bronx and Brooklyn as well as those living in out-of-the way rural areas fit this characterization equally well. Diffuse Decisionmakers are rarely involved in community activities or events. While many Strivers can recite a long list of their school and community activities, Diffuse Decisionmakers talk about sitting home, “hanging out” with their friends, watching television, or “doing nothing” in their spare time.

Strivers are understandably reluctant to detach themselves from the support networks that are their springboard to higher education and hoped-for social mobility. Diffuse Decisionmakers are loath to leave familiar environments because they lack confidence, fear failure, or are afraid of encountering “strange” new people. Again, it is only fair to note that some of the Diffuse Decisionmakers have suffered traumatic or wrenching life experiences that have left deep psychological scars and crippled their ability to make their way in the world. At some point, it is difficult to disentangle cause and consequence; again, social class in the broadest sense supplies only some of the answer.

The Striving Single Mothers and the Young Wives and Mothers differ from the Strivers and the others insofar as their familial roles are now the single most salient factor influencing their lives and life plans. As seen, under other circumstances, some of the Striving Single Mothers might have been Strivers themselves; most of their pregnancies appear to have been unplanned. Nevertheless, as a group, the Striving Single Mothers are set on a life course, perhaps a slightly different one than they would otherwise have chosen, or else they have been slowed down in reaching a goal by the demands of single parenthood. A few have been galvanized into action in recognition that their decisions are no longer

affecting only them. For the most part, the now practical-minded Striving Single Mothers have set their sights on modest, but accomplishable goals. Most are receiving considerable support from their families, including all-important help with child care, and continue to reside with their parents.

The Young Wives and Mothers, the smallest cluster, are perhaps the most distinctive in having chosen to put their roles as wives and mothers first. The vast majority of the Strivers and their college-going middle-class peers talk about starting their families around age 30, once they have completed their educations and gotten a foothold in their careers. The Young Wives and Mothers can envision going back to school or returning to work full-time at about the same point in their lives, once their children are in school. For now, as a matter of fact and sometimes of principle, they are making their husbands and children the focus of their lives. Interestingly, however, even if not currently employed, all the Young Wives and Mothers expect to be working outside of the home at some point for the remainder of their adult working lives.

*Indeed, partly in recognition of the fragility of marriage as an institution, not a single respondent in the entire sample saw herself as having a future as a full-time housewife.* Moreover, many of the Strivers and the Middle-Class College-Goers talk as though they expect to be the main financial supporters of their children. Several, especially among the Black and Hispanic respondents, express a strong desire to never have to depend on a man. In this respect, we can see the effects of profound shifts in conceptions of gender roles over the past several decades as well as some of the “fallout” from the period of greatest social transformation of family structures.

### ***A Note on Racial and Ethnic Differences***

Racial and ethnic differences do not provide an overarching framework for explaining variations in life plans and life planning processes among these young women. Most clusters are comprised of remarkably equal proportions of White, Black, and Hispanic respondents even though there is no necessary reason this should be so, since the clusters are analytic constructions that emerged inferentially from the data. Still, while they do not override other factors, some racial and ethnic differences within and across the clusters are worthy of note.

The young Hispanic women, regardless of cluster, are far more likely than the others to be living at home and helping their mothers with household tasks and caring for younger siblings. They tend to come from larger families and to play an integral role in household functioning. In some cases, mothers with very little formal education have been surprisingly enterprising in helping their daughters gather information on careers. Hispanic respondents also tend to be more reluctant than the others to

break ties with friends. In addition, Hispanic Single Mothers and Young Wives and Mothers are more likely to insist on having family members care for their children while they work.

Even when they come from two-parent households, mothers and other female relatives on the mother's side—including grandmothers, aunts, and cousins—play a stronger role than fathers or father's kin in the young Black women's lives. Mothers are especially strong influencers and role models for those in the Middle-Class College-Goers cluster. They often admonish their daughters to put off marriage and children until after their educational and career goals have been met and advise them not to depend on men for their livelihoods or identities. As seen, two of the Black Single Mothers are planning to rely on matri-centered extended kinship networks to help them realize their plans to go to college.

Family ties are also important to the White respondents, but in a different way. The White Single Mothers, often residing with one or both parents and an assemblage of siblings and half-siblings, are more apt to want to establish independent households, while still wanting to stay close by. In contrast to the Black respondents, especially, the White respondents are about equally likely to be influenced by mothers or fathers (or neither) in making their career choices and more often perceive both parents as a single, solidary unit. Although this is closeness of a different, less-extended sort, it is very real nonetheless and fuels the desire of White women in all clusters to stay close to home whenever possible.

### **Life Planning Clusters and Military Propensity**

This chapter has not paid much attention to how these six clusters of young women, each with its distinctive characteristics and approaches to life planning, relate to variations in military propensity. Propensity will be covered at length in the chapter that follows. Here we offer a few thoughts by way of preview.

***Strivers:*** Despite family financial situations that would make the ability to obtain money for college highly appealing, relatively few Strivers have given the military any consideration. Only one Striver, with plans to enroll in ROTC, intends to join the military. This response can partly be explained by the Strivers' reluctance to go far away from family and friends. Nevertheless, it is useful to consider how some of these young women might be more successfully brought into the military ambit.

***Middle-Class College-Goers:*** A few of these women, from military families, plan to enter the military after graduating from college, more as a way of honoring family traditions than

as a career route. For the most part, however, like the Strivers, the young women in this cluster never really gave serious thought to a military career. A few did consider joining, then dismissed the idea when circumstances failed to develop as hoped. Since then, their lives have taken another turn, and they are no longer interested in pursuing a military lifestyle.

***Non-College-Goers:*** Not surprisingly, this cluster has the highest proportion of young women who have given or are still giving serious consideration to entering the military. These young women, several of whom might be described as “slow starters” or as having gotten a bit off course in their life plans, tend to see the military as a way to gain desired training and, eventually, perhaps, a college education. A few still have to overcome external barriers before they will be able to enlist. Others would probably have enlisted earlier in their lives had this not been precluded by medical reasons.

***Diffuse Decisionmakers:*** A few of the Diffuse Decisionmakers say they are still considering joining the military. However, it is difficult to assess their statements. Even if the will to join were sufficiently strong—and it is not—major impediments would still often stand in the way. Others in this cluster at some point entertained thoughts of entering the military as one of several, often vaguely conceived and since-abandoned possibilities for their futures. One or two of these young women might actually have joined had they been permitted to do so, and a few still might enlist, depending on how the circumstances in their lives evolve.

***Striving Single Mothers and Young Wives and Mothers:*** Several of the young women in these clusters had at one point seriously thought of enlisting. A few are still willing to consider the possibility, but for the most part, family responsibilities have since rendered the issue moot.

**Career Plans and Military Propensity of Young Women:  
In-Depth Interviews With 1997 Youth Attitude Tracking Study Respondents**  
***Making Life Plans***

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### 3. UNDERSTANDING WOMEN'S PROPENSITY

This chapter presents findings from this in-depth study of young women's propensity for military service. Particular attention is given to their images of military and civilian careers and lifestyles, the sources of influences that contribute to or shape their images, and whether and how they consider the effects that gender might have on career choices or perceived/preferred options. The chapter is organized into five main sections. The first four present profiles of the young women in four propensity groupings: Joiners, Shifters, Fence-Sitters, and Non-Joiners based on assessments of information from their responses to questions in the YATS survey (see Appendix A) and the in-depth interviews. The fifth and final section of the chapter presents the young women's perspectives on sexual harassment and how, if at all, it influences their attitudes toward the military.

Joiners are young women whose responses suggested that they would most likely enter the military. Shifters are those who had thought about joining the military, but at some point in their lives decided against it. Fence-Sitters are those who mentioned the military as a possible option for themselves, but were either uncertain about whether they would pursue it or said they would pursue it only after exhausting other more desirable options. For the most part, those in the Non-Joiner propensity group had never considered military service and appeared least likely to join.

#### **Joiners**

Young women assigned to the Joiner propensity group are those most likely to join the military. This section presents profiles of these young women, which are organized to reflect the major themes or patterns that emerged from the in-depth interviews. These include: (1) the influence of growing up in families with strong military traditions, (2) impressions of military recruiters, (3) education and career aspirations, and (4) the effect of unforeseen events on plans to join the military.

#### ***Military Family Background***

*Analysis of the in-depth interviews shows that many persistent Joiners grew up in military families.* For example, when asked how she became interested in the military, one 22-year-old Black Joiner said she was "born into the military." Her mother, father, and stepfather all served and, since she was 3, "the military has been the only life [she has] known." Another young woman, the daughter of a retired Army officer, added that most of her friends also grew up in military families and lived in military towns, including her boyfriend who just completed a tour of duty as an Army tanker. She thinks she

would probably join one of the Armed Services when she completes her training to become a registered nurse.

Angela, a White Joiner talked about how she grew up in a military family and plans eventually to carry on her family's tradition of service. "Almost all the men in my family," she said, "back from my great-grandfather . . . have been in the Navy. . . . It's a family tradition." When she was younger, she assumed that the onus for continuing this tradition was on her brother. However, when his vision problems could not be corrected and he was determined ineligible, she knew that she was "the only one who could carry on the tradition" of military Service in this generation.

Generally speaking, these young women were confident that they could find a satisfying life in the military. For the most part, their confidence was grounded in information from reliable sources, including their own first-hand observations and concrete advice from their fathers, mothers, neighbors, and friends who had Service experience.

A goal-oriented Hispanic high school senior who had a pragmatic approach to the future talked about how her father—a 20-year veteran—had helped her prepare for a career in the Air Force. He advised her to do her best on the exam, telling her that those who got high scores generally have more career options. Also, she talked to recruiters at her school, as well as women in the Air Force all who said it was a good place to get started in life. Most of these women are neighbors or friends of the family. She thinks women and men have similar opportunities to pursue their interests in the military and rise in the ranks. Although many jobs in the military are in traditionally male fields, such as electronics, the training is available to women and men alike. She concluded: "That seems pretty fair that you have a chance to do it if that is what you want."

Another Joiner thought her images of military life were clear and realistic because she "actually lived through it." As several pointed out, however, this meant familiarity with the negative aspects of life in the military, as well as the positive. In the words of one: "When you grow up in a military family you know the positives and negatives of it." Another young woman, who grew up in a military family and plans to enter the Air Force, described her access to first-hand information and advice about the military. Her father, she said, "gave [her] his opinion and everything about what he felt I should do," though he left the ultimate decisions up to her. He suggested, for example, that she negotiate with the recruiter to get a job that was interesting to her. In her words, her father told her: "Just like if I was looking for a certain job, make sure it was guaranteed and that I did good on the test . . . and other things that would help me so I would be happier in the Air Force."

When Joiners described their images of the military and the military lifestyle, they inevitably mentioned job security and discipline. One young woman, for example, said the military would be the surest path for her to achieve independence from her parents. In her words: “There’s the security of having a guaranteed home that is paid for and a guaranteed job. Going to college, I could either lose the job or not make enough money to pay for rent or something.”

A young Hispanic woman who was taking basic classes at a local community college and working part-time said that a major advantage of the military is that you are “pretty much guaranteed a steady job” that you cannot just “blow off.” In her words: “You need to keep that job and do your best at it. If I don’t like it, that’s too bad. I committed and it’s my duty to do it.” She considers it a privilege to help her country out in time of need. Also, she believes that the military would provide her with the discipline she needs to grow up and become a responsible adult.

Another young woman said members of her family were encouraging her to join—especially her uncle who is in the Service and his wife. She appreciates their advice since they have been through it and know what the advantages and disadvantages are. They have told her that boot camp would be hard, but afterwards she would be guaranteed a job that will make her self-reliant and provide her with marketable skills.

Without exception, discipline was viewed as a positive characteristic of the military. Several mentioned that the military would provide them with the discipline they thought they needed to grow up and become responsible adults. Kathryn, who believes that military Service should be required for all citizens, observed the positive transformation of her older brother after he enlisted in the military: “[When my brother] went into the military, he was rough . . . ornery. When he got out of training and everything he was disciplined and his life was straight.” Like her brother, she too needs help to become more disciplined: “I know I have little discipline. I get up when I want, I do whatever I want. I need some sort of something to just kind of set me straight.”

In the words of another Joiner, discipline is:

a positive thing because it teaches you not only discipline to your drill sergeant, or whatever, but discipline to yourself. . . . As soon as I join the Navy, I’ll be on my own. So I’ve got to discipline myself to be able to live on my own, have my own responsibilities and everything, instead of having my parents keep an eye over me and everything.

A young White woman thinks that because the military emphasizes discipline in its members, those who are parents tend to have more control and better relationships with their children than their civilian counterparts. She attributes these positive parent/child relationships to the culture of

discipline and accountability in the military. In her words: “Military members and families are more demanding of discipline and respect. . . . Military kids are raised with better discipline. . . . There is control of kids because it will make the member look bad . . . [if their kids don't act right].” Also, she continued, “military members can talk more easily to their children because they serve with many young people. . . . [They] know what their kids are doing. . . . They are serving with kids, so they know how to talk to them.”

Joiner images of military life are mostly positive, though not Pollyannish. Having “lived through it,” they have relatively clear and realistic images of military life, including the stresses and strains that the military lifestyle places on members and their families. For example, Angela, a White 18-year-old, described the hardships she experienced growing up in a military family. Although her family moved every 3 years or so, moving *per se* was not problematic since she enjoyed traveling and learning about other cultures. However, it was stressful when her father was posted to countries like Japan where the cost of living was high and the family could not afford to stay there with him.

More recent experiences remind Angela of her childhood. At the time of the in-depth interview she was living with her husband in a remote area in Oklahoma where he was stationed. They are struggling to make ends meet, and she has had to defer her plans to study pharmacy since the nearest school is a 90-minute drive from the base.

Another young woman also talked about the ups and downs of the frequent moves she and her family had made because her father was in the Service. For her, leaving friends was the hardest part of it. “Leaving friends,” she said, “it was hard. We moved every 4 years, so I'd make friends and have to leave and then make new ones.” Because of this experience, however, she and other Joiners who grew up in military families are confident that they can leave their familiar surroundings and prosper. In her words: “I know how to [adjust to new surroundings]. Anywhere I go I can just get along easily with people. That turned out pretty good [when I was growing up].”

### ***Recruiter Contact***

Compared to young women in the Fence-Sitter and Non-Joiner propensity groups, Joiners have had considerable contact with recruiters. Their impressions of recruiters however, are mixed. The majority of Joiners described recruiters as unreliable sources of information about the military who had little or no influence over their decisions to enter the military. A much smaller number mentioned experiences with recruiters that positively affected their propensity to join.

### ***Unfavorable Impressions of Recruiters***

*Many of the young women who were not influenced by recruiters were turned off by their superficial portrayals of military life as easy or glamorous. In the words of one young woman: “[Recruiters] paint a pretty picture of it, but you kind of have to know that it’s not a piece of pie or anything to go into the military.” Others were less politic in their depictions of recruiters. Many who grew up in military families, for example, said what recruiters told young people ran counter to their observations and experiences. One young woman called recruiters liars:*

*They’re liars. . . . They promise too much to kids. . . . They try to glamorize the military and give false hopes. . . . I’ve been in a military family. I know you can get the worst station. Recruiters glamorize it . . . give false hopes.*

Another Joiner, a 21-year-old Black woman, who plans to join the Air Force and has been in contact with recruiters over the past several years, said she does not put much stock in what they say. Like the previous young woman, who said recruiters make false promises, she believes strongly that “recruiters will say anything to get you to join.” Most of her knowledge and opinions about the military have come from “actually living through it.” She grew up on military bases and in military towns where her father, who only recently retired from the Army, was stationed.

She said her father supports her desire to join the military, but advised her to select a branch other than the Army. He told her that the Army has gone downhill since he first joined—i.e., there are fewer benefits, more frequent moves, equipment shortages, and people are not paid on time or are paid incorrect sums. Her boyfriend, who just finished his 4-year tour of duty, agreed with her father’s assessment. Recruiters, she concluded, do not provide young people with the information they need to make informed decisions about joining. Many other young women in the Joiner propensity group agreed with her assessment.

### ***Favorable Impressions of Recruiters***

*Not all young women in the Joiner propensity group had unfavorable impressions of recruiters. Several described their interactions in positive terms. Positive recruiter attitudes or behaviors mentioned by these young women included the following: (1) recruiters showed respect for the young women and genuine interest in them as individuals; (2) they were informative and honest; and (3) they did not try to push them into any decisions before they were ready. One 19-year-old Hispanic woman, for example, had not seriously considered the military until after she had graduated from high*

school. Since then, however, she has met with three recruiters, representing the Army, Navy, and Air Force.

At the time of the in-depth interview, she confidently expressed her intention to join the Navy within the next 6 months. Her decision was strongly influenced by the Navy recruiter who “went into a lot of detail.” Unlike the recruiters from the other two Services, she said, the Navy recruiter took whatever time was needed to answer her questions. Although the recruiter was a man, she greatly appreciated his efforts to tailor his presentation to young women and to “tell it like it is.” In her words: “The Navy recruiter talked about a lot of things I would possibly be thinking or facing as a woman,” including the fact that some men do not think women should serve in the Armed Forces alongside them. This characterization did not put her off since he also talked about the wide selection of jobs that women can choose from in today’s Navy that were not open to them in the past.

Another Joiner, a 20-year-old Black woman, said she had “almost joined,” but at the last minute decided she was not yet ready for basic training. She plans to try again in the future and was grateful to a local recruiter who, despite her blunder, has kept in touch with her and sustained her interest in joining the military when she is ready.

Only one other young woman in the Joiner propensity group, Sylvia, described a recruiter as influential. She is the eldest daughter of Mexican immigrant parents and a high school senior. She has put considerable thought into her future plans. She participates in a college search club at her high school, has collected information about various careers, and talks regularly with her school guidance counselor, girlfriends, mother, and a recruiter from the Army National Guard. Her plans appear to be based on a realistic assessment of her personal strengths, limitations, and preferences. Throughout the in-depth interview, this young woman often used the pronoun ‘we’ whenever she referred to the National Guard—e.g., “we were there at the Oklahoma bombing, and when the Bulls win championships we are on the streets watching so no riot happens.”

Sylvia’s interest in joining the Army National Guard after high school has withstood the test of time. At a very early age, she said, she saw a commercial that inspired her to join. In her eyes it would be a perfect match: “It’s been like a dream to me. . . . I’m the type of person that likes to help out a lot of people. And the National Guard, basically what it does is to help a lot of people in case of tornadoes, hurricanes, and earthquakes.” She also thinks that the National Guard instills discipline in members, which she thinks is positive. As soon as she was old enough—about a year ago—she initiated contact with a recruiter who provided ongoing information and support.

The qualifying exam, she said, is her only obstacle. At the time of the in-depth interview, she had failed the exam twice. She said the questions about “mechanics” posed the biggest problems. Also, her first language is Spanish, and she still reads English slowly. She is discouraged, but plans to take the exam one more time. She recently quit her part-time job at McDonalds so she can concentrate on her studies and improve her chances of passing the exam. The recruiter calls her periodically to see how she is doing in school and what she is doing to prepare for the exam. His calls keep her focused on her goal of joining and encourage her to persist.

Recruiter support is especially important for this young woman since her father has told her that the National Guard was “for men, not girls” and does not want her to join. Initially her mother did not want her to join either. However, when she saw how persistent her daughter was, she eventually came around, saying: “If that’s what you want to do, fine. Go for it. You might not have another opportunity like that in your life. And if that’s a dream, well, make your dream come true.”

Sylvia does not agree with her father, who thinks the military is only for men:

Women have come a long way. Before it was like women were nothing. They were just housewives and taking care of children and that’s all they were good for. But now, we’ve proven them wrong. . . . Almost everything a man can do a woman can do, except President, but I know we’ll get there one day.

She concedes, however, that the military is still predominantly male. Recruitment ads and brochures, which feature men, reinforce women’s images that the military is not for them. However, she believes that one person can make a difference. If she were to join, she would try to show everyone that women could work hard and achieve high rank in the military.

### ***College Aspirations and/or Achievements***

*Before graduating from high school, most Joiners in our sample put considerable thought into what they would like to do in the future. As a group, they tended to be goal-oriented and, compared to those in the Shifter and Fence-Sitter groups, have a relatively clear sense of their career interests, strengths, and aspirations. The majority plan to attend college and then enter the military as officers. A second year college student who plans to join after graduation told the interviewer:*

I probably just wouldn’t enlist because I’d rather be in like ROTC and be an officer when I get out. There are other routes to [enter the military] instead of just enlisting at the bottom of the barrel. I wouldn’t want to do that.

Similarly, a 21-year-old Black woman plans to join the Air Force after she completes her training to become a registered nurse. In this way, she said, she can influence the direction of her career in the Air Force. In her words:

I want to get my degree [before I join]. . . . Then I will already know what I'm going into, and I don't have to go around in circles when I get into the Air Force. . . . I already will have what I want, and I can just go straight into what I want to do.

She would join the military sooner, but only if something happens and she can no longer afford to continue her education on her own.

This young woman views the military as a positive destination. Compared to employers in the civilian sector, she thinks the military provides greater gender equality:

In the military there is a certain way that things go. [Men and women] both have to do the same training and have to go through the same tests to get what they want. In civilian life, it's basically who you know and who knows you and who you can get over on.

Like most other young women her age, she would like to marry and have children at some time "deep in the future," when she is 29 or 30 years old. Participation in the Armed Forces would not impede these goals.

A Hispanic high school senior also grew up in a family that has extensive ties to the military. Her father was in the Marines and many of her close cousins are in the Service or have served. As a result of her responses to the YATS survey, she was placed initially in the Fence-Sitter propensity group. Although her plans have not changed since her participation in the survey, she is definitely a Joiner. In a conversation following the in-depth interview, she explained that she might have come across as "wishy-washy" in the previous interview because she was not 100 percent certain about specific aspects of her plans to join the military.

Like other Joiners, she appears to have a good sense of her skills and how she would like to develop and apply them "in the real world." She plans to become a career military officer, with a specialization in computer science—a field that is consistent with her own interests and talents, as well as the needs of the military. Although she has received considerable support and encouragement from her father and other relatives for pursuing this path, the decision was ultimately her own. In her words:

I pretty much know what I want to be. I want to go into the military . . . after I get a degree and then go in as an officer, instead of going straight to the military. I know people who have done that and it's really worked out for them. They've talked to me about, it and they said it's a good idea. Since I was little I've always had good grades and people have influenced me to do this and do that, and I finally figured out what I really wanted to do.

Although this young woman will be the first person in her family to attend college, she is not going in blindly. On her own, she has explored civilian and military career options by talking to family friends, teachers, and professionals in the civilian and military sectors about their jobs. When asked how she approaches these conversations, she said: “I ask for a description of the job and what exactly they do. . . . I ask them for a demonstration and stuff like that. . . . I have to know what it’s like. If I’m not going to like it why would I go into it?” She thinks she will reap more satisfaction from a career in the military because she would be “actually doing something to help my country” and developing skills that she could use in the civilian workforce after she retired.

She has been accepted to the college of her choice and has already talked to a campus recruiter for the Air Force ROTC program there. Her father, she said, told her that ROTC “is good for discipline” and would have helped him finance her education, though she has since been awarded a generous scholarship. Also, she has a lot of friends in Junior ROTC who are “always trying to recruit” her to their ranks.

Patriotism is important to her: “If you want to be in the military,” she said, “you have to be loyal to your country and you have to want to protect it.” She supports U.S. involvement in peacekeeping missions because “you never know when something is going to break out in another country and just kind of spread over here.” The U.S., she said, “has done a great deal for the world.” Danger is not a major concern for her, in part, because she does not yet have any children who depend on her.

Angela, the young woman who is living with her husband on a remote Air Force base in Oklahoma also plans to carry on her family’s tradition by pursuing a medical career in the military. She has 2 more years before her husband completes his tour of duty, and then it will be his turn to make adjustments to fit her career goals. This will work in their relationship, she said, since he has no idea what he wants to do when he gets out. At that time she plans to study pharmacy—a dream she has held since her junior year in high school—and then enlist in the Navy as a pharmacist. She said she is too smart to get stuck in an unchallenging career. In her words: “I worked hard and got good grades in high school. . . . I’m not getting stuck . . . I’m not going to waste my brain on working at some little job.” She has thought through a number of strategies that would enable her to realize her military career goals and has written “guidelines and landmarks” that define where she wants to be at certain stages in her life.

In addition to her family’s tradition of service in the Armed Forces medical corps, she is motivated by “being able to go fresh out of college and get right into a pharmaceutical program in the military.” In the civilian sector, she explained, she would have to complete a 2-year internship before she

could begin actual work. Further, she thinks the military affords women greater opportunities to get ahead.

She has seen less gender discrimination in the military than in the civilian workforce. She attributes this to differences in the way work is organized in the two sectors. In the civilian workforce individual achievements are recognized, which means that men and women must compete with one another. In the military, teamwork is important, and men and women must cooperate and help one another if they are to achieve their individual and collective goals. She also thinks that women are less vulnerable to sexual harassment in the military because there is more accountability. In her words: “[In the military] everyone always has to answer to someone.”

### ***Enlistment Plans Deferred***

*Several of the young women in the Joiner propensity group remain committed to joining the military, but due to unforeseen events in their lives have had to postpone their plans indefinitely. The circumstances of two young women—one who suffered the death of both parents and another who experienced an unplanned pregnancy—are representative.*

A 22-year-old Black woman whose father, mother, and stepfather served the whole time she was growing up said the military has been the only life she has known. Throughout high school she participated in Junior ROTC and fully expected to enlist as soon as she graduated. Before graduation, however, her father died and her mother was diagnosed with terminal cancer. This was a difficult time for her and, as her mother's cancer spread, she paid less and less attention to her schoolwork. Her mother eventually died, but before she did, she made her daughter promise to finish college before enlisting. Since graduation from high school, she has been studying criminal law and social work at a community college and working part-time at the local military base.

This motivated and resilient young woman continues to view the military as a positive destination for herself. The military, she said, will provide her with a sense of direction and a “worry-free” lifestyle: “[The military is a good place to go . . . and decide what you want to do with yourself. . . . As long as you're [in the military], they will take care of you. The average civilian person worries about making enough money to pay rent. [In the military] you live in the barracks and if you have a family you live on post.” When she graduates from college, she intends to enlist. Like other college-oriented Joiners, she said a major advantage of postponing enlistment is that she will be able to go in as an officer—“I'll have rank and I'll make a little more money.” This is especially important to her since she grew up on bases and “already knows a lot about the military.” Because her mother had been a drill

sergeant and her father a lawyer, she said she would not be satisfied to become just an “average person” once she enlisted.

Kathryn, a White 21-year-old high school graduate, told the in-depth interviewer that she has always dreamed of joining the military. She was overjoyed when she was accepted into the Naval Academy since it meant that she would not be starting out at “the bottom of the barrel.” She was set to go, then found out she was pregnant. At the time of the in-depth interview, her son was 10 months old. She said that until he is older, she is approaching the future “one day at a time.” Nevertheless, her interest in the military has continued, and she said she would “most definitely” join the Reserves when he is less dependent on her. She has discussed this possibility with her parents, who support her decision and have offered to care for her son whenever she was away.

Like many others in the original Joiner propensity group, this young woman came from a family that has a history of military Service. Her father had been in the Army, and her brother served in the Marines. Also, she said the majority of her friends are in the Service. She believes that it is something that every citizen should be required to do.

### *Summary*

- Most Joiners grew up in military families or have strong familial ties to the military. Many participated in Junior ROTC programs. As a result of these associations, they have relatively clear and realistic images of the rewards and challenges of military life.
- Most Joiners have thought about what they were going to do after high school for a number of years. They tend to be goal-oriented and, compared to Fence-Sitters and Shifters, have a relatively clear sense of their career interests, strengths and aspirations. Marriage and family are distant goals.
- Many Joiners are oriented toward going to college after high school and aspire to enter the military as officers.
- Most Joiners are motivated by the military’s education and training benefits, steady jobs with benefits, and secure income. Hispanic Joiners were more likely than Black or White Joiners to mention that they were motivated by patriotism.
- Most Joiners did not mention danger as a major concern.
- Most Joiners think women and men have similar opportunities in the military. Assignments and promotions are based on hard work and skills, not gender. Many believe that gender discrimination is greater in the civilian workforce due to weak systems for accountability and lax enforcement.

## **Shifters**

Young women assigned to the initial Shifter propensity group are those who had thought about joining the military, but were no longer considering it at the time of the in-depth interview. This section presents profiles of these young women. They are organized to reflect the major themes or patterns that emerged from our conversations with them about changes in their life circumstances or their thinking that diminished their propensity for joining the military including the following: (1) family formation; (2) overwhelming desires to remain close to family and friends; (3) negative impressions of the military; (4) fears of the irrevocable nature of enlistment; and (5) ineligibility.

### ***Marriage and Family***

*The largest single cluster of Shifters is composed of young women who are no longer thinking about joining the military because they have formed families or expect to in the near future. Within and across race/ethnicity groups, about half of the young women in the Shifter propensity group either have a child or are expecting a child. A few of these young mothers are married, but most are not. Several others are married, but were neither pregnant nor parenting.*

One 18-year-old single mother, for example, had been an officer in her high school's Junior ROTC program, where she said she learned she could do many things that previously she thought she could not do. Based on her Junior ROTC experiences and discussions with family members who either had served or were serving in the Armed Forces, she was confident that she would enlist after graduation. Her grandmother and aunt encouraged her and said they would look after her 1-year-old daughter. She took the ASVAB and met with a recruiter who told her "if everything went right" she could leave for boot camp in a few months. Afterwards, the reality of leaving her daughter behind hit home, and she did not show up for the next scheduled meeting with the recruiter. In her words: "He [the recruiter] wanted to meet me at the library, and we was going to talk more about it. . . . But I didn't go meet him. . . . I didn't really want to leave my little girl."

Another Shifter was a White single mother who once dreamed of joining the Air Force. When she was growing up, her grandfather often talked to her about the time he spent in the Canadian Air Force. One Christmas he gave her flying lessons at a local private airport and, from that time forward, she wanted to join the Air Force and "fly airplanes like [her grandfather] did." This set her apart from her friends who she said wanted to join just to "get out of this little country hole we live in." Her father supported her dream, but her mother said it was no life for a girl.

In high school she joined Junior ROTC and during her senior year spent a week at a local Army base. She enjoyed this experience tremendously. She thought the base instructor gave her and her classmates a realistic picture of what military life would be like. Also, they had practiced rappelling, learned how to read maps, and walked across monkey bridges. Although she was not in the best shape, she thought she could meet the physical requirements. However, she was less certain that she could adjust to the discipline. As she put it: “I can handle someone telling me what to do up to a point, and then I just start getting mad. If they’re not on my back all the time, just let me figure it out on my own, I think I could handle it pretty good.” Also, she was not comfortable with the prospect of moving around and working with completely different people “every 6-12 months.” Danger, she said, goes with the territory—“you have to take the bad with the good.”

She also talked with recruiters from the Air Force and Army. The Army recruiter called her and came out to her house. He was informative and impressed her as someone who really enjoyed his job. The Air Force recruiter, however, did not impress her at all. She described him as a “male chauvinist pig” because he appeared to be only interested in talking to the guys. As she explained: “The Air Force recruiter didn’t really seem all that concerned. It wasn’t like he was trying to recruit me, I guess because I was a woman. . . . I called his office a couple times and left messages for him to call me. . . . He never did.”

Although she became pregnant after high school, her interest in joining the military continued. After the baby was born, an Army recruiter called her. When he found out about the baby, he told her that the Army does not accept unmarried women with children. She said the National Guard was the only branch of the Service that would accept her, unless she got married. However, the National Guard was not a satisfactory alternative for her: “I don’t want to be a weekend warrior. . . . I don’t think you really get the full effect of what military life is. . . . And if you’re going to join the Armed Forces, you shouldn’t just do it once a month. You ought to live it and breathe it.” As a result, she abandoned her plans to join the Service.

Her caseworker at the Department of Human Services helped her get into a practical nursing program. She thinks she will stick with it, since she is tired of working in fast food restaurants. Also, with nursing credentials she would not have to worry about job security since nurses are in demand in a variety of health care settings. She is worried that she may not be able to cope with working, going to school, and keeping a household.

A 20-year-old Hispanic woman seriously considered joining before she became pregnant. Her friends at school also were looking into the military, though she did not think they were as serious

about it as she was. Her father, who had served 10 years in the Air Force, “thought it was a really good idea.” She talked to recruiters during her junior year in high school, but not her senior year. As she described it:

Our class would go and have little classes in the recruiting office. I think that's where I first started getting interested, and then I went back. . . . When I was a junior . . . I was really looking into [the military]. I would talk to the recruiter all the time.

In her senior year, however, she distanced herself from the recruiter and decided to postpone any decisions about joining until after graduation. In her words:

I don't really know why I stopped thinking about it. . . . I had just stopped talking to that recruiter. . . . I just think he was a little pushy about it. . . . I wanted to wait a little bit, maybe after I graduated or wanted to stop thinking about it until after I graduated and then decide what I'm going to do because I already had all the information.

Her images of the military were all very positive—travelling, meeting new people, getting something accomplished, and being respected. Moreover, she always had a high regard for people in the military. After graduation, however, she got a job, met her fiancé, and then got pregnant. Thoughts of the military fell by the wayside: “This is my first daughter . . . and I think she's the most important thing in the world. . . . I wouldn't [join the military] because of her. . . . It's so hard for me to be away from her.”

Another young Hispanic woman was the eldest of five children born to Mexican immigrant parents. She is the first in her family to graduate from high school and to attend college. At the time of the in-depth interview she was in her third year of college, majoring in computer science. She was married in November 1997. She and her husband would like to have a lot of kids after she completes school and has at least 2 years experience in her chosen career.

In high school, she had thought seriously about joining the Army because she wanted to go to college and her family was very poor. She attended assemblies at school and talked with a recruiter at her school's job fair. The recruiter, she said, was informative. She thought he was honest because he did not glamorize boot camp. He told her about the money available for college through the GI bill, various in-service education and training programs, and travel.

Although she said she still has some interest in joining, it is unlikely. She does not want to live apart from her husband and, even if the military would allow her husband to live and travel with her, she is concerned that they may restrict the number of children she and her husband could have.

Kenya, a 20-year-old Black woman, is a single parent who is looking for a career that will provide a comfortable and stable living situation for her daughter and herself. She recalls a time in her life when her father talked to her often about the benefits of a military career. At the time she was not interested, mainly because she did not believe in going to war:

I'd probably run and hide . . . because I don't like war. . . . I cannot just go and you expect me to shoot up people's children and people's mothers, fathers, just for a reason that has absolutely no morals behind it. . . . When they say you should defend your country, I ask: 'What has my country done for me?' Our country can't even handle its own problems.

As she got older; however, she decided that she could probably go to war and shoot only those who tried to shoot her first.

She gave birth to her first child when she was 19, which delayed her plans to enlist in the military. Several months after her baby was born, she made an appointment to meet with a recruiter. The meeting did not go the way she expected. In her words:

[The recruiter] told me I need to get permission from my baby's father . . . and I was like, 'You want me to go and get this person's permission for me to leave her with my mom, which also means I have to get him involved in my business, which also means that my mom's going to go against my wishes to do what she wants to do. My thing is if you're not a father, you do not see her. . . . You don't take care of her. You don't pay child support. You don't do anything for her, so you don't see her.'

Although the meeting did not go the way she had planned, she was not going to forsake her goal to join the military. In her words:

I was actually planning on going and figuring out how I could go around not seeing my child and not having to give custody of my child to my mother because that would involve too much. . . . I said I can do this. I'm going to be away for so long, but my mom will bring her and let me see her. . . . But when I talked to the recruiter [about this plan], he said there's absolutely no way.

The recruiter, she said, explained that she would have had to relinquish control over her child before the military would have considered her application to enlist. She responded: "Okay, you don't really want me. . . . You're not working with me. . . . Let me think about it."

At about the same time that she was having these conversations with the recruiter, she saw a television program on race and gender discrimination in the military that turned her away from the military completely. In her words:

[T]he TV showed all these higher ranking men raping the women and abusing the women. . . . And it was not only that I would have to deal with the racial issues. . . . I would

have to deal with these men that don't think you have a place in any branch. And all these women were saying they were being raped and what not and not being taken seriously. . . . And I'm going, okay, I don't think this is the place for me.

### *Other Family Ties*

*Several young women who at one time had thought seriously about joining the military have decided against it because they do not want to leave the comfort and security of their families and hometowns.* A high school senior in a small Appalachian town with high unemployment said she had seriously considered joining the military because it was the only path she saw to stable employment and a steady income. She learned about this from her older sister's husband who served 4 years in the Navy, returned to their small town to settle down, and after several years re-enlisted because he could not find steady work with benefits that could support himself, his wife, and two children. They are stationed out-of-state, however, and she and her parents miss them dearly, since it is difficult for them to get home on any regular basis. Her older sister's experiences, she said, were major factors in her decision not to join the military.

She wants to remain close to her family and, when the time comes, she wants her children to have "a grandma and grandpa that they can be close to." She has since applied to a wildlife management program that is offered at a local community college. She enjoys the outdoors and thinks there are local jobs in that field. However, she thinks it will be hard because it is a "man's career."

Veronica, a 20-year-old Hispanic woman, whose interest in the military started when she was 10 or 11 years old and she visited a nearby Academy with her class. At the time she had thought that joining the military would be the "neatest thing to do." She continued to think about it "for a long time after that." When she was older; however, she decided that the military would not provide the kind of lifestyle she wanted. In her words:

I saw people that had gone away and how long they were away, and I just knew that I did not want that type of life. I had friends who had graduated and were going into the military, and I didn't see them for months and months at a time. And I just knew that's not what I wanted.

The fact that she is married and has two children did not figure into her decision since she "made it long before [she] got married and had kids." If her husband were to enlist tomorrow, she would "support him in that and take care of our girls, and he wouldn't have to worry about where his kids are and if they were happy or not happy." It is easier for men, she said.

Carol, a 22-year-old White woman, decided against joining the military due to difficult circumstances in her family and her life. This young woman's father, who had served with the Navy in

Vietnam, strongly encouraged her and her older sister to enlist in the military after high school. She had seriously considered it until, after lengthy illnesses, both of her parents passed away before she was 17. Throughout high school, she said, the bulk of her time and energy were focused on caring for her sick parents and, as a result, she missed out on a lot of experiences that teens have that help them grow up and mature. She knew that she needed a structured and disciplined environment to grow up in.

She turned down a full tuition college scholarship because she feared that she would party too much and become an alcoholic like her father. Carol began to think seriously about what her father had told her about the military. She met with a Navy recruiter who made a positive impression on her—in part because the recruiter was female: “It was a woman, which was odd. . . . Most of the time it’s men. That impressed me a lot that she made it that far and did that much with her life.” She seriously considered the Navy, but after the death of both parents she did not think she could bear being far from the comfort of friends and extended family members who took her into their fold after the deaths of her parents.

Since the YATS survey, her life has become focused on her child and husband. Her husband is a truck driver, and she has chosen to be a stay-at-home mom since any job she could get would pay less than what she would have to pay for child care. She continues to have high regard for the military and said that if she were drafted, she would go “in a heartbeat.”

### *Negative Impressions of the Military*

*Several young women in the Shifter propensity group said they had once considered joining the military but decided against it, based on information from reliable sources that left them with negative impressions.* One is a bright and articulate 18-year-old Black woman who, at the time of the in-depth interview, was a freshman in college, majoring in advertising and working at three part-time jobs. When she was a senior in high school, she had seriously considered her options, which included joining the military.

Her impressions of the military were formed from information she collected from multiple sources—e.g., she “talked extensively with recruiters” from the Army and Navy, read brochures and pamphlets, and paid attention to media coverage that described various aspects of military life. For her, there were several main advantages to the military—it would help her finance her college education, it would provide a steady paycheck and job security, it would teach her discipline, and it would be a good way to get into shape and become a stronger person.

However, she also identified several disadvantages that precluded enlistment—i.e., she would miss her family, she would miss her freedom to come and go as she pleased, and she would not want to find herself in an environment where women were not respected. Of the three, she had the most to say about the way women were treated in the military and how it impacted her decision. In her words:

I didn't know if I wanted to go through all the lovely ways women are treated in the military. . . . I just think that there's a lot of stuff that goes on everyday that is so small that [women] don't want to make any waves about and they don't want to get in trouble.

She acknowledged that the same thing went on in civilian workplaces, but on a smaller scale: “If I have to deal with [sexual harassment], I'd rather deal with it on a lower scale when I'm in the workforce and not so much everyday by so many people in the military.” She thinks the military was “a thousand times more comfortable for a man” because men run the military and men respect one another. “Men,” she said, “don't have to “worry about how [they're] going to go to work tomorrow and stay away from the sexual harassment that's following them around.”

When asked what the military could do to make itself more attractive to young women, she said the military must consistently demonstrate zero tolerance for sexual harassment of women at all levels. In her words:

Instead of once in a while making a big public scene of what they're doing to some guy that was harassing . . . not letting all of the other little ones slip . . . [they need to] really make an effort to make people feel comfortable there. It's like the higher up the people are, the more they're putting it under the rug that they were harassing somebody. Just like making it important to stop harassing female military people. It just really bothers me how once in a while they'll do that just to keep people happy. They need to think it's important to take care of that problem, which I don't think they do.

Another young woman also explored the possibility of joining the military after high school. She spoke with recruiters from the Air Force, Army, and Navy, who she described as “all very nice.” Since then, however, she has put her own plans on hold until her fiancé finishes college. When he graduates, he will work while she goes to school—ensuring that they always have at least one income to support them. She said she still thinks occasionally about joining the military, but has decided that getting married and joining the Service are not compatible goals. Her fiancé, she said, “has pretty much told me that he wouldn't like me to go in because then if I was sent somewhere that he couldn't go, or if he had a job somewhere where I couldn't go, then we'd be apart.”

Before her engagement, when enlistment was still a possibility, she got little support for joining the military from her family and friends. Her parents were opposed to her joining. Her father, a military veteran, told her that she did not have the right personality for the military because she expressed

her feelings too freely. Her friends, many of whom were in the Service, advised her not to believe what the recruiters told her. These same friends told her “horror stories” about basic training—e.g., excessive physical exertion and “being cut down.” After basic training, they told her, she should not expect to get a job in her chosen field because the military “puts you wherever they need you” and then you are “trapped for however many years you said they would be in for.” One friend, a Desert Storm veteran, described his experience as “emotionally draining” and told her that the military did not keep the troops informed about what was really going on and, [as a result], they walked into some dangerous situations.”

### *Fear of Commitment*

*A number of young women in the Shifter propensity group mentioned that a commitment to the military, unlike a commitment to non-military employers, is irrevocable. If they were to enlist, they would be “stuck” for the full-term of their contract whether they loved it or hated it. For some, this possibility was a major factor in their decision to not join the military.*

The case of one 21-year-old Black woman was illustrative. This young woman passed the ASVAB when she was a senior in high school and went so far as to schedule an appointment for her physical, since she intended to enlist in the Army immediately after she graduated. She recalled that the recruiter who she met at school and who guided her through these steps was helpful—explaining to her and her parents what the Army offered and what military life was like. She was ready to join, though at the last minute she got scared and backed out. She said she was not ready to make such a big commitment. Unlike civilian life where you can try things out and change paths when you are not satisfied with the way things are working out, once you join the military you are “stuck.”

She thinks that women are treated as inferiors in the military, though this was not something that she considered when she was making her decision to join or not to join. She has several friends—female and male—who enlisted. She said they appeared satisfied with their decisions, though she has not talked with them in-depth about their experiences.

At the time of the in-depth interview, she was focused and goal-oriented. However, this has not always been the case. Just as she had not seemed to question seriously her readiness to enlist in the military until the very last minute, once she decided against it, she did not have an alternative plan in mind. It was not until she moved to a large city in another state to find a job and establish herself that she realized the limited opportunities available to young people who had a high school diploma, but no skills or experience. After she realized this, she enrolled in a 4-year college. One semester later, however, she transferred to a 2-year trade school, thinking that she could acquire the same skills in a shorter time. She

now regrets this decision since she did the same work as a college grad, but cannot command the same salary. Currently, she works as the manager of a housing development for elderly and disabled persons. She lives free-of-charge in the complex, but earns a very low salary and has no benefits. She would like to remain in this field and hopes that the experience she is getting will be a stepping stone to higher paying jobs in the future.

### ***Not Eligible to Join***

*Several young women who appeared highly motivated to join the military were told they were not eligible. As the following profiles show, the reasons that these young women were ineligible included asthma, impaired vision, and injuries caused by an abusive stepfather.*

One very promising young Black woman aspired to become a career officer in the military. At the time of the in-depth interview she was a senior in high school. She described herself as a good student who is actively involved in her school's choir and a variety of other extracurricular activities. She likes working with numbers and has had several part-time jobs in small accounting offices. She plans to study business management after high school and become a CPA. Until recently, she had planned to combine her interest in accounting with a career in the Air Force. "The military," she said, "is a type of business . . . and I figured as an option I could be in accounting for the military." She said she was impressed by the fact that you get paid while you are being trained in the military. In the civilian sector you pay to get trained; then you have to find a job.

Other advantages of a military career for her included the challenging nature of the work and the opportunity to meet new people and travel. In her words:

It would challenge you every day. Every day wouldn't be the same. That for me seems really important. . . . Different things every day would make it exciting and interesting and make you look forward to getting up and going to work. Meeting people or maybe even going different places. . . . You probably wouldn't see that working in a civilian job because you wouldn't have time or your job may not include travel.

Compared to civilian employers, she thinks the military provides a more even playing field for women to compete with men and get ahead. As she explained:

In civilian life people don't think they have to go by a certain set of rules. In the military you have to follow rules and give equal treatment. They say that in civilian life, but it's not enforced. . . . So in civilian life a woman has to work a whole lot harder to get ahead.

She had a lot of support for pursuing a military career. Older friends serving in the military, she said, encouraged her:

They were like, dang, it's great to do it because you don't need to worry about how you're going to pay for your college and stuff. If you don't want to go to college you have a job choice so that you won't be like flipping hamburgers. So either way you go, it's a win-win situation.

Her sister, who is in the Army Reserves and "is more excited about that than her college classes," gave her more measured advice:

My sister said that's a decision I have to make myself. I can't tell you to do it and I can't tell you don't do it. Just don't do it because someone tells you because it's not for everyone. . . . Once you get there you can't quit. It's being told what to do and it's not for you if you can't handle a lot of responsibility.

A man at her church who is in the Army also influenced her through his actions, not his words. About this man she said:

You can tell he really, really enjoyed [the Army]. He's like we can do it this way, and I learned this in the military. Let me show you how this can be done an easier way. He relates his training to everyday life. He doesn't sit around and wait for other people to do things for him. He does them himself.

She talked about her interest in accounting with several recruiters, who all said it would be possible for her to accomplish her goals in the military. She was excited about this possibility. However, a female recruiter for the National Guard told her that her asthma was a problem:

I said I have asthma. She was like, well, I'm sorry. She asked if it was something like some people say you have asthma because you can't breathe in a certain way, but I told her no. Then she said she was sorry, but I couldn't do it unless I grow out of it or have something that I could steadily take to keep it at bay. And there is nothing you can take to completely keep it at bay. . . . I've had asthma all my life and I don't see it going away on its own.

Another young Black woman also told the in-depth interviewer "if I didn't have asthma, I'd definitely go in [the military]." Her father, who was an Army radio dispatcher, died when she was young and had little influence on her opinions. However, she grew up in a military town and has a lot of friends whose parents are in the military. Also, her high school had a strong military presence. For example, each year "they did big events," students were given book jackets that advertised the Navy, and the Junior Achievement group she belonged to was sponsored by the Army. In this way, she was able to observe

military life in action and formulate her own opinions about it. What impressed her most was the discipline. In her words:

It's hard, but you're making money and learning discipline. [In the military] you're learning about learning—how to listen, how to follow directions. . . . At the [night] clubs, you can tell who's in the military—they're more respectful.

Another young woman, who was in ROTC and was initially categorized as a Joiner, lost interest when she found out that problems with her vision disqualified her from becoming a pilot. Military service, she said, had not even crossed her mind until an Air Force recruiter spoke to her college orientation group 2 years ago. She recalled: "He just built it up so much . . . I was like *wooo* I want to be a pilot!" As a result of his presentation, she enrolled in the Air Force ROTC. After 2 years, however, she was told that her vision was not good enough for her to become a pilot. Since this was the single most important reason she joined in the first place, this news was a huge disappointment for her. Although she generally liked ROTC, and her boyfriend and most of her other friends were in the Air Force, her interest dropped precipitously.

At the time of the in-depth interview she thought she might join the Air Force Reserves when she is older. Right now, she said, the situation in Iraq conjures up too many bad images of war in her mind. Unlike the danger associated with being a pilot, which she thinks is exciting and prestigious, the danger associated with being a soldier scares her. TV and movies, she said, portray the exciting side of danger—"it's intense, but everyone comes out alive and everything's okay at the end." That is not real.

Based on her experience in the Air Force ROTC, she does not think the military treats men and women differently. However, she thinks women do have fewer opportunities to achieve the higher ranks in the military. In her words: "To a certain level, advancement opportunities are the same. But once you start getting past Major . . . there are less opportunities for women to advance into Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel up into General status." She equated the problem to the glass ceiling women find in the civilian sector: "[In the civilian sector] women can be the manager of a department, but once you get to manager of the company or the division, it's not usually a woman." She thinks people make too much out of sexual harassment in the military, as well as in civilian workplaces.

A 17-year-old high school senior said she first became interested in the military when recruiters came to the house to talk to her older sister. As she described it: "When my sister was thinking about the military, I kind of sat and listened to the recruiter talk about a lot of options that would have been open to her. It sounded really interesting to me, especially the college and job security parts . . . It really just kind of caught my eye."

When she got older, she initiated contact with recruiters from the Air Force, Army, and Navy who came to her school. Those from the Army and Navy impressed her most because they seemed genuinely interested in what she and other young people had to say. Referring specifically to the Navy recruiter, she said:

He went out of his way to talk to you. . . . It's not you're being privileged to be talking to him . . . it's more like he's privileged to be talking to you. He gives you a feeling of respect. . . . He sits and he makes you feel like what you have to say and how you feel about everything is important.

This young woman was thinking seriously about joining the Navy after graduation. However, she was a victim of domestic violence and had just had reconstructive surgery on her jaw. Her doctor told her that she would not be eligible until her jaw was healed completely. In the meantime, she has enrolled in emergency medical and police training courses at a local community college. She hopes to join one of the Armed Forces eventually as a military police. Friends who are currently serving have benefited from it. Among other things, she said they have gained a lot of self respect through it:

You're forced to work and be a part of the team. A lot of friends I had . . . when they worked in groups in school, they were always the laid back ones who didn't really want to get into the group. . . . [The military] kind of forced them to do it, and it built their self-confidence because they see they can do it.

### *Summary*

- The largest single cluster of Shifters is composed of young women who are no longer thinking about joining the military because they have formed families or expect to in the near future. Within and across race/ethnicity groups, about half of the young women in the Shifter propensity group are either parenting or were expecting their first child. A few of these young mothers were married, but most were not. Several others were married, but neither pregnant nor parenting.
- Most Shifters have at least one family member who currently serves in the military or has served in the past. Compared to Joiners, however, these familial ties to the military tend to be weaker.
- A number of young women in the Shifter propensity group mention that a commitment to the military, unlike a commitment to non-military employers, is irrevocable. If they were to enlist, they would be “stuck” for the full-term of their contract whether they loved it or hated it. For some, this possibility is a major factor in their decision not to join the military.
- Compared to Joiners, Shifters have a more jaundiced view of the way women are treated in the military. Overall, they believe that men are treated as superiors and women as inferiors. For most, sexual harassment is not any worse in the military than it is in the civilian workforce and, therefore, was not an important factor in their decision to not join the military.
- Most Shifters have talked to recruiters from one or more of the Services. Their impressions of the recruiters were mixed. For the most part, though, the young women said they preferred recruiters who were honest over those who glamorized the military or made false promises.

- A sizable number of young women who appeared to be highly motivated to join the military had health conditions that disqualified them.

## **Fence-Sitters**

Fence-Sitters are those young women in our sample who mentioned the military as a possible option for themselves, but were either uncertain about whether they would pursue it or said they would pursue it only after other more desirable options were exhausted. This section presents profiles of these young women that reflect major themes or patterns that emerged from analysis of the in-depth interviews. It is organized around the two major clusters of Fence-Sitters that were identified: (1) those who aspire to continue their education after high school and (2) those with highly diffuse approaches to thinking about or planning their transition into adulthood.

### ***Money for College***

*The largest number of young women in the Fence-Sitter propensity group come from families that are generally less well off than those of Joiners. Many aspire to further their education after high school, but are concerned because they do not have sufficient resources to pay for it. At least in part, these young women are attracted to the military because it provides a steady job and offers college tuition benefits. Compared with Joiners, familial and other connections to the military are weak.*

One 20-year-old White woman who grew up in a lower-class working family is attracted to the military because it guarantees employment and a stable income. However, she did express some concern that the military was downsizing and that these guarantees may not hold in the future. In her words: “The military is a steady job; they’re not likely to fire you, though they’re not growing too much these days and they may encourage you to leave if they’re overstocked.” In addition to providing steady work, the military would pay for her to go to college and provide opportunities to travel to some “really neat places.” Finally, she said, the military would help her make the transition from dependence on her parents to independence by providing a lot of things that she depended on her mother for, such as room and board, transportation, and health insurance. In her words: “It provides a way out of home.” “If you were to go off on your own, it’s kind of hard to get started, but in the military it makes it easier because they take care of a lot of the stuff for you, like health care and all that.”

Her parents are “at the age where they kind of want the nestlings to leave the nest. . . . They want to be left alone, or something like that. So they kind of push you a little bit.” Her older sister and younger brother had responded to their “push” by joining the Service. She has not had to, so far, because

her parents have not pushed her as hard as they had pushed her siblings. She believes this is because they have always had higher expectations for her than they had for her siblings. In her words: “They really haven’t pushed me because I think they wanted me to become more. . . . They wanted me to go to college and all that.”

At the time of the in-depth interview she was studying biology at a local community college. Previously, she was in a pre-med program, which proved too stressful for her. She said she is “sick of school” because it lacks purpose. However, she does not want to “just stop going to college and work in some drug store” where there are few opportunities for advancement. In her mind, the military is a desirable alternative since it would provide her with some hands-on work experience, preferably in the health care field, and renew her sense of purpose.

This young woman holds seemingly incompatible views about the role of women in the military. On the one hand, she thinks that gender does not matter in the military, since “you’re a number, just another person.” Further, there are “one in a million chances” of getting a raise or promotion—whether you are male or female. On the other hand, she thinks that “guys are more likely to get a good job” because we are all programmed to believe they are more competent. Most of her information about life in the military has come from her sister, who is serving in the Navy. Her sister has told her that, once you get out of boot camp, the Navy is “sort of laid back” and “some of the people don’t really work hard.” If it had not been for her sister, she said, “I probably would have thought that going into the military was too tough. . . . I would have believed it was impossible or really physically hard, [but] now I believe it’s pretty hard, but bearable.”

She has talked to several Army recruiters, though she said they have not influenced her “at all . . . because [she] was already set [on joining].” She thinks that the military misrepresented opportunities in their recruitment ads:

It’s kind of a lie. . . . I know because it’s just not what my sister does. I can imagine her on one of those things that roll under the plane or maybe standing up in some crooked position trying to take off the panels. . . . That would be my sister. . . . That’s the real thing. But on TV you see all these computers . . . directing planes. That’s high tech. I don’t think many people get to do that. . . . You see stuff that doesn’t happen everyday.

Another Fence-Sitter, a White high school senior, also grew up in a family that was not very well-off. Both parents had graduated from high school and her father had completed 2 years of college. Her parents have always said they wanted her and her older sister to go to college “for at least 2 years.” Although none of her friends planned to go college, she has decided that she would. In addition to her parents’ wishes, her older sister’s experiences since high school have influenced her decision. Her older

sister chose not to go to college and is working in a job that she does not like and that does not pay well. She believes this will be her fate as well, if she does not continue her education.

She is worried about the costs of college and sometimes thinks she should enlist to get the college benefits. In her words: “[The military] would pay for my schooling, and that kind of influences me because I’m not like a wealthy person where I can go and pay for college and be done with it and not worry about it.” She is reluctant to make the commitment, however, because “it sounds like we could be going to war.”

In addition to her fear of going to war, this young woman does not think she has sufficient information to make a decision. She has talked to a lot of recruiters who she described as persuasive, but not always believable. Referring to a female recruiter she had talked to, she said:

The recruiter made it sound like it was much easier than it seems, and she like overexaggerated a lot of things and kind of like pushed me away from it. . . . That’s why now I’m uncertain if I want to go now because a lot of things she said could not be true. It didn’t sound like it was realistic. I think she was just trying to get me to come in and sign up.

Recruiters, she said, would be more effective if they were more truthful and provided specific information about the roles of women in the military and the opportunities they offer. Her uncle, a former Marine, also portrays an overly rosy picture of military life. He achieved a high rank, which she thinks has clouded his perceptions of what the military experience is really like for young people just starting out. Although this uncle says he would like her to follow his footsteps in the Marines, he has offered to help pay for her schooling so that she “[does] not have to worry about going into the military.”

Another young woman, a 20-year-old college student from West Africa, gave the impression that she would do anything, including joining the military, that would help her reach her goal to become a medical doctor. A major obstacle is that she needs information about what the military might offer her and whether and how the military might actually pay her tuition and fees. She thinks a medical career in the military would enable her to help people who are “sick and wounded,” which is her major interest in life. She is especially interested in what the U.S. does to keep the peace in foreign countries and how it helps countries that are ravaged by war and disease. She supports these efforts and would like to participate, if possible. She said the military would give her a “strong heart,” meaning that she would learn to adapt to all sorts of situations and personalities in a professional manner.

This young woman has no familial or other connections to the military. Rather, a chance encounter with a classmate who told her that the Service is paying his college tuition prompted her to

contact the campus recruiter. Her first contact yielded her little or none of the information she was seeking. Instead she learned that the recruitment office was understaffed and the recruiter did not have time to answer her questions to her satisfaction. As she described it:

I was trying to tell them that medical school costs a lot of money. If I am going to be in their training, are they going to cover my tuition, fees, and all the money that I need to graduate from medical school? I just want to make sure they can do that before I go into training.

She plans to make another appointment in the near future.

She has discussed the possibility of joining the military with her mother, who was initially against the idea because it would put her in danger. However, she said her mother has become more supportive and even expressed preferences for the Marines and the Navy because they have the “smartest uniforms.” She shares her mother’s fear of war, but has come to terms with this possibility if she chooses to enlist. As a medical doctor, she assumes that she would need to be close to the action because that is where the wounded soldiers would be.

Overall, she thinks the media give the impression that the military is mostly for men. However, she did mention one ad that showed a female Marine “dressed smartly in her uniform in front of an airplane.” She is aware of allegations of sexual harassment in the military. However, it is not a concern for her, since she believes that it only happens to women “with certain personalities” who do not behave respectfully. She said she is athletic and could manage the physical demands of the military.

Another gregarious young Black woman said she was thinking of joining the military if she could find no other way to finance her education. Her mother had taught her that “life is whatever you make it,” and she is determined to make it secure and comfortable for herself and any children she might have. At the time of the in-depth interview, she was a sophomore in college, majoring in biology and working part-time as a bank teller. She chose the college she is attending because a cousin also attends and it is close enough that she can easily go home whenever she feels like it.

When she completes her degree in biology, she plans to continue her education and become a certified physical therapist. Her mother supports her plans because “the medical field is good . . . [and] you’re not going to be getting out of school and not finding a job.” In addition to the availability of jobs, she chose this profession because it would enable her to help others. In her words: “Basically I want to help other people. . . . Somebody who may not have thought they would be able to walk or do something. . . . I’d like to help them be able to do it.”

She disagrees with key aspects of U.S. foreign policy, but not enough to affect her decision about whether or not she would join. In her words:

I know we have peace treaties with other countries and if something goes wrong we're supposed to help. But I think some things we shouldn't be involved in. And that really upsets me as far as sending our soldiers somewhere . . . killing off our soldiers for somebody else who maybe doesn't even believe in the same thing that we do. I have a problem with that.

Overall, she has gleaned a positive image of the military from conversations with her brother, her brother's girlfriend, and two cousins who are serving. However, she is very clear that she would only join the military "if she just had no other way of getting the money to go to physical therapy school."

A Black high school senior also would like to attend college, but she is not sure that her family can afford the costs of tuition and books. At the time of the in-depth interview, this young woman was living with her grandmother and helping to pay household expenses with money she earned from a part-time job. She is aware that the military would finance her college education if she enlisted. However, unlike most other Fence-Sitters, she does not have a positive image of the military. She talked to recruiters at school and gave the military "a lot of thought" when she was in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades.

By the time she got to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, however, she decided that the only reason she would join would be to get money for college because she believes that the United States is a racist country. In her words: "If I joined the military . . . the only reason would be financial. . . . I believe that as a Black female I have nothing to owe this country. . . . I don't see fighting for something I don't believe in." Also, she has seen officers on television screaming and yelling in the faces of recruits and concluded that she could not handle that sort of rudeness. She thinks recruiters are untrustworthy because they will say anything to get you to join.

In lieu of joining the military, she hopes to get financial aid or scholarships that would enable her to go away to college. She has always wanted to study law because she "likes to voice her opinion about everything." Also, it pays well and will enable her to give her children "what [she] didn't have as a child."

In her opinion, sexual harassment is a problem in the military, but she conceded that it is also a problem in the civilian workforce. However, she does think that men and women are treated differently in the military. As she explained: "Men are thought of as stronger. . . . They have to live up to every expectation, or they feel they have to live up to every expectation." Women, she said, have to work harder than men in the military just to "prove themselves and prove that they are capable." "Men," she continued, "just have to prove they are better than the next man. Women have to prove that they are

better than men period.” She thinks the military would be attractive to more women if they “talked about the truth,” i.e., the different things women have to do to prove themselves, instead of “making it all seem goody-goody when it is not.”

Another young woman in the Fence-Sitter propensity group had taken decisive steps to get off the fence and join the military, but then reversed her decision and returned to sitting on the fence. She is 19 years old and, since high school graduation, has lived on her own. She works in a pizza parlor and plans to begin college as soon as her application for financial aid is approved. She is not sure whether she wants to pursue a career in nursing or physical therapy, but thinks that she can take the basic courses and decide later. What she knows for sure is that she does not want to be “stuck in a \$6.25 an hour job.” Her mother strongly supports her decision to go to college and has advised her to complete her education before starting a family. In her words:

Children are like the last thing on my mind. My mom always tells me . . . get all your college away and then have the kids. Not like her. . . . She had us and she just went back to college [last year].

A year ago she was certain that she would join the Air Force. However, on the day she was scheduled to take the ASVAB, the recruiter did not show up and did not return her calls. It was not until after she had committed to a lease for an apartment that the recruiter called to reschedule her appointment to take the test. She could not get out of her lease, and thoughts of joining the Air Force receded. Although the recruiter’s error was untimely and unprofessional, it seems possible she may have changed her mind once her financial aid for college was approved or she may have gotten cold feet. At the time of the in-depth interview, she said the military was still an option, though she does not plan to pursue it again until after she graduated from college. Unlike college, she said, the military teaches self-discipline and self-reliance. Relatives in the Service, she said, enjoyed the travel and are getting their college education without going into debt. The major disadvantage is that military personnel cannot go home whenever they feel like it.

In her opinion, basic training may be the only component of the military in which men may have an advantage over women: “A guy might be more likely to get through it . . . because they are always exercising and staying in shape. . . . Females they go to the mall.” However, she plays basketball and does not think the physical demands would be an obstacle for her. She thinks women and men have similar opportunities to get ahead in the military. She has a female cousin in the Navy who has advanced in rank through determination and hard work. Like her cousin, she described herself as “one who doesn’t give up and succeeds at whatever she attempts.” She thought the military could do more to educate

women about the opportunities it offered: “This would give women more confidence about going into the military. . . . Help them to see it’s not a one-sided place to be.”

### ***Diffuse Decisionmakers***

*A smaller, yet sizable number of young women in the Fence-Sitter propensity group had less articulate plans for the future and did not seem to have sufficient information or motivation to pursue either college or the military. As the following profiles illustrate, these young women have diverse life circumstances, and many do not appear to have access to adults who are in a position to guide them.*

Several young women in this subgroup of Fence-Sitters have children or are expecting their first child. One, a 21-year-old Black, is the mother of a 3-month-old girl. An important goal for her is to provide a decent life for her daughter and herself. To do this, she knows that she needs to further her education and get a job, but has taken no concrete steps to get started. She and the baby stay with her aunt and uncle, and it is apparent that they are trying to help her by “looking for job openings that have benefits and pay good.”

Over the past several years she has thought about taking classes that will prepare her to work in a local manufacturing plant and about enrolling in a nursing school run by the godmother of her best friend’s husband. She has also thought about joining the military and has not totally eliminated it as an option. She met with a recruiter once after high school, who told her about the different military programs, and about the travel and other benefits. She said the military sounded okay, but mostly it was “something . . . if I couldn’t find better.” She said she needs more information about what the military does for single women with children—“like what has to be done as far as getting put on a base and all the traveling that is involved. . . . Can my daughter come with me and stuff like that.” She would first like to try getting a job and going to college. If that does not work out, then she may contact a recruiter to find out what requirements and accommodations they have for single mothers. The military, she said, would probably help her “calm down as far as the partying goes” and teach her to be more organized.

It was apparent from the in-depth interview that this young woman’s vision of what she might do to support her child and herself in the future is hazy, at best. Her only concrete idea was “doing the work that the Motorola people do at the plant . . . whatever they do.” She “might go back to doing hair,” since she has a cosmetology license, though she expressed no enthusiasm for this career path. She has been out of school and not working for several years now and appears to lack confidence in her ability to adjust to either environment or to fit in. Knowing what you are supposed to do, coping with co-workers and managing the workload, she said, would be stressful for her whether she entered the labor

force or joined the military. Returning to school would also be difficult: “It’s been so long . . . I’d have to pretty much start over, as far as the school routine and the taking the notes part, organization of the different subjects and studying. I’d have to try to make time for that in between work and her [baby].”

Overall, she thinks the military experience would be pretty much the same for men and women. Women, she said, have to do everything men do, “so it builds [women’s] strength up to the manly level.” The main advantage that men have, inside and outside the military, is freedom from major parental responsibilities: “A man can pick up and go when they say go. He doesn’t have to go through the part of trying to find somebody to keep the children and stuff like that. He can pick up and go faster.”

Another young woman is married and expecting her first child. She is 19 years old and has thought about joining the military. She said it is still in the back of her mind, though it is not as “clear and focused” as it once was. Her husband is in the Army and his experiences have changed her views about the military. As she described it, her “husband is not having a very good time,” in large part because he is religious and a lot of the other enlistees make fun of him for it. “They think he is a snob,” she explained, “because he doesn’t go out to the bar with them.” Also, he is in the Cavalry and does not have a glamorous or interesting job.

Before he joined, she said, the recruiter talked to them “all of the time.” However, they now feel that he misled them. As she described it:

A lot of the things [the recruiter] said were not exactly true . . . like the kind of job he would get and the schedule for promotions. A lot of the things they have him do are not real intelligent. . . . They stand around half the time and a lot of people goof around and he can’t get anything done.

In retrospect, her husband thinks the Army is “just for people who don’t know what else to do.” He is sorry he enlisted, but when he got out of high school he did not know what to do. Neither he nor his parents could afford to pay for college, so he figured he “might as well join the military and get it for free.”

She and her husband have talked about the possibility of her joining. He told her he does not want her to be enlisted like he is: “If I was to be an officer it would be different, but there’s no way he’d ever want me to enlist because too much happens . . . especially to women, like harassment and stuff.” She has always wanted to be a teacher, but her family was poor and she could not afford to go to college. Instead, she went to “hair school,” thinking she could work and make the money to go to college. Now, with a baby on the way, she no longer feels like she is in a position to make good career decisions: “I don’t know if I want to work outside the home, or I just want to stay home.” Since her husband does not

make very much money, she may not have a choice. Ideally, though, she would like to just focus on raising her child.

Several other young women in the Fence-Sitter propensity group do not have children but, as diffuse decisionmakers, are highly uncertain about what they would like to do with their lives. They talked about the possibility of joining the military in the vaguest of terms. One of these is Bativa, the young woman who is preparing for her GED and working part-time at Burger King. She takes life a day at a time because “nobody really knows what they’re going to be doing.” She lives with her parents in an impoverished borough in New York City and has a somewhat bleak outlook on life formed from observations of the struggles of others in the job market who are older and more experienced than she is: “I just do what I got to do for right now. Then when that time comes then I’ll go there.”

The military is attractive, she said, because it pays well and provides good benefits. She thinks it would make her father and others in her family proud of her, though whenever she talks to them about it they do not believe she will actually follow through with it. The major disadvantage is that she would have to leave her family: “I just don’t want to leave home. I would go, but it’s being away from home and my family and the only time you can see them is on vacations or holidays. I can’t deal with that.” Other disadvantages include being around a “bunch of people” she does not know, failing, and having no assurances of a job once she completes her tour of duty. Her sister-in-law, for example, has been struggling to get on her feet since she left the Army. Bativa suspects that she may have “dropped out or quit,” adding, “I don’t want that to happen to me.”

Despite these fears and reservations, the military continues to be an option under consideration: “I want to do it like in a couple years . . . because of the money and because you get good benefits.” At the time of the in-depth interview, she had not talked to a recruiter. Television advertisements have been her only source of information and inspiration—particularly the one that challenges viewers to “be all that you can be.” Another influential ad mentioned college tuition benefits. “I’d be the first one in my house to go to college,” she observed. She thinks the military should have “more people like you [referring to the interviewer]” who are willing to talk to young people about their futures.

In her opinion, the U.S. should not squander its resources on problems in foreign countries when there are so many domestic problems in need of attention. In her words:

The President is supposed to be ruling the United States. I don’t know why these people go all the way to another country to fight and worry about other countries when they have to worry about the United States. They should be looking at homelessness in America, getting

better jobs for people here, or stopping all the fighting that's going on in the United States instead of going to another country where they got their own president and stuff to handle it.

In her opinion, the military is not a supportive environment for women. Women in the Armed Forces, she said, have to deal with “chauvinists” telling them “everyday that they can't do it.” The combination of these attitudes and the high ratio of men to women have led her to believe that harassment of women is the norm. In her words: “There's like 20 men for every woman in the military. . . . They think it's all right to harass women because nobody will do anything. . . . They won't believe a female, or they'll think she deserved it.”

Another Fence-Sitter does not appear to have a handle on what she might do after high school or even what her interests or skills might be. This may reflect limited abilities, since her high school curriculum includes very basic academic classes and electives in physical education and child care. Beyond bussing tables or working at Walgreens, she could offer no further thoughts or dreams. She mentioned college, but only if she “could find something to get a degree in and go into that.” She also mentioned that she is engaged to marry, though the wedding is at least 3 years away. When asked what she would like to do or accomplish before marriage, she said: “Graduate high school, get a good job or join the Army, Air Force . . . or whatever, or go to college.”

This young woman's parents are encouraging her to consider the military so that she would not have to worry about finding a good job now and would increase her chances for having a good future. She said her parents had given her older sister the same advice. The older sister disappointed them, however, when she moved to Kentucky and “just became a waitress.” Her cousin's husband recently “quit the Navy” because he did not like it. He told her that they feed young people a “bunch of lies” and false promises just to get them to join. Although recruiters routinely visit her school, she has never talked to one or asked for information. Recently, she looked through some brochures that her fiancé had picked up.

Other images of the military come to her from TV ads and movies, which make life in the military look like fun. “The discipline,” she said, “doesn't bother me too much because my parents are pretty strict too.” She does not know much about the pay or benefits. Her only fears are going to war and “getting shot.”

Although she said the military might be the best thing she could do, it sounded like it would be her last resort: “I'm trying to get a good job now—e.g., a cashier's job at Walmart, Revco, or Walgreens. If a job doesn't work out, though, I might join then.”

Another diffuse decisionmaker in the Fence-Sitter propensity group is a senior at an inner-city high school that specializes in graphic arts. Her images of the military are vague, and she does not seem to have access to reliable sources of information. More generally, she does not seem to have access to any adult that could provide her with the guidance she needs and wants. Counselors, she said, are always too busy with administrative tasks to help students plan for their futures. However, they do post brochures about trade schools and other postsecondary options on a bulletin board in the counseling office. She has looked at them on her own and mailed in postcards requesting further information. Most of her ideas about what she might do in the future come from a girlfriend. In her words: "I listen to what she wants to do . . . and then think about whether that would be a good thing for me to do too if I had the right money and everything."

Before she participated in the YATS survey, she had thought about joining the military "every once in a while," but since then has not thought about it very much at all. She has observed her sister's godmother who is in the Air Force and surmised that the military has provided her with a stable and secure lifestyle. However, she has not talked with her about her experience. She and her girlfriend watch videotapes about the military and took their admissions pretests, but she did not score high enough to pass. If she does not find a job after graduation, she may try to take the test again.

This diffuse decisionmaker thought that commercials and ads about the military are "a little bit deceiving" because they do not provide realistic images about what recruits might actually do once they joined. Friends at school, she said, have told her that the military "bribes you with free college and all that, but when you get in you find out you're not eligible." However, she thinks some of these friends are not reliable sources of information. She likes the discipline of the military because "it gives people a sense of self-control." It would also get her out of the bad neighborhood where she grew up, help her achieve independence from her family, and help her realize "what special talents and abilities God has given [her]."

She supports U.S. efforts to keep the peace in foreign countries. She is afraid of going to war and wishes countries would find other ways to work through their problems.

### *Summary*

- Many young women in the Fence-Sitter propensity group aspire to continue their education after high school, but are concerned because they come from lower income families that do not have sufficient resources to help them pay for it. The military appears to be an attractive possibility because it offers college tuition benefits and provides a steady income.

- A smaller number of Fence-Sitters in our sample do not appear to be college-bound. Most of these young women appear to have limited access to adults who could help them plan their future lives; several have children.
- In general, Fence-Sitters did not grow up in families with strong traditions of military service; none participated in high school Junior ROTC programs. Only a few reported that they knew someone who was currently serving in the military or who served in the past.
- Fence-Sitters had little or no contact with recruiters. Many who did, described them as persuasive, but not trustworthy. Much of the information they received, they said, seemed unrealistic to them. The military could make itself more attractive to women if it provided information and messengers that honestly address women's opportunities and responsibilities in the military.

### **Non-Joiners**

Young women in the Non-Joiner propensity group are those who are least likely to join the military. They have given very little or no consideration to joining and have consistently reported that they would “probably not” or “definitely not” be on active duty in the military or any of the Services in the next few years.

Non-Joiners are a demographically diverse group that includes young women from middle and lower income households. From our analysis of the in-depth interviews, six major themes or patterns emerged that explain their disinterest or rejection of military Service for themselves. These are: (1) commitment to higher education, (2) desire to remain close to family and friends, (3) incompatible religious beliefs or personality traits, (4) negative impressions of the military, (5) ineligibility for Service, and (6) diffuse or unfocused decision-making styles characterized by lack of commitment to any particular path—military or otherwise.

#### ***Family Expectations and Support for College***

*The largest single cluster of young women in this propensity group either were planning to go to college in the near future or were attending college already. As the following profiles show, the parents of young women in this cluster stressed the importance of education and, early in their daughters' lives, communicated expectations that they would continue their education after high school. Some of these young women are from middle income families; most were from lower-middle and low-income families. None had very much information about the military.*

Adrienne, a Non-Joiner from a White middle-class family, told the interviewer that she has “always known” that she would be going to college. Both parents had attended college and, as she was growing up, they communicated their expectations that she too would attend college. She internalized

these messages and never questioned the assumption that she would attend college. In her words: “My parents have always been saving [for my college education] and they were always saying: ‘After you get out of high school, you go to college.’ And I was like, okay.”

This young woman’s middle-class upbringing has afforded her opportunities to explore her interests. At the time of the in-depth interview she was a college sophomore, majoring in music education. She hopes to become an elementary school music teacher after she graduates. Marriage, she said, is “somewhere down the road.” However, in case she marries another music major, she has chosen a minor in business. Few school districts or communities, she said, have either the resources or the need to hire more than one music educator. When she wants to make her own decisions, she does. However, she relies on her parents a lot: “I take [my parents’ input] into consideration when making my decisions. . . . They have my best interest in mind, and they’ve experienced more than I have. [Also], my parents are paying for school . . . so they still have a large part in decisionmaking.”

This young middle-class woman never considered the military as an option. In part, this was because she always imagined that the military was for men:

You see all these commercials. I think it’s for either the Marines or Navy, you see these guys in their white pants and their blue uniforms with hats . . . swords, you know, it’s all guys. You see military combat, it’s guys. You see all the commercials—it’s just males. You never see any females. . . . I’ve never seen a woman in uniform. . . . If you see a woman it’s like it’s kind of like on the side, it’s like, hey see all these guys and oh, by the way, women can join too. . . . You never hear women go ‘Oh, you know, my parents are so proud of me that I joined the military.’

Other images—lots of running, isolation from the “real world,” and frequent moves from one base to another—are from occasional conversations with a high school friend who married someone in the military: “She talks about how they’re always moving all over the place . . . and don’t get off base much or out into the real world.” From this, she is certain that the military life style is not for her. Also, she could never have imagined herself killing another human being or putting herself in a position where she might be killed: “The country is a very great cause and I love being an American and stuff because of all the rights we have. . . . But I can’t imagine putting my life on the line for my country. . . . I can’t imagine dying first off, so I can’t imagine putting myself in a position where I’d have to kill other people.” Nevertheless, she said she has learned what the military stands for from her courses in history and understands why countries sometimes need to go to war.

She does not agree with U.S. involvement in peacekeeping activities, however. In her opinion, the resources should be used to address domestic problems such as poverty and illiteracy. In her words: “Let [other countries] fix themselves! Why should we care? Why does the United States have to

be the peacekeepers of every country? You know, we have people in the streets that are poor. Why don't we help them? We have people who are illiterate. Why don't we spend more to fix that instead of spending money to fix Russia? Or in Israel . . . It's their war; it's not our war. We weren't part of why it started, why should we be a part of how it's finished?"

Another Non-Joiner, also from a White middle-class family, has wanted to become a lawyer since she was in the third grade. At the time of the in-depth interview she was a senior in high school and confident that she would achieve this life-long career goal:

I plan on being a lawyer. . . . I'm the kind of person that when I set my head to something, I know that I can accomplish it. Because no matter how tough it gets, then I can bear with it and stick with it. And I know that if that's something I really want, it's something I can achieve.

At least in part, her self-confidence was the result of a strong network of support from significant adults in her life, as well as like-minded peers. Her parents have always been there to help her think through any tough decisions:

My mom and dad . . . they're always there for me, you know. If I have a problem, or if I just am not sure, you know, of the decision I want to make, they try to guide me in the way that they think is best for me. . . . If I want to do something, and I'm really not sure whether that's what I want to do, I set it down with them and I weigh the consequences, and the goods with the bads. . . . And they always seem to help me.

Entering the military has never interested her. The only conceivable advantage would be the tuition benefits because "everyone has problems if they're middle-class with paying for college." However, her parents have set money aside for her education, and she has applied for financial aid and scholarships.

Although she "talked to [a recruiter at school] and heard what he had to say," she never left him with the impression that she was remotely interested in joining. She knew people who are interested in joining the military and thinks that is "cool." Like other college-oriented Non-Joiners who are excited about pursuing their interests in the civilian sector, she understands and respects others who are equally enthusiastic about military service. In her words:

Like my friend . . . She would like to go [into the military] because she's not really definite on what she wants to do. And I'm for sure. I'm positive on what I want to do. . . . I know there's a lot of people . . . freshman in high school who say, I want to go into the military. And that's really cool. And I think that, you know, if that's what they want to do, and I don't look down upon anybody for wanting to do that. I think, you know, that it is good. You want to serve your country and stuff like that. . . . It's just never hit me as something I want to do.

Another Non-Joiner was a college-bound high school senior from a family that is not so well-off. She is goal-oriented and has a good sense of where she wants to head in life: "There's nobody else that can make a better decision than you because it's what you're going to want to do, not what somebody else wants." She would like to marry and have children, but not before she finishes college. Her goal is to put herself through 6 years of college to become a social worker. She knows this will be costly and, because her family is not well-off, she has decided to start out at a local 2-year college and then transfer to a university. Already, she works at two part-time jobs and knows that she will have to continue working throughout the years she is in college. "Otherwise," she said, "there's no way I'm going to be able to afford it. Nobody's helping me out but myself. . . . I picked out a community college for a couple of years just because I'm not going to be able to afford to go to a good college for a whole 4 years." She plans to maintain a 3.0 grade point average because it will make her eligible for a tuition reduction program when she transfers to a state university.

At one time she thought about joining the military "just because of the paying for college." She read pamphlets, but did not believe them because "you can't really just go by a pamphlet . . . they're not going to make themselves sound bad." Recruiters came to her school, but she said their visits were not well publicized, and she never got a chance to talk to one. She got little encouragement from family and friends who had served. They told her the military makes promises they do not keep and, from this advice, she surmised: "If my main reason for joining is for college money and it doesn't happen, then what would be the point of going?" She thinks the military is best suited to those who do not know what else to do with their lives since "there are a lot of careers that can happen through that."

Her parents, she said, definitely discouraged her from joining because she is a woman and "women are treated badly in the military." She agrees with them:

It's a lot of pressure on [women] . . . not so much physically, but as in if you're being treated poorly you're not going to be happy in the environment you're in. . . . I'm talking about being treated rudely. . . . I'm not even talking about taking orders from somebody . . . because you do that your whole life whether you are in the military or not.

The military, she concluded, was much easier for males—not because women did not do as well, but because "a lot of people just still don't think that a woman could do as good."

Sofia, a 17-year-old Hispanic senior in high school, has had her heart set on going to college and majoring in medicine since she was young. She is in advanced placement classes and, because her family does not have a lot of discretionary income, she is working part-time and putting some of her earnings in a college savings account. Although she thinks she is ready to make good decisions about her future, she is not ready to leave the comfort and security of her parents' home and the small town where

she grew up. For this reason, she plans to attend a local 2-year college where she can complete basic course requirements and then transfer to a 4-year college.

Like several other college-oriented Non-Joiners, she views the military as a place where young people, mostly young men, go when they do not know what else to do with their lives. Her older brother who recently enlisted, she said, is a good example. Her father always had higher expectations for her than he did for her brother because, unlike her brother, she liked school and never ran away from home or got into trouble.

She never considered joining the military and never talked to a recruiter because she wanted to go to college. Also, she thought the military was too disciplined and too regimented for her, and the possibility of dying overseas for “someone else’s country—not your own” is too great a sacrifice. On the positive side, however, she thinks the military offers opportunities to visit other parts of the country and the world. It also offers opportunities to enlistees to “take pride in the fact that they are protecting their country and playing a part in the big picture.”

Opportunities for women and men in the military are different and, in some ways, she thinks women may have it better because “men get stuck with actually doing the fighting, while women get the desk jobs and work with computers, which are higher ranking positions.” She followed news coverage of the recent court martial of a woman pilot who had an affair with a married officer. In her words, the verdict was “really stupid” since it involved two consenting adults. In civilian life, she thinks women have to work harder than men with similar abilities to get ahead. Women, she said, do not speak out loudly enough about the discrimination they confront. This is not a concern in her chosen career since surgeons are judged by their skills and not their gender.

Deidre, a 19-year-old Black woman is another goal-oriented college student from a lower income family. She is an enthusiastic college freshman, who said she “has the instinct that I know what I want” and is “eager to do what I want.” She is majoring in business because she has “heard business is the future” and she “wants to be a part of it.” Her parents, she said, are behind her 100 percent. They never went to college and want her to have a better life than they have had. In her words: “My parents want me to go to college to better myself and to get a good job and secure my future without financial problems. . . . They want me to have what they didn’t have cause they didn’t go to college.” She wants to have a family, but not until she achieves her career goals and has a “secure life.” Otherwise, she said, she “can’t secure them financially or anything else.”

When she was younger, she told her parents she wanted to go into either the Air Force or law enforcement. Their response, she said, dismissed any further consideration. As she explained: “[My

parents] were like what are you talking about? I guess they brainwashed me, like no, no, no, and it just stuck with me from then on.” Although she redirected her aspirations, she does not think the military is all bad. One of her cousins who enlisted to become a nurse has given her a more balanced perspective. It was not all about war, and it provides recruits with diverse training and career options. Views of what life is like inside the military, she said, are important. Had she had more accurate information about the military when she was younger, it may have been a more attractive option to her and her parents.

Nancy, a 20-year-old White college sophomore, was another Non-Joiner who always assumed she was going to college. In her junior year of high school, her parents advised her to research all her options—“don’t leave any out”—then choose the best one. After collecting and evaluating information from colleges and universities, visiting some, and talking to her swim coach and others who had attended them, she chose one that was not too far from home because she wanted to remain close to her family.

She lives near an Air Force base and has friends who grew up in military families. She is definite that she would never join the military—in part, because she has her heart set on going to college and becoming a teacher, but also because she has seen how hard the military lifestyle is on families. She has friends who are interested in joining and admits that the training, working for a cause you believe in, and benefits are attractive. However, the military is not for her.

### ***Remaining Close to Home***

*Among the college-oriented Non-Joiners, a common theme was their desire to remain close to their families and homes after high school. For some, this narrows the field in terms of which colleges they would attend. Like the young women who are profiled in this section, many other Non-Joiners said being stationed far from their homes was a major disincentive associated with the military.*

Charlene, a Non-Joiner is a Black high school senior. She is an honors student, performs community service, sings in the church choir, and volunteers as a Candy Striper in the children’s ward of a local hospital. She said she has a good head on her shoulders and parents who support her and want her to “be more than them.” Since she was a little girl, she said, she has been fascinated with childbirth and has wanted to become an obstetrician like a man she knew in her neighborhood.

She is college-bound and the military, she said, is definitely not a possibility. “Becoming a doctor would be a dream come true—it is an occupation that she is sure she will “enjoy for life.” If she were to join the military, she would not only be forsaking her dream of becoming a doctor, she would also

be “leaving [her] family and support network.” Being near to them, she said, was one reason she has selected to attend a commuter college that is near her parents’ home.

Her images of the military include “lonely days and nights . . . without your family,” as well as fun and excitement from “meeting many new friends all over the world.” Discipline is not a concern, since she is already “disciplined and good at taking orders.” Danger is also not a concern because she believes “when it’s time to go, then it’s time to go.”

Like other college-oriented Non-Joiners, she thinks the military is a good experience for other people. In her words: “Whether you are male or female it doesn’t matter if you want to make something out of your life. . . . And if going into the military makes you happy, then it doesn’t matter if you’re a guy or a girl.” However, she said military recruitment strategies are oriented toward men. If the military is serious about recruiting young women, she said, then military women need to have the same presence in high schools and on television commercials that men have. Men, she thinks, have advantages in military and civilian life alike. She explained:

It’s just the way our society is, you know. Men have it easier, I guess you could say, and women have to fight for whatever they get. It’s unfair, but women are just going to have to work harder to prove that they have the same abilities men have at any job.

Another high school senior also is planning to attend a local community college for 2 years and then transfer to a 4-year institution because she does not want to leave her family right after high school. Like the other woman portrayed in this section, she is in the honor society, active on her school’s debate team, and works on the yearbook. Her parents, she said, have been talking to her about college since she was very young. She is interested in studying law and psychology, but wants to take some courses before she decides which she will pursue. Whichever she chooses, she eventually wants a career that will be interesting, but not so demanding that she does not have time to start and care for a family.

She is aware that the military provides college benefits, though she has never thought about it as a way for her to get her education. Her knowledge of the military is limited, she said, but what she has heard is not enticing. Travel, which means separation from her family, is the greatest disincentive.

### ***Conflict with Religious Beliefs or Personality***

*Several young women in the Non-Joiners propensity group told in-depth interviewers that enlistment was never an option due to perceived conflicts between the military and their religious beliefs or personalities. All are either in college or plan to attend college for at least 2 years.*

Two young women said participation in the military was inconsistent with their religious upbringing and beliefs. One, a 20-year-old Black woman who is goal-oriented and enrolled in a 2-year college, was reluctant to participate in an interview sponsored by the military. All her life, she said, she has known that she wanted to become a minister. For this reason she could neither support nor join an organization like the military that is associated with killing. The other, a 17-year-old Hispanic Non-Joiner, also said participation in the military would be inconsistent with her family's religious beliefs. In her words: "We don't believe in going to war. . . . My mom says [the military] trains people for war."

Several other young women said the military way of life did not fit their personalities. A 21-year-old Hispanic woman with one child, for example, came to this conclusion after listening to the stories and experiences of family members and friends who have served. Also, in high school she took the ASVAB and, afterwards, was contacted by recruiters. As she told the in-depth interviewer:

It's not something that ever attracted me. It's a way of life I wouldn't get used to because I'm not the type of person who even follows a certain routine . . . doing the same things everyday and every weekend. I don't follow routines in my life. Everyday for me is like a new and different day, a totally complete day. . . . I would have a heart attack [if I joined the military]. It's definitely not for me.

In addition to beliefs that her personality was not compatible with life in the military, she has surmised from television news that women and men are treated differently in the military and that women's experiences are "mostly negative." In her words:

Most of what I've heard is negative, to be honest with you. . . . There's always girls saying that they got sexually harassed and . . . they don't give them the same rights and things that they do the guys.

She thinks there are steps the military could take that would make it a more attractive alternative to young women like her. In her words:

They could make [young women] more aware of what would be expected and what it would be like. . . . How military life would be like for a girl . . . because everybody sees only what the guys go through. And if it's the same for guys and girls, I guess make that clear. If it's different for guys and girls, the same thing—make that clear and let the girls know what . . . advantages there are to going, what they offer a girl, you know, what you can be doing. If you don't have to go to combat, for example, then let the girls know that they don't have to go to combat. I think that would help.

Another striving young Hispanic woman said the military was not accessible to college-bound students like her. If she were interested in the military, she would not know where to contact a

military recruiter. Her images of the military, which come mainly from movies and television, are inconsistent with the kind of person she is. In her words:

That's not the kind of person I am. I couldn't go and do that. I'm the kind of person that would go to college, get a job and I'm not a joiner. . . . I don't join clubs or anything at school, so I wouldn't make that big decision to go and do something like that.

She said she has stepbrothers and uncles in the military and does not think badly of it. However, because she is a woman, she believes she would not be on an equal playing field with them if she were to join the military. In her words:

The military would be harder for a woman. If you had a fair advantage from the beginning, both men and women equally, in my opinion that would be different. But seeing that it is just men, I'm like one of the people who think women are probably discriminated against. . . . If you're like one of five women in with a whole bunch of men, there is obviously going to be some sort of harassment. Maybe just harassment like comments from men because that's what they do and that is the way they are. . . . [For women, then] it's a matter of feeling comfortable and how strong you are saying: 'I'm a woman and I'm here too.' I don't think I could do that.

### ***Negative Impressions of the Military***

*Several other young college-oriented women had negative impressions of, or experiences with, the military that preclude any consideration of joining.* One example was a young Hispanic sophomore in college who hopes to become a radiologist. She is the first one in her family to go to college:

My mom and dad never went to college, but they always wanted for us to go. . . . When my brother graduated from high school he didn't want to go. . . . But me . . . I don't want to be stuck in a factory or anything like that.

Her father is a truck driver and is only home on weekends. She lives at home and helps her mom around the house when she is not studying. She does not like military life and never considered joining. When she was in high school, she said, recruiters would call, usually when she was not at home: "Mom would just say the Army called for you, or the Navy. . . . I got stuff in the mail, but I never opened it. . . . I just threw it in the garbage."

Her boyfriend was in the Army. He told her stories about what drill sergeants do to harass recruits and knew it was not for her. Also, she does not think the military treated women and minorities well: "I've read lots of things about . . . the drill sergeant that raped those girls . . . hate crimes . . . I've never really heard anything good about it."

Another bright and ambitious 20-year-old Hispanic woman does not consider herself the type of woman that ends up in the military. She has earned her BA in elementary education, which she describes as her “safety net” because she knows she can get a job. Although she likes teaching, she would like to pursue another career that “is a dream, not something just to maintain” her. She hopes to become a college professor. She is married, but is not planning to have children for a few years.

She talked to an Air Force recruiter when she was in high school. She said he came across as well-mannered and intelligent, though he was not very informative: “He just kind of gave me some papers, told me what it was, and told me I should consider it.” If she had met a female recruiter who “came across the way he did, in a positive light . . . it would have made me consider it more. I would have thought, gee, she’s in it. Maybe I should consider it.”

In general, however, she finds the military unappealing. The military women she has had contact with are not the kind of woman she aspires to become. Some, she said, were “lax with their morals.” Also, she has read that women get raped in the military and higher ranking officers take advantage of them, which “doesn’t make a woman want to run to the Army.”

She thinks men and women have different experiences in the military. The men she knows who served in the Army have “prospered,” but not the women:

A woman has to defend herself a lot more for going into the military than a man. A man is patted on the back for going into the Armed Forces. A woman is questioned. If I were to go to the Army, my family would say ‘why are you doing that?’ But if I just took a job in civilian life, my family wouldn’t question me.

Due to circumstances in her family, another young woman views the military as a negative destination for herself. This 21-year-old college student described herself as “mature enough” to make her own decisions. Her mother, she said, “was just there to support my decisions and kind of guide me along.” She decided that a career that is interesting to her (i.e., merchandising) is more important than money and has set goals for herself in every aspect of life. As an example, she mentioned her plans to get married when she was 32 and have four children.

She described her aversion to the military as a “personal thing” between her and her father. As she explained, her father’s entire family was in the military, and he had always told her that she would amount to nothing if she did not follow suit. She told the in-depth interviewer: “I just hated it! That’s the only way they think they can make it in the world . . . by getting military money, and I don’t want to do that.” When she was in ninth grade she talked to a recruiter, who she “didn’t believe very much.” The reasons were different, but even back then she had not cared about military life, which she associated with

war and living far from home. Also, women do not get the same respect that men get in the military. In her words: “It would take a woman three or four times the work to get the respect a man would get.” Sexual misconduct in the military, she said, is something that should be expected whenever you posted men far away from their families.

### *Ineligible for Military Service*

*Several other young college-oriented women in our sample had asthma and health conditions that preclude any possibility of military service for them.* One young woman in this subgroup was originally a Fence-Sitter that eventually might have joined the military through ROTC had she been able to pass the physical exam. At the time of the in-depth interview, she was a senior in high school who thought she was ready to make her own decisions and her own mistakes. Her father was a career officer in the Army. She grew up moving from one base to another and knows, first-hand, about the stresses and rewards of military life. Overall, her views of the military are positive, but not Pollyannish. The most difficult part was that her mother was often too busy being a “military officer’s wife” to spend much time with her at home. For this reason, when she has children, she would like to be a stay-at-home mom while they are young. She adds: “That’s something that’s important that kinda didn’t happen in my life.”

When she was growing up, she said, she and her father would watch movies about the military and, when they were over, would discuss their accuracy. In this way, she learned about the realities of boot camp, as well as other aspects of the military:

He would say, yes, that’s what boot camp is like. They pretty much want you to get down to the point to see how much you can be pushed. When you come out of there when it’s time to face battle, you cannot be afraid. You have to learn to work with your group and depend on others in your group.

She believes that women in the military “must work harder at what they do than a male to prove themselves.”

She believes strongly that a college education is necessary to get a stable, decent-paying job. “High school education just doesn’t cut it these days,” she said. “You’ll be working your butt off at some job you may not enjoy.” Her father, who offers advice but does not tell her what she should do, agrees. Until recently, she considered joining ROTC to help pay for her education. She met with Army and Marine recruiters who were helpful and not pushy. She took the ASVAB and did well, but ultimately was denied admission because she did not pass the physical. She and her father had taken out loans to finance her education, and it appears unlikely that she will ever join the military.

### *Diffuse Decisionmaking*

Other young women in the Non-Joiner propensity group are diffuse decisionmakers. Like those in the Fence-Sitter propensity group, they do not have a clear vision of what they might do with their lives, do not feel they are prepared to make decisions, or have vague or no ideas about what they might do. The profiles of two young women are illustrative.

A 17-year-old high school senior appears purposive in her approach to the future. She has access to computers at school, and the Internet is a major source of information about possible career options: "I go to school and look on the computer, like on-line, and I get information about how much this certain job pays and what it's going to take. What college courses are needed and stuff like that." She also gets advice and suggestions from her teachers. She gets little input or feedback from her parents who she said "commute 4 hours a day to work and are hardly ever home."

However, she is a dreamer with a lot of ideas, but no clear direction. She wants a career in a field that interests her, pays a decent salary, and will not become obsolete. She loves animals and, since she was young, has dreamed of becoming a zoologist. From the Internet, however, she learned they are not paid well. Computer programmers are well-paid, which means she will have sufficient income to raise any children she might have, but becoming one has never been a dream.

She is "really strong" about not wanting to join the military. Her reasons include fear of war and not wanting to be so far away from her family. In her words:

I don't want to join the military at all! I am really strong about that . . . because I don't want to risk my life to fight somebody or kill people I don't know. . . . I am afraid that like the Army . . . they train you . . . and pay for your college and all that, but then they have you on call and if anything like war breaks out or something and they really need you then you are going to have to go risk your life and leave family behind. I am just afraid of that. . . . Also, it's hard to just be away from family . . . and it's not only affecting [the person who enlists] it affects family members too. I don't want to go overseas . . . you are in a whole different country with different people—I just want to stay in America. Money-wise I don't think it's worth going to war. No matter how much amount of money they could give or offer they can't replace me. Tell my family here's the money, but your daughter is not coming back.

She thinks U.S. involvement in peacekeeping missions or humanitarian efforts overseas is "dumb" since we have so many domestic problems. In her words:

Why should we worry about the starving kids in Ethiopia when there are so many kids here that are starving . . . that are homeless. Why don't we worry about helping us, get our country straight, and help us out instead of wasting all kinds of money to go help other kids when there are kids here that need help? If it was for our country and it would be dealing with here, I wouldn't mind going into it.

Another is a high school senior who does not feel ready to make decisions about her future: “I have no clue. . . . I think I need more self-confidence. I guess God will tell me what He wants me to do, and I won’t fail Him.” She has thought about going to college, but said she could not choose a school because she does not know what she wants to study. She works in the guidance office at her school and found out she had a knack for clerical and secretarial work. When she told her parents, they said “WHAT? You don’t want to be a secretary.” She explained that her mother was a secretary who thought “the pay isn’t good and all the work gets piled on her and she doesn’t get any credit for it.”

Her mother would like her to go into the military because “they would pay for my college and 9 times out of 10, I could get a job when I come out.” She talked to a recruiter, but it “wasn’t a deep discussion” because the military does not appeal to her. Her images of the military have been formed from movies. She said she would not like being away from home and would not like all the running and climbing that they do. She does not have a problem with authority. However, from the movies she has concluded that the yelling of orders is excessive and she thinks this would provoke her to challenge authority.

### *Summary*

- Most Non-Joiners grew up in families that stressed the importance of education; their parents talked to them about college, beginning at early ages. As a result, the largest single cluster of young women in this propensity group were either college-bound or already attending college. Some were from middle-income families. Others from lower-income families said their parents wanted them to go to college and have a better life than they had.
- Most college-oriented Non-Joiners spent 2 or more years thinking about what they were going to do after high school. Like Joiners, they tend to be goal-oriented and, compared to Fence-Sitters and Shifters, have a relatively clear sense of their career interests, strengths, and aspirations. Marriage and family are distant goals and are subordinate to their career goals.
- As a group, Non-Joiners have little information about the military. Those who have discussed it with family or friends have received negative messages about military life. Few had ever talked to a recruiter. Several were aware that recruiters came to their schools, and a few mentioned that because they were college-prep, they were out of the loop. Many said the military is a good option for some young people, but not for them.
- Compared to young women in the other propensity groups, Non-Joiners were more likely to associate the military with “killing and dying.” Several mention that enlistment was never an option due to conflicts between the military and their religious beliefs.
- Compared to other propensity groups, more Non-Joiners said their personalities were not well-suited for the structure and discipline of military life.
- Several Non-Joiners said they never considered the military as an option, in part because they surmised from recruitment ads and news coverage that it is mainly for men. Many believe that men are given more privileges and respect in the military than women.

## **Conclusions: Young Women's Propensity for Joining the Military**

Propensity to join the military is a key concept in the larger YATS effort and, over the years, has provided a reliable measure of trends in youth attitudes toward the military and the characteristics of those who are more or less likely to join. However, the highly structured instrument that is used to achieve these precise estimates of propensity limits exploration of complex factors that may contribute to differences that are observed. This study has used a semi-structured interview guide to explore in greater depth young women's attitudes toward the military and reasons underlying differences in their propensity to join.

Respondents include young women in four propensity groups: Joiners, Shifters, Fence-Sitters, and Non-Joiners. These groupings are based on assessments of information from their responses to questions in the YATS survey and the in-depth interviews.

Joiners are young women whose responses suggested that they would most likely enter the military. Compared to young women in the other groups, a disproportionate number of Joiners grew up in military families or report strong familial ties to the military. Many also participate or have participated in their high schools' Junior ROTC programs. As a result of these associations, Joiners have relatively clear and realistic images of the rewards and challenges of military life.

Most Joiners have put considerable thought into what they would like to do before they graduated from high school. As a group, they tend to be goal-oriented and, compared to those in the Shifter and Fence-Sitter groups, have a relatively clear sense of their career interests, strengths, and aspirations. Many are oriented toward going to college and aspire to enter the military as officers. Marriage and children are distant goals.

Most Joiners are motivated by the military's education and training benefits, steady jobs, and a secure source of income. Very few young women mentioned that they were motivated by patriotism. Most Joiners think women and men have similar opportunities in the military. Assignments and promotions are based on hard work and skills, not gender. Many also believe that gender discrimination is greater in the civilian workforce due to weak systems for accountability and lax enforcement of the law.

Shifters have thought about joining the military, but have decided against it. The largest single cluster of Shifters is composed of young women who are no longer thinking about joining the military because they have formed families or expect to in the near future. Within and across race and ethnic groups, about half of the young women in this propensity group either have a child or are expecting a child. A few of these young mothers are married, but most are not. Several others are married, but are

neither pregnant nor parenting. A smaller cluster of young women in this propensity group decided against the military primarily because they do not want to leave the comfort and security of their hometowns. Several others are highly motivated to join the military, but have health conditions that disqualify them.

Many Shifters have at least one family member who was serving in the military or has served in the past. Compared to Joiners, however, these familial ties to the military tend to be weak. Some mention that family members have actively discouraged them from considering the military. Also compared to Joiners, Shifters have a more jaundiced view of the way women are treated in the military. Overall, they believe that men are treated as superiors and women as inferiors. For most, however, sexual harassment is not any worse in the military than it is in the civilian workforce and, therefore, is not an important factor in their decision to not join the military.

Another common theme among the Shifters is the level of commitment required by the military. Unlike commitments made to employers in the civilian sector, commitments to the military are irrevocable. If they were to enlist, they would be “stuck” for the full-term of their contract whether they loved it or hated it. For some, this possibility is a major factor in their decisions not to join the military.

Fence-Sitters consider the military as an option, but are uncertain. The largest cluster of young women in this propensity group would like to further their education after high school, but are concerned because their families do not have sufficient resources to pay for it. Some of these young women are attracted to the military, at least in part, because it provides skills training and steady work. Others consider it a back-up or last resort if other means for financing their education or training after high school are not available. A smaller cluster of Fence-Sitters do not have any specific plans for the future and do not seem to have sufficient information or motivation to pursue either college or the military. Further, they do not appear to have access to adults who can effectively guide them.

In general, Fence-Sitters did not grow up in families with strong ties to the military. None have participated in high school ROTC programs and only a few report they know anyone who is currently serving in the military or has served in the past. Also, most have little or no contact with recruiters. Those who did have contact, however, described them as persuasive, but not trustworthy.

Non-Joiners are a diverse group of young women who, for the most part, have never considered military Service and appear least likely to join. Many grew up in families that have stressed the importance of higher education for as long as they can remember. As a result, the largest single cluster of young women in this propensity group are either college-bound high school seniors or already

attending college. Some are from middle income families. Others are from lower income families whose parents want them to go to college and have better lives than what they have had.

Most college-oriented Non-Joiners have spent two or more years thinking about what they were going to do after high school. Like Joiners, they tend to be goal-oriented and, compared to Fence-Sitters and Shifters, have a relatively clear sense of their career interests, strengths, and aspirations. A common theme is their desire to remain close to their families and homes after high school. The need to relocate, then, is perceived by them as a major drawback to the military. Marriage and children are distant goals and are subordinate to their career goals.

In general, Non-Joiners have little information about the military. They do not think the military is a viable option for themselves—in part, due to the male orientation of recruiter ads and news coverage. Many believe that men are given more privileges and respect in the military than women. A very small number are aware that recruiters have come to their schools, and a few surmised that because they are college-prep they are out of the loop. Those who have discussed the military with family or friends have received negative messages about military life. Nevertheless, they think the military is a good option for other young people, particularly those who do not know what else they might do with their lives.

Compared to young women in the other propensity groups, Non-Joiners are more likely to associate the military with “killing and dying.” Several mentioned that enlistment has never been an option due to conflicts between their religious beliefs and the military. Also, in contrast to other groups, more Non-Joiners said their personalities are not well-suited for the structure and discipline of military life.

## **Sexual Harassment**

This final section of the chapter presents the young women's perspectives on sexual harassment and how, if at all, it has influenced their attitudes toward the military.

*The largest number of young women in our sample said that harassment issues had no impact on their decisions or preferences for one career over another. For some, harassment is a problem that is beyond their realm of experience and, as a result, they had not thought much about it before their participation in the in-depth interviews. This was especially true among the diffuse and foreclosed decisionmakers in the Fence-Sitter and Non-Joiner propensity groups. One young woman, for example, responded: “Harassment? I don't think about that really.” Another ventured to say that sexual*

harassment is “not good,” but admitted that she has “never really thought about it” since she has not “experienced that” or “seen it face-to-face.”

Another diffuse decisionmaker who said she did not have much to say on the topic suggested that women are somehow in control over whether they are harassed or not. In her words: “Harassment . . . it depends on the woman and how she carries herself.” This belief that women somehow provoke men to harass or mistreat them was a common theme among young women from relatively conservative and traditional cultures. This includes many of those of Mexican descent, as well as the young woman from West Africa.

One Hispanic Joiner thinks some women may invite victimization through their behavior. In her words:

I think it has a lot to do with the woman, by the way she brings out herself. If she brings out herself kind of like she don’t care or whatever, then they’re going to take advantage of her. But if she cares for herself . . . and looks decent, then they’re going to respect that.

A Hispanic Non-Joiner said she never considered the military a respectable place for women such as herself. In her words: “The women that I somewhat come in contact with that have been part of the military haven’t been people that I’ve felt like being like. . . . They’re kind of lax with their morals.”

*College-going and college-bound women acknowledged the pervasiveness of sexism and harassment in the military, as well as civilian workplaces.* In the words of one young woman: “Sexual harassment is an issue in the military, but it’s an issue everywhere.” Another young woman described harassment as a problem for women in both sectors: She said: “Constantly you hear like somebody in the higher [military] office threatens or sexually harasses a female officer. . . . In civilian life it’s the same. . . . I mean the male will always have the upper hand. . . . Mostly it’s a male dominated world.”

Some college-oriented young women believe, however, that sexism and harassment are more prevalent in the military. As one young woman put it: “[sexual harassment] is a little bit more in the military just because of the guys being how they are and they’re just kind of there to give you a hard time about women being there and everything.” As another put it: “You got 20 males to 2 females, and they think that it’s all right to harass them because nobody is going to believe them. They won’t believe a female, or they’ll say she deserved it, or whatever.” A college-going Non-Joiner thought harassment of one sort or another was inevitable in the military:

I’m one of the people who thinks women are probably discriminated against in the military. . . . If you’re like one of five women in with a whole bunch of men there is

obviously going to be some sort of harassment. . . . Maybe just harassment—like comments from men because that's what they do and that is what they are.

This young woman does not think she has the fortitude to tolerate the circumstances of women's lives in the military:

Me, if I were to walk into a group with four other women in it and there were a lot of men, I would feel very uncomfortable. . . . It's a matter of feeling comfortable [in that kind of situation] and how strong you are saying 'I'm a woman and I'm here too . . . .' I don't think I could do that.

Another Non-Joiner echoed her concerns: "The military," she said, "would be a little more intimidating for a woman to go in. . . . There are so many guys . . . and I think if I was interested [in joining] I'd definitely look into sexual harassment." Another college student said if she ever did join the military she would "just have to learn how to defend [herself]."

A young woman, a Shifter, thinks that military life is "a thousand times more comfortable for a man" because he doesn't have to "worry about how am I going to go to work tomorrow and stay away from the sexual harassment that's following me around." Unlike males, she said, women do not have any power or authority in the military. As a result, the problems of gender discrimination and harassment are not addressed adequately:

Instead of once in a while making a big public scene of what they're doing to some guy that was caught harassing they should not let all the other little ones slip. . . . [They need to] really make an effort to make [women] feel comfortable there. It's like the higher up the people are putting it under the rug that they were harassing somebody. Just like making it important to stop harassing female military people. It just really bothers me how once in a while they'll do that just to keep people happy. They need to think it's important to take care of that problem, which I don't think they do.

A Hispanic young woman who hopes to join the National Guard also thought that men in the military are not punished seriously for rape or harassment. She attributes this problem, however, to women who do not speak up. In her words: "A lot of women get raped in the military, but a lot of them get raped and they don't speak up . . . and I guess that's why there's a lot of rapes."

*Although Joiners identify sexual harassment as a problematic issue for women in the military, compared to those in the other propensity groups they appear more prepared to deal with it. As one woman described it:*

Being in the military, you are there to do your job. You aren't there to worry about what other people have to say about you. . . . If it became a really big issue to where it was constant, then I'd say something . . . whoever is in charge I'd let them know. . . . Most likely it wouldn't just be happening to me.

Another young woman thought it was unlikely that she would be sexually harassed, but if it were to happen it would not last for long:

I'm not going to say it probably might happen, but [if it does] I'm not going to let it happen like once and not say anything. As soon as it happens, nip it in the bud . . . I'd probably tell the person that's over my sergeant or whatever.

**Career Plans and Military Propensity of Young Women:  
In-Depth Interviews With 1997 Youth Attitude Tracking Study Respondents**  
*Understanding Women's Propensity*

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## 4. SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

To better understand young people's interest in military service, we have conducted in-depth interviews with carefully selected samples of young men and women. These relatively unstructured conversations complement results from the Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS). For this study, we interviewed 96 young women. We interviewed equal numbers of White, Black, and Hispanic women, and attempted to select subjects with a broad range of current and past interest in military service. We analyzed results by carefully reading and reflecting on verbatim transcripts of the interviews. The analytic procedures conformed to commonly accepted standards of analyzing qualitative data, following an approach that might best be described as a type of inductive grounded theory. Appendix A provides a full description of the study methodology.

The first two sections of this chapter correspond to the previous two chapters. The first section summarizes findings on life planning and career decision-making in general (discussed in Chapter 2); the second section describes findings on propensity to join the military (discussed in Chapter 3).

### **Life Planning and Career Decisionmaking**

From our discussions, we identified six clusters of young women with common approaches to life planning and career decisionmaking. The clusters are defined in the next section. Sections following that discuss factors that define and differentiate women in different clusters and their approach to career decisionmaking: family background and circumstances; readiness to make career decisions; career choices; family plans; and ties to family, friends, and places.

#### *Life Planning Clusters Defined*

Styles of life planning among the young women we interviewed seemed to vary by socioeconomic background, educational and career plans and aspirations, and gender roles. We identified six reasonably distinctive clusters. These include the following:

**Strivers.** Women from families with limited money or education. They are determined to succeed in their careers; they see college education as the means for lifting their social status.

**Middle-Class College-Goers.** Women who grew up in families with at least one college-educated parent. They, too, have high expectations of themselves for both school and career.

**Non-College-Oriented.** Women mostly from working-class or lower-middle-class families who seek careers that require only a year or two at a vocational school or a community college.

**Diffuse Decisionmakers.** Women also from families with limited income and education, who have little sense of where they are going, have unrealistic expectations, or expect direction to come from outside themselves. Some are single mothers expecting a child shortly.

**Striving Single Mothers.** Women who remain focused on career goals despite setbacks or detours necessary to meet their children's needs. Except for their status as single mothers, they might easily be classified as Strivers or Non-College-Oriented women. Only one comes from a middle-class collegeeducated background.

**Young Wives and Mothers.** These women are also from working-class or lower-middle-class families and are centered on marriage and family. They do not aspire to go beyond high school, at least for the foreseeable future. When employed, they work in low-end jobs, as do their husbands.

### *Family Background and Circumstances*

Middle-Class College-Goers young women come from financially stable, college-educated families, unlike the young women in all the other clusters. These middle-class women have always expected to go to college. They expect their parents will at least help finance their education. Their parents are more knowledgeable about career planning, college education, and preparing for professional careers than parents of less privileged young women. Typically, their parents are deeply involved in decisions about finding the right college.

Strivers, determined young academic achievers who hope to raise themselves beyond the family's economic level through education, come from less affluent families. Most would be the first in their families to go to college. Although they often cannot help financially, parents give strong moral support, believing with their daughters that education can provide a better life. These parents help promote a pro-education message that often runs counter to other messages in the wider school and community environment. Some Strivers report support from adult mentors, such as teachers or older relatives, who provide role models, bolster confidence, and furnish information about career paths and possibilities.

Families of the Non-College-Oriented women though of similar parental socioeconomic status, seem not to provide the focused educational support or encouragement that Strivers receive. In fact, many Non-College-Oriented women are diverted from educational progression by their family's needs (e.g., lack of money and need for help in caring for younger siblings).

Diffuse Decisionmakers are also from families of lower socioeconomic and educational status. Compared to those in all other clusters, more come from troubled and divided family situations (involving foster care or estrangement or separation from family members). Even those from intact families tend to lack the same level of family support and encouragement as the Strivers or the Non-College-Oriented. Diffuse Decisionmakers also lack role models for the work world.

The Striving Single Mothers we interviewed have immediate or extended families who assist in child care so they can work and/or go to school. One of these women came from a middle-class family; both her parents had completed college. The family background of others resembled those of Strivers or Non-College-Oriented women.

Young Wives and Mothers, like all but the Middle-Class College-Goers, come from working-class and lower middle-class families with limited education and resources. Those who have remained geographically close to home have maintained strong ties to family.

### ***Readiness for Decisionmaking***

Women in different clusters vary in their evaluation of their readiness to make decisions about their futures. As a rule, Strivers believe in themselves and their decision-making ability, though a few concede that they could use some guidance from others, including family. In contrast, Middle-Class College-Goers are less certain of their decision-making ability and assume the need for guidance. The difference between Strivers and Middle-Class College-Goers seems to be that the latter are more aware of a variety of options, and more realistic about potential obstacles to reaching specific goals.

Non-College-Oriented women typically believe that they have reached the time in their young lives when they *should* make their own decisions, even if that means they will have to experiment and learn from mistakes. Diffuse Decisionmakers, as their cluster name suggests, including those with children, have only vague ideas about what they want to do with their lives. They lack confidence in their ability to make decisions or learn new job-related skills.

Most respondents with children, whether single or married, are making or have made decisions based on perceived family needs. Striving Single Mothers have had to alter goals or defer

career progression to accommodate their children. Thus, while they may be as ready to make decisions as women in other groups, their plans are constrained by their obligations to their children. The Young Wives and Mothers have decided to focus on their families, putting off any thought of career until their children are older.

### *Career Choices*

In choosing a career, women seem more likely than men to consider intrinsic satisfaction, particularly the satisfaction of helping others, over extrinsic rewards (e.g., high salary). However, the choices of many women are limited by their circumstances, and for some, practical considerations at least temporarily take precedence over personal taste.

More than money, most Strivers are looking for a career that allows them the satisfaction of helping others. They aspire to become physicians, lawyers, teachers, and counselors. Many have been set on a particular career choice from an early age, often due to a role model's influence. Like the Strivers, Middle-Class College-Goers hope to do something that will allow them to contribute to society; they envision careers in fields such as social work, medicine, and teaching. Perhaps because they have more information about their options and requirements for different careers, these young women seem slower to select a specific career. Strivers are more likely to say they chose a particular profession at an early age; Middle-Class College-Goers are more likely to say they are still considering various alternatives within a particular professional area.

Striving Single Mothers, on the other hand, are very practical, looking for jobs that require few credentials and allow them hours compatible with child care responsibilities (e.g., in banking). Many also choose careers like nursing because they can begin at a lower level (LPN) and later graduate to a profession (RN). A few non-college-goers have focused on a particular career path, but most take jobs as they present themselves and then build careers around them. Some hope to start businesses in the future but understand little of what that involves.

Diffuse Decisionmakers know little of the world of work in general and what skills they need to perform possible jobs. Their imaginations range over career ideas, but they take no practical steps to prepare them for any one job.

Young Wives and Mothers are deferring any careers (other than that of wife and mother) until their children are older.

### *Family Plans*

Most of the young women we interviewed, regardless of socioeconomic status or college aspirations, want to establish their careers and become financially stable before starting a family. A few Strivers have looked at careers that would mesh with child-rearing, and others suggest that they would be happy living single, if they did not find someone to marry. Several Black and Hispanic Strivers, who expect to be the economic mainstay of their future families, are determined that they and their children will not have to depend on a man for financial support.

The Middle-Class College-Goers, like the Strivers, plan to defer parenting until they can provide for a family and feel secure. Though less oriented towards career goals, the Non-College-Oriented young women also prefer to delay forming a family.

The family plans of Striving Single Mothers vary: some appear to have no contact with their children's fathers, and no plans to marry; others plan to marry. Some Striving Single Mothers get financial and/or emotional support from their child's father; some do not.

True to pattern, the Diffuse Decisionmakers have no clear plans for marriage or family. Those who are expecting a child or already have children did not plan them; they live with relatives and have little or no contact with their children's fathers.

Young Wives and Mothers represent young women who chose not to defer family formation. They maintain more traditional views on marriage and family; their lives center around their families. Most are stay-at-home mothers.

### *Ties to Family, Friends, and Place*

Most of the young women we interviewed, regardless of cluster, have strong ties to home, family, and friends. These social ties significantly affect career development. However, the strength and nature of these ties, and their impact on career development, varies across clusters.

Strivers rely on a strong social network to provide moral and social support in their climb to a successful career and a higher socioeconomic status than their parents, and many of their peers, enjoy. To maintain these ties, they have chosen colleges close to home, often initially 2-year community colleges, sometimes no matter the curriculum. Some Strivers recognize they are only deferring the break from home, that successful realization of their plans will mean eventually having to break away from

family and friends to enter unfamiliar new environments. However, they are uncomfortable with the prospect.

Middle-Class College-Goers are more likely than Strivers to live away from home at college. In selecting a college or university, these women are more likely to consider factors other than proximity to home, such as excellence in a chosen curriculum. Nonetheless, they usually stay in close geographic proximity to home, tend to choose colleges where they have friends, and plan to settle close to family after graduation. For the most part, Middle-Class College-Goers' educational and career options are not hampered by geographic proximity to home.

Diffuse Decisionmakers seem tied to home and familiar places and people because they fear the unknown. This contrasts with Strivers, who seem to rely on social ties to give them the courage or strength to venture into educational and career environments unknown to their family and friends.

Most Non-College-Oriented young women, like Diffuse Decisionmakers, seem unwilling to consider leaving home. In our sample, the exceptions were women considering enlistment. One of these was from a military family.

Young Striving Single Mothers have practical ties to the local support systems that allow them to work or study, secure in the knowledge that their children are well cared for. While all currently live with parents and siblings or other relatives, the White striving single mothers want to establish independent households as soon as is financially feasible. Nevertheless, they want to continue to live in proximity to family members. By contrast, the Black striving single mothers are more willing to continue a network of family interdependence with maternal kin, especially if this will allow them to eventually move to areas with greater educational and career opportunities. Hispanic striving single mothers are most apt to share household and childcare responsibilities with their child's father.

The Young Wives and Mothers, as well, have built their lives in a community of extended family and church connections. Most are living in the communities where they were raised, and do not plan to move. One has moved with her husband to a military base away from home and mainly socializes with fellow church members. Another may move to Latin America with her husband and child, though her family and friends oppose the idea.

### **Interest in Military Service**

Our interviews focused on interest in military service as well as broader considerations of career choices described above. We selected study participants based on current and past interest in

military service: Joiners, Shifters, Fence-Sitters, or Non-Joiners. The next section defines and characterizes each of these groups, providing insight into factors that affect interest in military service. Also covered are responses related to two issues of policy importance. Women's perceptions of recruiters, discussed in Chapter 3, are summarized here, as are their views on gender discrimination and sexual harassment in both civilian and military contexts. Sexual harassment was a major issue in the news in 1997.

Finally, results of this study have clear implications for military recruiting. These implications are covered at the end of this chapter.

### *Salient Characteristics of Propensity Groups*

#### *Joiners*

We have classified as Joiners young women whom we judge, on the basis of these interviews, to be reasonably likely to enter military service. Many of these young women grew up in military families. Based on their own observations plus the advice of family and friends, they are convinced that military service will offer them a good life. They believe this even though, because of their own experience, they have a realistic view of the hardships of separation a military lifestyle can cause—a father away on duty, friends lost to a relocation. What the military offers them above all else is job security and a sense of discipline (something they value to help them grow up and eventually raise strong families).

As a rule, these women are focused, with a clear sense of who they are and what they want to do. Most plan on going to college, then entering the military as officers through the ROTC program. A few will delay their plans due to unforeseen events (death in the family or pregnancy).

#### *Shifters*

Shifters are young women who once considered joining the military but have since changed their minds. Experiences with Junior ROTC or stories from military family members have formed their positive images of a military career. Through military service, they saw a chance for an education leading to a steady job. However, a large proportion have shifted their thinking because they have formed families or expect to in the near future. Likely separation from their child deters young mothers from military service. Moreover, unlike Joiners, they are bothered by the prospect of moving away from

networks of family and friends. Less certain about their commitment to the military, they fear the irrevocable nature of an enlistment contract.

Some Shifters remain highly motivated to join, but have been found ineligible based on physical conditions (e.g., asthma or impaired vision). Some Shifters who are single mothers want to enlist, but are deterred by the requirements for temporarily relinquishing custody of their child to other relatives.

### ***Fence-Sitters***

Fence-Sitters are young women who mention military service as a possible option, but are either uncertain about whether they will pursue it, or say they will pursue it only if other, more attractive options cannot be realized. Many Fence-Sitters see the military as one way to afford a college education that will lead to a steady job. Only a few Fence-Sitters have friends or family who have served in the military. They have little or no contact with and tend to distrust, recruiters

A few Fence-Sitters are Diffuse Decisionmakers who include the military along with many other job options in their vague discussions of what they would like to do with their lives. They like the idea of a regular income, but do not move beyond speculation about this or any other solid career path.

### ***Non-Joiners***

Non-Joiners have little or no interest in joining the military and have very little information about it as a career choice. These women are Strivers or Middle-Class College-Goers who are focused on education. Like Joiners, they tend to be goal-oriented and, compared to Fence-Sitters and Shifters, have a relatively clear sense of their career interests and aspirations. Because of their strong ties to family and home, they see military relocation as a serious drawback. Some are averse to killing and what they see as an overdisciplined way of life. For a few, health considerations would keep them out of the military.

## ***General Issues Affecting Propensity***

### ***Experience with Recruiters***

Exposure to recruiters varies, as might be expected, with current and past interest in military service. Most Joiners and Shifters have talked to recruiters from one or more Services. Fence-sitters

have had little or no contact with recruiters. Typically, Non-Joiners are merely aware that recruiters had visited their school.

Comments from Joiners and Shifters, who have had the most contact with recruiters, are mixed. Some have been pleased in their interaction with recruiters who, while treating them with respect and interest, have given them honest information and allowed them to take their time in making up their minds. These recruiters offer support, keeping in touch and helping the women weigh military options based on strengths. Others are less complimentary, typically reporting that recruiters portray an unrealistically rosy picture of the military. Some simply dismiss recruiters as unrealistic and therefore unbelievable.

A few women said they would have preferred a female recruiter who could speak to women's issues. Reported experiences with female recruiters were generally positive.

### ***Sexism/Sexual Harassment***

In general, those who view a military career in positive terms do not expect to find sexism in the military. Many Joiners, for instance, consider military teamwork a hedge against gender discrimination. Hard work and discipline, not gender, they say, lead to advancement. One Shifter likens the military to a more even playing field because of its rules for competition. As for sexual harassment, most—regardless of cluster—do not believe that it has made a difference in their career choices. Indeed many do not even think much about it. Some more conservative women feel that if harassment or rape do exist, they occur because of inviting female behaviors or men's separation from their wives. Others believe that the media exaggerate the problem.

Although many, especially college-goers, acknowledge that sexism and harassment occur in civilian as well as military life, others insist that both are more pervasive in the military. For the most part, these are the women who are least disposed toward a military career. Backed by recruitment ads, they see the military as a male-dominated "society" that encourages discriminatory acts, both small and large. It is an environment where women must work harder than men to gain respect and prove themselves.

## **Implications for Recruiting**

Young women's strong social ties to family and friends and their preference for "helping" professions, suggest their propensity for military service will remain substantially lower than that of men. However, these facts also suggest things the Services might do if they wanted to more effectively attract

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women to military service. To address the need for social ties, the Services might, in their recruiting efforts, underscore the quick and lasting formation of new friendships in the military. Advertising might also portray visits to home and open communications with family and friends back home.

Addressing the expressed desire of many women to “help”, the Services might stress teamwork, and numerous facets of military occupations in which each Service member helps others. Obviously, training in health professions will be more appealing to women (though stereotyping women as nurses might be unwise). In this regard, it would be helpful for recruiters to be able to sell certain fields of occupations and occupational training.

The Services might also appeal to the strong desire of many young women to achieve financial security and independence, particularly through training and education. Women are attending college at somewhat higher rates than men, so college funds should be at least as attractive to them.

Women differed in their views of recruiters. Generally, they seemed turned off by recruiters who pushed too hard and who painted an unbelievable picture of military service. They were attracted to recruiters they perceived as honest, helpful, and patient.

Most young women expect they will be competitive in the military: that they will be able to perform as required (including physical training and discipline) and that they will not be subjected to sexual harassment or gender-based favoritism. The Services would do well to picture themselves as a structured environment that guarantees all will be treated fairly on the basis of talent and effort.

Veterans seem to have the same influence on young women’s interest in military service as they do on young men’s interest. As the number of veterans among the population is decreasing, the military will need to replace this source of familiarity with military service for males and females alike.

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Appendix A  
Study Methodology

## Appendix B

### Respondent Profile Form

## Appendix C

### 1997 YATS In-Depth Interview Protocol

## Appendix D

Interviewer Instruction Sheet  
For Use With 1997 YATS In-Depth Interview Protocol

## Appendix E

### 1997 YATS In-Depth Interviews With Women: Major Issues/Themes

Appendix F

Call Record

## Appendix G

### Interview Summary Guide

## Appendix H

### Summary of Findings: In-Depth Interviews with Young Men

## APPENDIX A

### STUDY METHODOLOGY

#### **Purpose and Overview of the Study**

The YATS In-Depth Interviews with Women were designed to gain a greater understanding of young women's propensity for military Service than can be derived from standard YATS results. Because the purpose of YATS is to measure year-to-year changes in attitudes, the survey requires very structured questions that do not vary from one respondent to another or from one year to another. Interviewers do not have the latitude to discuss responses to survey questions to gain an "in-depth" understanding of the meaning of responses. The purpose of these followup interviews was to gain that depth of understanding that results from a conversation, rather than a fixed sequence of questions and short answers. In planning the study, we identified two broad areas of investigation:

- The context and process of young women's career decisions; and
- The specific consideration of military enlistment as a career choice.

While our primary interest is consideration of military Service, we felt we could not fully appreciate what we heard about military Service without understanding the context in which it takes place. Thus, we sought first to understand career decision-making in a general sense.

The study was planned as a followup to the 1997 YATS. The 1997 YATS provided a sample of 4,113 young women for which we already had a great deal of relevant information. We limited our selection to those respondents with characteristics of the primary recruiting market: 17-21 year-old females who were either high school seniors or high school graduates. We selected individuals representing different levels of current and past interest in military Service and chose approximately equal numbers of Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics. Furthermore, as data collection proceeded, we monitored the sample to assure no demographic segment (defined by age, race/ethnicity, educational status, employment, and geographic location) was overrepresented at the expense of another. Thus, the sample is "representative" in the sense that it included a broad range of young women from all parts of the United States representing different levels of interest in military Service.

Our flexibility in sample selection was increased by designing the study for telephone rather than in-person interviews. Interviewing a representative sample of YATS respondents, given their geographic dispersion, would have been prohibitively expensive. In the initial study in this series of qualitative studies, documented in "An In-Depth Study of Military Propensity: Followup Interviews with 1995 Youth Attitude Tracking Study Respondents," we initiated the approach of conducting qualitative

## 1997 Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS) In-Depth Interviews with Women *Study Methodology*

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interviews by telephone and followed this methodology in the current study. As in the 1995 study, we were able to establish rapport with and maintain the interest of respondents during a lengthy interview. Respondents willingly completed the entire interview protocol, averaging about 45 minutes.

The following sections describe the study methodology:

- Sample selection;
- Development of the interview protocol;
- Interviewer training;
- Contact procedures;
- Data collection;
- Final disposition of sampled cases; and
- Data analysis.

### Sample Selection

We selected female YATS participants who reflected the full range of interest in military Service within the “prime military recruiting market,” the segment of the youth population that provides most military recruits. In addition to these young women most likely to join the military, we also wanted to include individuals unlikely to join, individuals who had been interested in military Service in the past, but whose likelihood of serving had waned, and individuals who were uncertain about joining the military. Each fall, YATS interviews are completed with approximately 4,000 16-24 year-old women who have no previous military experience. Thus, the 1997 YATS administration provided a list of potential participants who could be classified by propensity and other key demographic variables.

The 1997 female YATS respondents were classified into four propensity groups prior to sample selection. Past research (Stone, Turner, & Wiggins, 1993; Orvis, Gahart, & Ludwig, 1992) shows that likelihood of enlistment is indicated by responses to “unaided” and “aided” propensity questions. We used these questions to classify respondents:

**Q438.** *Now, let’s talk about your plans for the next few years. What do you think you might be doing?*

1. Going to school
2. Working
3. Doing nothing
4. Joining the military/Service
5. Undecided
6. Staying at home

7. Other

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Because Q438 is asked before the interviewer introduces the topic of military Service, respondents saying they might join the military are said to have provided an “unaided” mention of military Service. Enlistment likelihood is also indicated by the following questions:

**Q503.** *Now, I'd like to ask you how likely it is that you will be serving in the military in the next few years. Would you say...*

1. Definitely
2. Probably
3. Probably not
4. Definitely not

**Q510 - Q513.**

*How likely is it that you will be serving on active duty in the [Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force]? Would you say...*

1. Definitely
2. Probably
3. Probably not
4. Definitely not

Q510 - Q513 are asked about each of the Services, in turn. We used the following question to determine past interest in military Service:

**Q525.** *Before we talked today, had you ever considered the possibility of joining the military? Would you say...*

1. You never thought about it
2. You gave it some consideration
3. You gave it serious consideration

Responses to these questions were used to define the four subsets of respondents:

1. **Joiners:** are most likely to join the military. Respondents said they would “definitely” or “probably” be on active duty in at least one of the Services, and said that they had seriously considered military Service prior to the YATS interview<sup>1</sup>.
2. **Non-Joiners:** are least likely to join the military. They did not provide an “unaided” mention of military Service among their military plans, said they had never considered joining, and consistently said they would “probably not” or “definitely not” be on active duty in the military or any of the Services.
3. **Shifters:** are respondents who appeared to have changed their minds about military Service. They said they had seriously considered military Service in the past, but did not provide an “unaided” mention of military Service, and consistently said they would “probably not” or “definitely not” be on active duty in the military or any of the Services.

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<sup>1</sup> Criteria used to define female Joiners differed from criteria used to define male Joiners in the 1995 study. Criteria for male Joiners included an “unaided” mention of military Service among their future plans (Q438=4).

4. **Fence-Sitters:** appear to be ambiguous. They did not provide an “unaided” mention of military Service among their future plans, but said they had given military Service “some” consideration in the past. They include respondents who said they will “probably” or “probably not” be on active duty, but exclude those who provided consistent responses that they will “probably not” or “definitely not” serve.

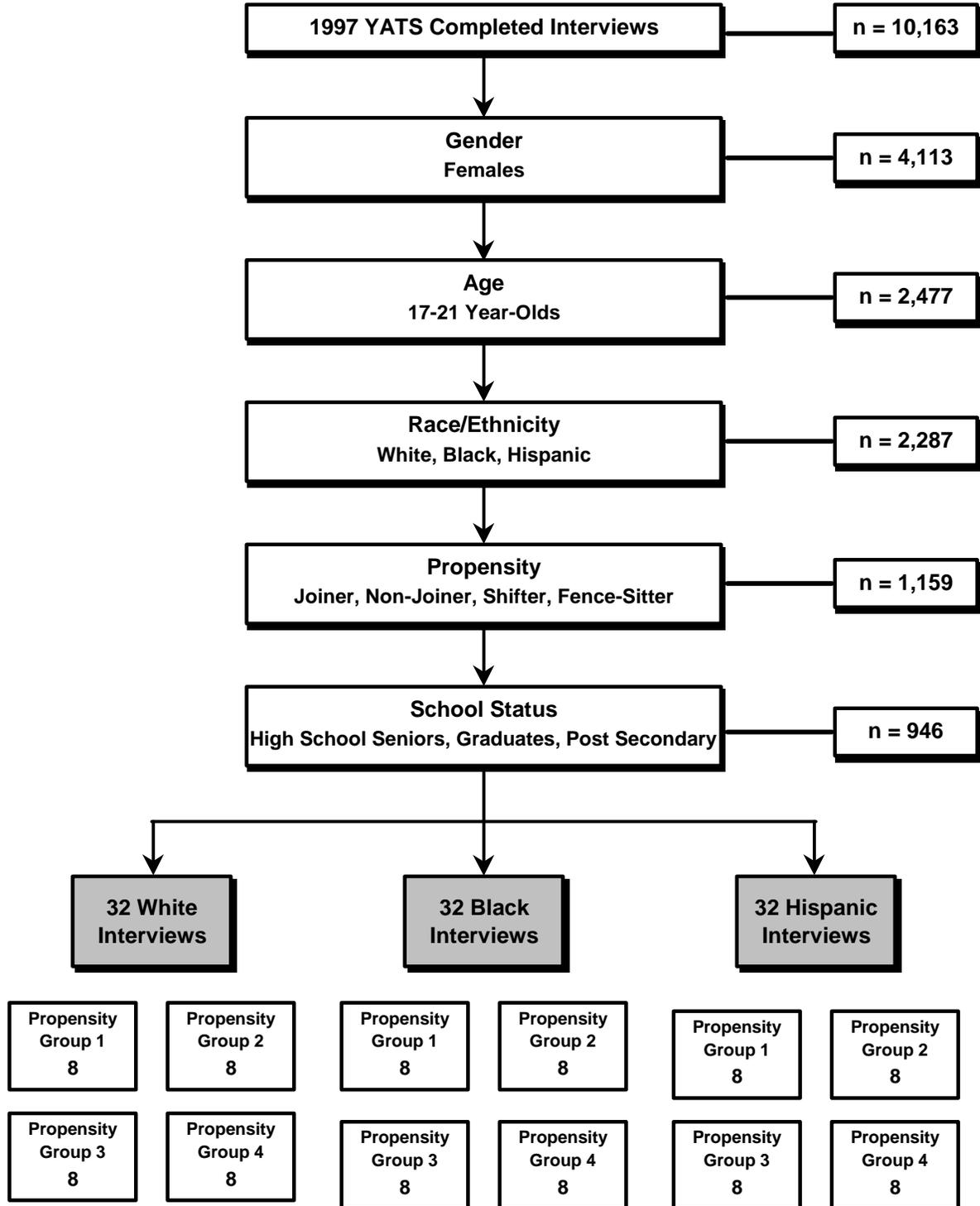
Table A-1 shows more specific definitions of these groups.

<b>Table A-1. Definition of Propensity Groups</b>	
<b>Propensity Group</b>	<b>Inclusion Rule</b>
Joiners	Q525=3 and V438JOIN=1 and CPYATS82=1 or 2
Non-Joiners	Q525=1 and V438JOIN=2 and Q503=3 and CPYATS82=4 <b>OR</b> Q525=1 and V438JOIN=2 and Q503=4 and CPYATS82=3 or 4
Shifters	Q525=3 and V438JOIN=2 and Q503=3 and CPYATS82=4 <b>OR</b> Q525=3 and V438JOIN=2 and Q503=4 and CPYATS82=3 or 4
Fence-Sitters	Q525=2 and V438JOIN=2 and Q503=2 OR 3 and CPYATS82=1 or 2 <b>OR</b> Q525=2 and V438JOIN=2 and Q503=1 OR 2 and CPYATS82=2 or 3
<p><b>V438JOIN</b> equals 1 if the respondent mentioned military Service in Q438; it equals 2 if the respondent did not mention military Service. This qualification was used to define Joiners in the 1995 study, but not in the present study.</p> <p><b>CPYATS82</b> is the minimum value of responses to questions Q510 through Q513. Thus, if a respondent said she would “probably” join the Marine Corps but “probably not” join the Army, Navy, or Air Force, <b>CPYATS82</b> would equal 2.</p>	

Exhibit A-1 provides a flowchart tracing the sample from the 1997 YATS respondent database to the projected in-depth interview respondents. The first several steps applied the eligibility criteria for the 1997 in-depth sample. Several criteria (sex, age, race/ethnicity, and propensity category) were used to define the eligible sample. Of the 10,163 1997 YATS respondents, 4,113 were females, 2,477 of whom were 17-21 year-olds. After the race/ethnicity and propensity criteria were applied, the sample consisted of 946 YATS respondents. The reduction of the sample from 2,477 to 946 members was due primarily to the application of the propensity group criterion. Because Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics make up approximately 96 percent of the YATS population, the application of the race/ethnicity criterion caused only a slight reduction in the number of eligible members. However, only about one-third of the YATS population falls into one of the four propensity groups. Thus, this criterion reduced the sample significantly. Table A-2 shows the 946 sample members categorized by race/ethnicity and propensity group.

Exhibit A-1

1997 YATS IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS SAMPLE SELECTION



Race/Ethnic Group	Propensity Group				Total
	Joiners	Non-Joiners	Shifters	Fence-Sitters	
White	30	583	87	26	726
Black	17	76	24	13	130
Hispanic	8	65	7	10	90
<b>Total</b>	55	724	118	49	<b>946</b>

The next stage of sampling was selection of the sample members for interviewing. The goal of sample selection was not to represent the YATS respondent population, but to yield sufficient numbers of respondents for analysis by important analytic characteristics, such as race/ethnicity and propensity category. Thus, the sampling was not proportional to these characteristics in the YATS population.

Determining the appropriate sample size for this study required significant thought. On the one hand, the analytic methodology required that someone read and assimilate information from many interviews—and there is a natural limit on how much information one can assimilate. On the other hand, we needed to have enough different cases so that we could perceive emerging patterns. Prior to interviewing, we did not know how many interviews would be enough. Based on the results of the 1995 study, when 120 completed interviews were conducted and analyzed, we determined that a slightly smaller number of interviews would be sufficient for this study. Table A-3 shows the number of target sample for the study.

Race/Ethnic Group	Propensity Group				Total
	Joiners	Non-Joiners	Shifters	Fence-Sitters	
White	8	8	8	8	32
Black	8	8	8	8	32
Hispanic	8	8	8	8	32
<b>Total</b>	24	24	24	24	<b>96</b>

In Wave 1 of the sampling, we selected 96 cases: 32 White females, 32 Black females, and 32 Hispanic females. We attempted to select 8 cases within race/ethnicity group for each of the propensity categories. However, the numbers in the Black and Hispanic Joiner categories were insufficient to meet our goal for race/ethnicity representation. We decided to relax the Joiner category criteria in order to increase the number of cases in the sample. The new criteria for the “relaxed” Joiner was Q525=3 and CPYATS82=1 or 2, which removes the requirement for an “unaided” mention of military Service. As

cases were completed or closed out, the sample was supplemented in two additional waves during data collection.

For each sample member, a Respondent Profile Form (see Appendix B) was produced to summarize responses to certain YATS interview questions. Among these were personal characteristics (age, date of birth, state of residence, educational status, work status, and military experience of family members) and responses to questions about military propensity and career plans (intention to join each of the military Services, college, or work plans) and gender issues in the military. Sample members were assigned to interviewers. Initially, all sample members were given equal priority in scheduling interviews. However, as interviews were completed, we monitored the distribution of respondent characteristics with respect to age; educational status (high school senior, high school graduate, or postsecondary student); work status (employed; unemployed, but looking for work; unemployed, but not looking for work); and geographic location. If we were completing interviews with many individuals in one category at the expense of another, we selected subsequent respondents from underrepresented categories. This sample management represented a transition to purposive sampling from the previous stratified random sampling. Purposive sampling preserved the intra-cell diversity of cases that random sampling might not have yielded, given the size of the sample, and ensured the breadth of data required for analysis purposes.

### **Development of the Interview Protocol**

Our initial design efforts in this study focused on identification of research questions that, in turn, would guide the development of both the interview protocol and the design of the sample. Although our primary interest was in the decision to enter military Service (or not to enter military Service), we reasoned that this decision is best understood in the context of career decisions in general. Five broad research questions were established for this study:

- 1. Post-high school career decisions.** In late adolescence, young people may be decided upon their career, or have uncertain or unformed ideas about an initial decision about career direction. Referring to these states as a continuum of the concept, “career maturity,” how does the career maturity of young women influence their attitudes toward and consideration of the military? What kinds of factors influence young women’s planning and decisions about a career (e.g., interest in traditional or nontraditional women’s occupations, current and future family plans)?
- 2. Sources of influence on post-high school career decisions.** What is the process of influence on young women concerning the military? Who and what are the influences (parents, relatives, or acquaintances in the military of different genders or news and current events); what is the nature of the influence (information, guidance, role modeling); and what is the impact on young women’s perceptions about the military?

3. **Propensity and changes in propensity.** What do young women mean by the responses they provide to propensity questions in the YATS questionnaire? Similarly, what do they mean by the reasons given for subsequent changes in propensity?
4. **The military image and life.** What is the image of military Service for young women? What is the meaning and evaluation of the information young women gain about the military from various sources? How do young women's values, career ambitions, and perceptions of the military way of life affect their evaluation of the military as a career choice?
5. **Knowledge of the military.** What specific knowledge do young women have about the enlistment process and military Service? How accurate is this information?

There were several issues concerning military image and life that pertained specifically to young women and military Service. These issues included the following:

- Young women's concern over gender equality and sexual harassment in the military;
- The relationship between women's self-image, values, and role models and interest in the military;
- The relationship of traditional versus nontraditional occupations and interest in the military;
- The relationship between young women's plans for raising a family and interest in the military; and
- The relationship of athletic activities, physical demands of military Service and interest in the military.

Using the research questions as a guide, we designed a 45-minute structured interview protocol for administration by telephone (see Appendix C for a copy of the protocol and Appendix D for the question-by-question guide). The aim of the protocol was to provide a format through which the respondent could reflect on, explore, and describe the story of her career decision-making process with emphasis on how this related to propensity toward the military. As with many important life events, individuals do not think about the thought process they experience as events transpire. Thus, the protocol offered several different entrees to the interview topics so that the youth could respond to points that were most salient to her situation. Some repetition was built into the interview to allow the respondent to return to important points upon reflection or as details were recalled. The protocol was general in content, making it adaptable to different types of careers, different points in the young woman's career decision-making process, and the ability of respondents to articulate the process.

The protocol included sections representing major areas of inquiry, such as influencers on the career-decision process and interest in the military. Topics were organized to follow a natural flow of conversation by introducing more general areas of career choice first, such as current career plans, followed by more specific topics like military propensity. However, if the respondent introduced topics in a

different order, the interviewer followed the respondent's lead. Within sections, the same questions were posed to each respondent. Probes were used liberally to encourage the respondent to expand on her response or to focus the discussion on specific items of interest. The protocol was divided into several sections:

**Section 1—Post-high school career decisions** This section asked the young women about their current involvement in school, work, and other activities. Also, they were asked about the decisions or plans they had made and how far they extended into the future. The interview began with a general discussion of the young woman's current school/work/personal activities. She was asked whether she had made decisions about her future and how far into the future she was planning. Plans for work, school, or military enlistment drawn from YATS responses were explored further, especially with respect to sources of information and influence, the point at which the decision was made, and the concrete steps that were taken toward a goal.

**Section 2—Entering the military.** The YATS responses to questions about intent to enlist were reviewed and we asked whether these views had changed since the YATS survey (or even as a result of participation in the survey). Current intention to join or not join the military were explored from the perspective of how the young woman reached her decision, who influenced her (parents, relatives, friends), the nature of the influence (information, guidance, role modeling), whether and how contact with a recruiter might have affected the decision, and what circumstances might have changed her mind.

**Section 3—Images of the future with military and nonmilitary**The young woman's image of military life was explored and compared with images of postgraduate schooling or civilian jobs. We explored the concept of "military lifestyle" and considered whether and how the young woman believed the military would change her as a person, as compared to how she imagined she would change if she were to enter civilian employment or attend college. Respondents were also questioned about sources of images and information about both military and civilian life, and asked about relatives and friends who were currently serving or had previously served in the military. The circumstances of any recruiter contacts were also recounted.

**Section 4—Accuracy of information.** Short-answer questions were asked at the end of the interview to assess the young women's knowledge about the enlistment process and military Service; military jobs and working conditions; and compensation and benefits, including college tuition benefits, job training, and promotions.

The protocol was reviewed and pretested to ensure that (a) we were covering the intended content, (b) the language was clear and understandable, and (c) the interview had a natural flow.

## **Interviewer Training**

Eight senior and middle-level female researchers conducted the interviews. Prior to data collection each interviewer was provided:

- An overview of the project and its rationale;
- A review of qualitative data collection techniques and how they differ from standard survey interviewing;
- An overview of the structure and rationale of the protocol, as well as a question-by-question review;
- Guidance on smooth handling of flow and question order; and
- A set of questions we expected respondents and their parents might ask about the project along with appropriate answers.

Each interviewer conducted a face-to-face practice interview with a surrogate respondent, which was audiotaped. The project senior scientists reviewed the tapes and provided feedback on technique, including interview flow and probing, and review of the specific intent of questions. After several interviews were completed by each interviewer, the senior scientists also provided additional guidance on the overarching themes of the study (see Appendix E for content). Senior scientists continued to monitor transcripts for quality and consistency throughout the course of the interview process.

## **Contact Procedures**

Sample members were initially contacted by personnel from Westat's Telephone Research Center (TRC). The purpose of the interview, which was to talk again with YATS respondents about their military and career plans in more detail, was explained. Selected respondents were told they would receive a \$15 remuneration for participating in the project after completing the 45-minute interview. (In contrast, youth are given no remuneration for participating in the annual 30-minute YATS interview.) To avoid initial refusals, interviewers explained the importance of the interview and, if the respondent was busy or could not make an immediate interview appointment, offered to call back at another time. However, if the interviewer believed that a refusal to participate was firm and the respondent would not agree to participate at a later date, they thanked the respondent and did not recontact her. The TRC interviewers set a specific date and time with the respondent for the interview. For respondents under age 18, we assumed permission if a parent or other adult did not refuse the respondent's participation in the interview. In scheduling, a minimum of 1 hour was left free between interviews to provide time for the interviewers to summarize the interview. The TRC interviewer also called the sample member the day before the appointment time to remind her of the appointment day and time.

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A call record was kept for each sample member (see Appendix F). The call record listed all call attempts and dispositions until the interview was completed or the case was finalized.

Prior to any telephone contact, specific guidelines were established to define the level of effort to expend in contacting sample members:

- **Call attempts.** A maximum of seven attempts were made to reach anyone at the given telephone number. The seven attempts were placed over different “time slices”: two daytime, three evening, and two weekend (one Saturday and one Sunday). Unsuccessful call attempts were coded as either “ring, no answer;” answering machine; or busy signal. (A message about the study was left on answering machines, but a return call was not requested.)
- **Household contacts.** After it was determined that the telephone number was a working number and someone in the household verified that the respondent was at that location, the maximum number of contacts attempted to reach the respondent was set at five.
- **Broken appointments.** The maximum number of appointments made and broken by the sampled respondent was set at three.

If the maximum number of calls was reached in any category, the case was closed.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection began on December 18, 1997 and was completed on March 31, 1998.

Interviews were conducted at the convenience of the respondent. For the majority of the interviews, interviewers were matched to participants by race/ethnicity. The majority of Black respondents were interviewed by one of two Black interviewers; Hispanic respondents were interviewed by a Hispanic woman or by a White, Spanish-speaking interviewer. Interviews with Hispanic women were conducted in English, although the interviewers spoke occasionally in Spanish, particularly to clarify issues with other family members. Interviewers completed a summary form (see Appendix G) immediately after each interview. All interviews were voluntarily taped, and each interview was transcribed verbatim.

The number of completed interviews by race/ethnicity and propensity groups are shown in Table A-4.

Race/Ethnicity Group	Propensity Group				Total
	Joiners	Non-Joiners	Shifters	Fence-Sitters	
White	10	5	9	8	32
Black	8	8	7	9	32
Hispanic	4	15	6	7	32
<b>Total</b>	22	28	22	24	<b>96</b>

### Final Disposition of Sampled Cases

The final disposition of the sampled cases is shown in Table A-5.

Result	Race/Ethnicity and Propensity Group												Total
	White				Black				Hispanic				
	J	NJ	S	FS	J	NJ	S	FS	J	NJ	S	FS	
Completes	10	5	9	8	8	8	7	9	4	15	6	7	96
Refusals	2	11	2	0	3	1	2	0	1	8	0	0	30
Maximum broken appts.	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	6
Maximum calls	1	1	1	0	0	0	4	0	1	1	0	1	10
Nonlocatable	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	3
Nonworking	0	1	0	1	1	3	1	1	0	1	0	2	11
Cases converted from interim to complete at study end	0	1	1	0	1	1	4	0	0	1	0	0	9
<b>Total</b>	14	20	14	12	13	13	18	10	7	28	6	10	<b>165</b>

J = Joiners      NJ = Non-Joiners      S = Shifters      FS = Fence-Sitters

All 165 cases were contacted. Of the 102 cases who agreed to be interviewed (completed cases plus maximum broken appointments), 96 interviews were completed. At the end of the study, 9 cases were converted from interim status (still to be or already scheduled for interviews) to final status. The overall refusal rate was approximately 22 percent (36 cases—refusals plus maximum broken appointments). Refusal rates differed by race/ethnicity group. For White respondents, the refusal rate was approximately 32 percent (19 cases); for Blacks, 11 percent (6 cases); and for Hispanics, 22 percent (11 cases). The overall rate of nonlocatable, nonworking numbers, or maximum calls to the household to locate the respondent was approximately 15 percent (24 cases). Differences by race/ethnicity were smaller

for this category: 12 percent for White respondents (7 cases); 19 percent for Blacks (10 cases); and 14 percent for Hispanics (7 cases).

### **Data Analysis**

Two project senior scientists took the lead in conducting data analysis. During the course of data collection, the two primary data analysts, both of whom also conducted interviews, selectively reviewed transcripts as they were completed to begin to get a feel for the data. They also met with other interviewers several times during the course of data collection to discuss themes emerging from the interviews. Interviewers were asked to review the draft study report and provide any comments from their perspectives.

Our analytic procedures conformed to commonly accepted standards for analyzing qualitative data, following an approach that might best be described as a type of inductive grounded theory. The concept of grounded theory was first introduced by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in their 1967 book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, and more recently elaborated by Strauss and Corbin (1990):

“A grounded theory is...inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents...it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon...One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that phenomenon is allowed to emerge.” (p.23)

Following the grounded theory approach, emerging insights and hypotheses on decision-making processes and styles were checked and rechecked in subsequent, iterative reading of critical portions of the transcripts. Although inductive in the sense of not following a hypothesis-testing mode, the analytic process was not theoretically “naive” insofar as our research questions were informed by knowledge of relevant concepts and theories of late-adolescent development and career choice. In conducting the analysis, there was no substitute for the actual text of the transcripts. However, the interviewers’ summaries of individual interviews were also helpful in guiding the analysis, especially in identifying specific cases for closer scrutiny.

The two senior scientists shared the main work of analysis, working collaboratively and in iterative stages. Both analysts maintained a complete set of all transcripts. Initially, each took primary responsibility for answering specific clusters of research questions. One analyst reviewed the transcripts with an emphasis on identifying major themes and patterns associated with the research questions focusing on the young women’s decision-making processes and styles. The transcripts were examined both for general flavor and tone and to discern systematic regularities and variations by factors likely to influence

decision-making. These factors included age, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, educational status, region, and urban versus rural residence, as well as other factors that proved important in differentiating the responses.

In parallel, the other analyst also reviewed the transcripts, but emphasized detection of themes and patterns related to the research questions that explored the meanings of and variations in military propensity. She, too, sought to discern systematic regularities in patterns of response and to ascertain factors or sets of factors to which they seemed to correspond. Analysis centered on systematically “unpacking” the meanings of propensity and identifying distinct configurations of images, social and informational bases, and interpretations of military and civilian life associated with the different propensity groups.

Once each analyst had systematically examined the data with an eye toward answering her specific set of research questions, the two analysts met to discuss the results. The two analysts also shared the highlights of their initial discussions with other senior project staff and the Project Officer and sought additional feedback and further points for clarification.

Having two experienced analysts scrutinize the data independently allowed for fruitful dialogue, cross-verification, and cross-fertilization. One analyst could see emergent themes that the other might miss, or may detect patterns that could be cross-checked with the other analyst. Each analyst eventually served as a check on, and a stimulus to, the other in developing, testing and clarifying ideas. Moreover, because the analysis were examining the same data with complementary but different analytic aims, the same or similar factors could emerge as important both for understanding the data on decision-making and for defining meaningful patterns of military propensity. Through this collaboration, the analysis process was enriched and deepened.



**APPENDIX B**

**1997 Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS) In-Depth Interviews with Women**  
*Study Methodology*

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## APPENDIX C

## 1997 YATS IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

*Hello, my name is (first name only) and I'm calling from Westat on behalf of the Department of Defense. Several weeks/months ago (insert specific time reference) you responded to a survey that asked your opinions about the military and your career plans. To get a better understanding of the career plans of young people, we are calling back some of the people we surveyed to speak with them again in more detail. You have been selected to participate in this effort. This is a very different type of interview—instead of having set answers, you will have the chance to do most of the talking and express your thoughts and opinions on the questions we ask. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential; no one but our research staff will be able to identify who said what. The interview will take about 40 to 45 minutes, and will be tape recorded to help us take better notes. And we will be sending you \$15 as a thank you for helping us with this study. I will ask you for your address at the end of the interview.*

**I. Post-High School Career Decision**

*Right now you are at a point in your life when you are deciding your plans for the future. The next several questions explore how and why you are making choices about what you will do in the next few years. It is very important for you to understand that there are no right or wrong answers. Different people are very different in how they think about their plans for the future. We want to understand your views and opinions on this subject.*

1. The information we have about you from the survey is pretty basic. **(Fill in with biodata from Respondent Profile Form.)** Could you tell me a little bit more about yourself? [IF NEEDED, PROBE ON SPECIFICS SUCH AS YEAR IN SCHOOL, HOW SPENDS TIME, INTERESTS, PART-TIME OR FULL-TIME JOBS.]

**1997 Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS) In-Depth Interviews with Women**  
***Study Methodology***

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2. Sometimes young people yourage feel they are at a good point in their lives to make good decisions about future plans. Others may feel they are not yet ready. Doyou feel you are now ready to make good decisions about what you will be doing in the next few years? Can you tell me why, or why not?
  - 2a. If you believe you are NOT now ready, what more would you need toknow or do before you would feel more confident about making these kinds of choices?
  
3. People can also be very different in how far in thefuture they are looking as they make their plans. How far in the future are you looking as you make choices about what you will be doing?

4a. When we talked to you before, you said in the next few years you might be:

1. Activity 1: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Activity 2: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Activity 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you still plan to be doing these things?

4b. Would you tell me more about these things you said you might be doing? First, let's talk about **(Activity #1)**? **(Activity #2)**? Finally, **(Activity #3)**? [PROBE ON WHO R TALKED WITH, DECIDING FACTORS, CONCRETE STEPS TAKEN, PERCEIVED LIKELIHOOD WILL PURSUE, PREFERENCES FOR ONE OVER OTHER.]

**(If not already addressed)** How, if at all, has your (current family situation/any plans you may have for having a family in the future) influenced your decisions about pursuing these activities?

1997 Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS) In-Depth Interviews with Women  
*Study Methodology*

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- 4c. Would you say a little about what made you change your mind about this since the survey? What are the things you now think you might be doing in the next few years? Why?

Activity 1 = \_\_\_\_\_

Activity 2 = \_\_\_\_\_

Activity 3 = \_\_\_\_\_

Would you tell me more about these things you now say you might be doing? First, lets talk about (Activity #1 (as named above?) Activity #2 (as named above)? Activity 3 (As named above?). [PROBE ON WHO R TALKED WITH, DECIDING FACTORS, CONCRETE STEPS TAKEN, PERCEIVED LIKELIHOOD WILL PURSUE, PREFERENCES FOR ONE OVER OTHER.]

**(If not already addressed)** How, if at all, has (your current family situation/any plans you may have for having a family in the future) influenced your decisions about pursuing these activities?

## II. Entering the Military

*The questions we just discussed were fairly general. Now, we will talk more specifically about reasons why you might or might not join the military in the next few years*

5. When we spoke with you before, you said you would **(definitely, probably, probably not or definitely not)** be serving in the military in the next few years. Would you respond in the same way today?

- 5a. How have your views on joining the military changed? Why?

Have you come to these views mostly on your own, or have other people influenced you? If so, who and how?

- 6a. You seem quite definite about **(joining/not joining)** the military. What makes you so definite?

Have you come to these views mostly on your own, or have other people influenced you? If so, who and how?

What (if anything) might make you change your mind?

**1997 Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS) In-Depth Interviews with Women**  
***Study Methodology***

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- 6b. Answering that you would (**probably/probably not**) enter the military seems to indicate that you are leaning in that direction, but have not yet completely decided. Does this accurately describe your answer?

What is your main reason for giving this answer?

Have you come to this view mostly on your own, or have others influenced you? If so, who and how?

What circumstances/factors would be likely to “swing” your decision one way or the other?

- 6c. You said on the survey you would definitely not be joining the military, but at some point in the past had seriously considered it. When was it that you seriously considered enlisting?

What made you decide you would definitely not enlist?

Are these the same reasons you would give now for why you will not enlist?

Have you come to these views mostly on your own, or have others influenced you? If so, who and how?

Can you foresee something happening to change your mind about this?

- 7a. When we talked with you on the survey how much thought had you given to whether you would serve in the military?

What kinds of things, if any, had you considered? [PROBE ON WHETHER PRIOR TO SURVEY HAD SPOKEN TO ANYONE/SOUGHT INFORMATION RE: MILITARY, WHO, AND WITH WHAT EFFECT, MEDIA EXPOSURE.]

- 7b. Since we talked with you, have you thought any more about whether you might enter the military?

Have you spoken to anyone or obtained additional information on the subject [PROBE ON WHOM AND WHAT INFORMATION.]

Was it your own idea to get more information, or did someone encourage you? Discourage you? Who and why?



- 10a. Where would you say you get most of your ideas about what military life is like? [PROBE ON WHETHER MOVIES, TV, PRINT MEDIA, PEERS, FAMILY, RECRUITERS, ADVERTISING. PROBE ON WHETHER R THINKS IS AN ACCURATE PICTURE OF MILITARY TODAY.] How would you say they have influenced your views?

- 10b. What about your ideas about what it is like to be going to school, working? [PROBE ON WHETHER R THINKS IS AN ACCURATE PICTURE OF GOING TO SCHOOL/WORK ENVIRONMENT.]

**1997 Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS) In-Depth Interviews with Women**  
**Study Methodology**

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- 10c. **(If not already addressed)** Do you know anyone now serving in any branch of the military? Who/which branch?

Have you talked to this person about what life in the military is like? If not, why not? If so, what did they say, and how did it influence your views?

- 10d. **(If not already addressed)** Do you know anyone who used to serve in any branch of the military? Who/which branch?

Have you talked to this person/these people about what military life was like? What did they say, and how did it influence your views?

- 10e. **(If not already addressed)** Have you had contact with a military recruiter? What was it like? [PROBE ON HOW CAME ABOUT, SETTING(S), IMPRESSIONS, HOW AFFECTED VIEW ON MILITARY.]

11a. For you, what are the two most important ways being in the military would be different from holding a civilian job or going to school? [PROBE ON WHETHER R CONSIDERS THESE DIFFERENCES WOULD STAY THE SAME OR CHANGE OVER TIME.]

11b. What do you think would be the main advantages of a military lifestyle for you?

11c. What do you think would be the main disadvantages of a military lifestyle, for you? [IF ISSUE OF DANGER HAS NOT YET BEEN RAISED, PROBE ON WHETHER AND HOW RESPONDENT SEES DANGER AS AN ISSUE.]

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**Study Methodology**

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12. Some people think the military experience is different for young men and young women of similar abilities. Others think the military experience is pretty much the same for young men and young women of similar abilities. Which would you say is closer to your own view? Can you tell me more about why you think this? [PROBE ON VIEWS/DEFINITIONS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT, VIEWS OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN TO GET AHEAD, AND PHYSICAL DEMANDS OF THE MILITARY.]

Would you say this would also apply to you personally? Why/why not?

**[If not already addressed]**

Would you say these same differences (or lack of differences) between young men and young women of similar abilities would also apply in civilian life? Why/why not? [PROBE ON BOTH SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES.]

13. Do you think being in the military in the next few years would change you as a young woman? How?

How do you think this would compare to how you would change as a young woman if you went to school/worked in a civilian job?

Does one or the other better fit with your idea of the kind of woman you'd like to be?

**1997 Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS) In-Depth Interviews with Women**  
***Study Methodology***

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14. Over the past few years, the U.S. military has become more involved in keeping the peace in foreign countries, such as Bosnia and Somalia. How, if at all, has this affected your views toward joining the military?



**1997 Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS) In-Depth Interviews with Women**  
***Study Methodology***

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21. Can women become military pilots?

22. Can women serve in ground forces in combat?

*In closing, I would like to ask one last question.*

23. In your opinion, what (if anything) could the military do to make enlisting more attractive to young women like yourself?

*That completes the interview. Thanks so much for talking with me today. You have been a big help! I will need to get your name and mailing address to send you the \$15 check for helping us with this study.*

## APPENDIX D

**INTERVIEWER INSTRUCTION SHEET  
FOR USE WITH 1997 YATS IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

In the guide: *Suggested phrasings are in italics*, [PROBES ARE IN CAPITALS AND PARENTHESES], **and instructions are in bold**.

*Introductory Statement: This statement does not need to be read verbatim. If you feel more comfortable, you can put it in your own words, as long as you convey the key points. The same holds for the suggested dialogue in italics at the beginning of each section of the guide.*

**I. Post-High School Career Decision**

1. This question is intended mostly as an ice-breaker. **You can prepare for it by familiarizing yourself with the relevant data items in the General Information section of the Respondent Profile Form, and filling these in prior to the interview.** This information will be used in probing, especially if the respondent is reticent. For example, information on sports involvement, volunteer work, part-time jobs that lead to future careers, family plans or status, can all be used in later questions.

2. This question asks about how ready the respondent feels she is to make good decisions about her future. It has been phrased to give her permission to acknowledge that she may not feel ready to make good decisions. The important point is to try to understand why the respondent does or does not feel she is at a good point to make good decisions.

You should ask Q2a only if the respondent says she does NOT feel she is at a good point to make decisions.

3. This question asks about how far in the future the young woman is looking as she makes her plans.

- 4a. **BEFORE YOU BEGIN THE INTERVIEW, fill out the blanks in this question with up to three activities listed as Plans After HS/Next Few Years on the Respondent Profile Form.** If there are only one or two activities listed, go with those. If there are more than three, list the first three.

Occasionally, you may find very nebulous or vague (Doing Nothing, Undecided, Staying at Home) or Don't Know responses. Instead of saying, "You said you would be doing nothing," rephrase the question as something like "Your survey answers suggest you were uncertain about what you might be doing. Do you still feel this way?" **If the respondent does still feel uncertain, probe as to why. If the respondent can now specify some likely activities, go to Q4c.**

**If the respondent answers that the YATS responses are more or less correct, go on to Q4b, which now has two parts and then to Q5.**

**If the respondent has changed her mind since YATS, go to Q4c, which now has two parts.**

**1997 Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS) In-Depth Interviews with Women**  
**Study Methodology**

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- 4b. Ask this question, in turn, for each of the activities listed in Q4a. You may discover that after discussing one activity, you've pretty much found out about the respondent's plans and the considerations she's weighing about what she'll be doing. In that case, there is no need to repeat the sequence mechanically for each activity. You may also find that you don't need to go into as much depth in talking about the second and third activities.

The following issues are important to what we want to know, and may be used as probes to stimulate discussion:

- **Who youth talked to about doing this (including gender of person), what person said, what was most important in deciding, other information (if any) sought/used;**
- **When she decided to do it, whether wavered/changed mind at all in course of making up her mind;**
- **Concrete steps (if any) taken to followup decision (writing for catalogues, requesting more information, applications, etc.);**
- **How likely she will actually be doing this, factors that might affect whether she does it (including future plans for family); and**
- **Whether she prefers this to other activities, anticipates doing other things concurrently.**

We are also interested in whether the respondent is considering traditional or nontraditional jobs, and how present or future family plans fit into her thinking. This interest is now reflected in the addition of a new sub-question if the respondent has not yet addressed the issue of current or future family plans.

- 4c. **This question is for respondents who have changed their minds since YATS.** We want to know, first, what made her change her mind. **After that, treat the question just like Q4b** and talk about up to three key activities the respondent now plans to pursue. Please note the addition of a sub-question on the influences of current family status or future family plans, which should be asked if the respondent has not yet addressed these issues. **Then go to Q5.**

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## II. Entering the Military

This section focuses more specifically on reasons for joining, or not joining, the military. If joining the military was one of the activities discussed in Q4b or Q4c, use the information you gained to expand on the discussion here, so it does not sound as though you are asking the same thing all over again.

5. This is a lead-in to Q6, based on how definite the respondent seemed in YATS about her intentions to join or not join the military. **BEFORE beginning the interview, please circle the appropriate response for General Military Propensity from the Respondent Profile Form.** The respondent very well may have changed her mind since then. The intent is not to “nail” her to a given response, but to explore both the firmness of her views on this subject, and the reasons for holding them. There are several possible sequences that can be followed:

If the respondent **HAS CHANGED HER MIND SINCE YATS**, go to Q5a.

If **NO CHANGE SINCE YATS**, then go to Q6a, Q6b, or Q6c depending on the respondent’s General Military Propensity, as well as her answer to whether she had given previous consideration to joining, as shown on the Respondent Profile Form.

**Go to Q6a if answered definitely or definitely not on general propensity and had not previously considered enlisting.**

**Go to Q6b if answered probably or probably not on general propensity.**

**Go to Q6c if answered definitely not and had previously considered enlisting.**

6. Q6a through Q6c are designed to probe the basis for and influences on the respondent’s views toward enlistment and how firm she feels her current stance is. In discussing this, refer to the Specific Military Propensities, as shown on the Respondent Profile Form. Be sure to identify the gender of persons influencing these views if not apparent from the response.
7. Q7a and 7b explore the impact (if any) of participation in YATS on the respondents plans and actions. Again, be sure to ascertain the gender of anyone with whom the respondent spoke, if not obvious.

### III. Images of the Future-Military and Non-Military

These questions explore the respondent's ideas about and images of life in the military as compared to life in the civilian world, and the sources of these views.

**If the respondent indicated in Section II that she would definitely or probably join the military, go first to Q8, then Q9.**

**If respondent indicated she would definitely not or probably not join, go first to Q9, then Q8.**

**Don't forget to ask both questions of all respondents.**

8. This question asks the respondent to talk about what she thinks life in the military would be like and whether it would change over time. If she seems to have only a very vague idea, you can use the probes to stimulate discussion.
9. This question asks about the respondent's views of what life would be like working or going to school. **You should ask about the activity from Section I she indicated she would be most likely to pursue in the next several years.**
- 10a. This question asks about the sources of the respondent's ideas and images of military life. **For the "personal" sources, you should probe on personal contacts with peers, family, or recruiters, and the gender of the source. We are particularly interested in whether perceptions of military Service come primarily from men. For the "impersonal" sources, you should probe on sources such as media or advertising. We are also interested how accurate a picture she thinks this presents of military life today.**
- 10b. In parallel fashion, this question asks about the sources of the respondent's images of working or going to school and whether she thinks this is an accurate picture of what going to school or working would be like.

**Both Q10a and Q10b should be asked of all respondents.**

**Q10c, d and e need to be asked only if the respondent has not already indicated:**

- Q10c. whether she knows/has spoken with someone now serving in the military/the nature of any discussions and impressions;**
- Q10d. whether she knows/has spoken with someone who previously served/the nature of any discussions and impressions; and**
- Q10e. whether she has had contact with a recruiter and what that was like.**

- NB: Q11, Q12, and Q13 ask the respondent to engage in more contemplation and synthesis than the previous questions. **The respondent may need a few minutes to collect her thoughts before responding to any or all of these questions. Be sure to give her permission to do this.** If she hesitates or says “Gosh, I don’t know,” you might say “I realize this isn’t an easy question to answer. Why don’t I give you a few minutes to think about it some more?” If she is still hesitant, try using what she already said in earlier questions to open the discussion.
- 11a. This question explores the respondent’s perceptions of the two most important ways that for her, personally, being in the military would be different than holding a civilian job or going to school. If she feels she is different than her peers in this respect, ask her to clarify why. The object is to get beyond generalities on lifestyle differences to a more personal assessment. We are also interested in the respondent’s views on whether these differences between civilian and military life would persist over time.
- 11b. **If it is not immediately apparent whether the respondent considers the differences named in Q11a advantages or disadvantages, then ask Q11b and Q11c as shown. If it is clear, use the respondent’s answers to Q11a to clarify and lead into Q11b and c. For example:** “It seems you consider  $x$  and  $y$  as disadvantages of a military life. Are there any advantages that you can see for yourself to a military life?”
- 11c. Probe on whether danger is a consideration (presumably a disadvantage).

**[NOTE: Question renumbered and changed]**

12. This question asks whether the respondent thinks that the military experience is different or the same for young men and young women of similar abilities. For some respondents who are able to engage in more abstract hypothetical thinking, you might try posing it as “Suppose you have a twin brother who was very similar to you in interests and abilities. Do you think the experience of military life would be the same for him as for you?” This is one question for which we do want to be sure to know how the respondent sees herself, personally, as fitting in with these issues. This is reflected in the sub-question which asks if these views also apply to her, personally, and why or why not. Ask the sub-question if you have gotten a general answer about differences and are not sure if she sees these as applying specifically to herself.

**If the respondent has not raised any gender-related concerns to date, this is the place to probe on whether she sees any differences in the experience of military life that are related to gender. If you haven’t already used this information—especially if the respondent seems “stuck”—this would be a good place to bring in the YATS responses shown in the Gender Issues section of the Respondent Profile Form.**

More specifically, we are especially interested in whether she sees sexual harassment as an issue of concern, and also how she defines it, as well as whether she thinks sexual harassment is as much of an issue in the civilian world. This is reflected in the addition of a second sub-question.

We also would like the respondent to compare any gender-related concerns about military jobs to civilian jobs and would like to know the source of her opinions in this area—personal contacts, news, etc.

We also are interested in whether the respondent believes young men and young women have the same opportunities to advance in the military. If it is suggested that men have more opportunities in the military, we want to know whether this is seen as the result of prejudicial attitudes and policies, rather than a natural consequence of the nature of military life and activities. If “equal opportunities” are not mentioned, and have not come up in the interview so far, we need to raise the issue. In any case, we want to know the basis of the respondent’s opinions on this issue—personal contacts, news, etc. In this effort, of course, we are trying to find out what the respondent is thinking, not induce a rationale where none exists. If the respondent hasn’t really given these issues any thought, that’s what we want to know. Again, as reflected in the second sub-question, we want to know how she sees the military as compared to the civilian work world in this respect.

We also want to probe on whether the respondent feels the physical requirements of basic training and the physical demands of military life test her ability as opposed to simply being distasteful. This could be related to any athletic/activities in which she may have participated.

Other requirements of military life (e.g., having to leave home, wear uniforms) may also be probed.

13. **[NOTE: Question renumbered and changed]** This question asks how the respondent thinks she would change as a young woman if she were to enter the military as compared to how she believes she would change as a young woman if she were to enter the civilian world.

The third part of the question asks which of the two (military or civilian) better fits her idea of the kind of woman she would like to be.

14. **[NOTE: New question]** This question, the last in this section of the interview, asks the respondent whether the U.S. military’s recent move toward greater involvement in foreign peace-keeping operations has influenced her views toward joining the military [**This question replaces the earlier probes on this topic in Q11c.**]

**IV. Accuracy of Information**

15-22. These questions should not be approached as a test of the respondent's knowledge, but rather as a test of the military's effectiveness in communicating information to youth.

**If the respondent says she does not know the answer, ask "Can you give me your best guess?"**

23. Final question: This question asks the respondent to consider what the military could do to make enlistment more attractive to young women like herself.

Closing: Remember to ask the respondent her name and mailing address for mailing the \$15 incentive check to her.



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**APPENDIX E****1997 YATS IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH WOMEN****MAJOR ISSUES/THEMES**

The following are major issues/themes that run through multiple questions in the interview. As we discussed on Monday, the purpose of the list is to help us listen to what the young women are telling us and to recognize when they are talking about an issue or providing a perspective that is especially germane to our study. We suggest you review these before each interview (in the beginning at least).

- **Family Plans**

Whether and how marriage and/or parenting issues influence education and career plans or preferences (military and non-military)—past, present & future.

- **Gender Issues**

- Sexual harassment in the military v. civilian life
- Opportunities for women in the military v. civilian life
- Physical demands on women in the military

- **Significant Influences on Decisions/Perspectives**

People

- Relationship of person to respondent (e.g., parent, sibling, other relative, teacher, recruiter...)
- Gender of that person
- How influenced

Media

- Source of influence (e.g., newspapers, TV, movies, internet, books...)
- Type of information (e.g., current events, advertisements, images from movies)
- How influenced

- **Changes Over Time**

- **Respondent's Perspective and Experiences**

We are most interested in what the respondent herself thinks and what her experiences have been. For those who speak very generally—e.g., “People my age don’t like discipline”—acknowledge their response and then ask something like “Well how do you feel about that?” or “What’s your opinion about that?”

**1997 Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS) In-Depth Interviews with Women**  
*Major Issues/Themes*

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1997 Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS) In-Depth Interviews with Women  
*Call Record*

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**APPENDIX G**  
**INTERVIEW SUMMARY GUIDE**

Each interview will be summarized immediately after completion by the interviewer using the following format.

**SUMMARY FORM**

**YATS QUALITATIVE FOLLOWUP SURVEY**

*Please complete this summary form as soon as possible after the interview.*

**Name of Respondent**

**CASE ID**

**Address of Respondent**

**Date and Time of Interview**

- S1.** Briefly summarize your overall impressions of how the interview went.
- S2.** Based on the interview, would you still characterize the respondent as a (Joiner, Non-Joiner, Shifter, Fence-Sitter)? What were the central themes expressed with respect to joining the military/images of military life?
- S3.** In a nutshell, how would you describe the respondent's overall approach to making decisions about his/her future plans?
- S4.** Please comment very briefly on anything else you found particularly interesting or noteworthy about the respondent or the interview that might be of help in interpreting the responses.
- S5.** Please note any "quotable quotes" made by this respondent.

**1997 Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS) In-Depth Interviews with Women**  
*Interview Summary Guide*

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**APPENDIX H**  
**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:**  
**IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH YOUNG MEN**

This appendix summarizes substantive results of in-depth interviews with young men but should not be regarded as a substitute for that report. The in-depth interviews were designed to allow youth to tell their own stories in their own words. This summary, while accurate, inevitably lacks the texture and context of the narratives themselves.

**Career Decisionmaking**

The analysis of youth career decisionmaking focused on how youth make decisions about their futures, their *styles* of decisionmaking, and the place military enlistment occupies in their deliberations. We found a constellation of factors—including age, race, ethnicity, geographic location, urbanicity, socioeconomic status, and educational aspirations—influenced the way these young men thought about their futures. The factors most commonly associated with decisionmaking styles, however, were social class, as represented by their parents' socioeconomic status, and educational aspirations (college attendance). As surrogates for the circumstances shaping consideration of the future for many youth, these were powerful predictors of both perceived opportunity and decisionmaking styles. The importance of current circumstances to future plans and the decision process also became clear during the analysis of in-depth interviews. Many young men felt little opportunity or power to change the course of their lives. Their career horizon was felt to be some inevitable perturbation of current circumstances.

Depending on social class and plans for college, youth appeared to function in very different decisionmaking contexts and display very different decisionmaking styles. We identified three youth segments: *privileged college students and college-bound youth*, *constrained noncollege youth*, and *less privileged striving youth*.

***Privileged College Students and College-Bound Youth***

At one extreme is a group comprised of middle- and upper middle-class youth coming from families who take it for granted that their sons and daughters will attend college. Many of the parents of these youth are college graduates themselves, and virtually all are reasonably successful at their own professions or businesses. From an early age, these youth were brought up with the premise that college is a minimum prerequisite for future financial stability and professional success.

These youth tend to exhibit decisionmaking approaches described by the **“rational decisionmaking model”** (Lieblich, 1989). That is, they appear to gather information related to future careers systematically, resulting in realistic understandings of the academic, experience, and other requirements of various career options. They weigh the strengths and weaknesses of different career possibilities in terms of their needs and come to a considered decision on what is most suitable. Once they make up their minds, they take the necessary steps to set the decision in motion.

These young men are able to proceed in this manner because they enjoy a period labeled by theories of late adolescent and early adult development as a “psychosocial moratorium,” a time when the youth is free from major commitments and responsibilities (Marcia, 1987). By and large, youth in this group are not married, have no children, and, most importantly, do not have immediate financial or other concerns necessitating immediate career decisions. Their parents and their parents’ friends tend to be in occupational settings that can provide them with realistic previews into the middle- and upper middle-class world of professional work and potential future careers. They generally have not experienced major life traumas that have redefined their lives. They can, therefore, focus their energies on schoolwork and the active exploring and testing of alternative career possibilities.

Surrounded by positive role models, these youth have access to a wealth (literally and figuratively) of informal and formal resources on career options. Their parents usually bear the major burden for financing their education, and it is the youths’ “job” to make good on this parental investment. Many parents play an active part in facilitating their children’s choices, helping them gather information or obtain valuable experiences related to future careers.

Decisionmaking contexts and decisionmaking styles are interwoven in these young men’s consideration of the military. These affluent college bound youth rarely seriously consider a military career. They foresee futures with a good deal of autonomy and self-direction in their work and often react negatively to the military’s hierarchical image. These youth speak of “not being able to take” being “bossed around.”

### ***Constrained Noncollege Youth***

At the other extreme are the youth whose life contexts are circumscribed by limited resources, family obligations, strong parochial attachments, and other factors restricting the content and scope of their career choices. Mostly of lower socioeconomic status, they have a limited range of role models and sources

of career information. Their lives are too often marked by insecurity brought about by economic crises, unemployment, illness, and death. For two very different sets of reasons, these youth tend to be nondecisionmakers. They(1) will not or (2) cannot proactively make decisions about their future careers.

One subgroup of young men among these circumscribed youth are relatively passive in their approach to career choices, following the path of least resistance. Many feel resigned to surrendering their fate to paths laid out by others, whether they are parents, spouses, or perhaps, recruiters. Real and perceived circumstances and a lack of resolve or ability in shaping one's life course have led to an apathy in addressing career decisions. As a consequence, these youth often create their own constraints, as there is nothing in their current lives to prevent them from pushing toward various career possibilities.

While these youth speak of plans for the future, they often talk about contradictory plans and have made no effort to follow up on any of them. They do not engage in careful information seeking and follow-up in investigating career options. Thus it is more accurate to say that these young men have the appearance of plans, but do not have real ones. Many of these youth instead have "pipe dreams," with vague and unrealistic expectations. We have labeled these youth **diffuse decisionmakers**

Another subgroup is composed of young men who are blocked from making decisions by external events and pressures. Overtaken by events, these youth have been prematurely **foreclosed** from future decisionmaking. Even at a relatively early age, some have been burdened with adult responsibilities. They may have married early and/or had children. Some have undertaken the responsibility of supporting seriously ill parents assuming the role of "the man in the family." In other cases, we found youth with serious health problems that limited future prospects. Brain tumors, serious obesity, cancer, and high blood pressure have robbed these youth of any real potential to make decisions for the future.

Constrained, noncollege youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds present a mixed opportunity for the military. Clearly, those we have labeled as "foreclosed decisionmakers" are not good candidates for enlistment. Their lives have already been determined by events and circumstances that close off the military, as well as many other options, to them. The story is different, however, for those we have labeled "diffuse decisionmakers." Approached at the right time, some of these young men (and most of their parents) would be receptive to a structured environment that could help them "shape up" and become more focused and disciplined. Some of the urban inner-city youth see the military as an "escape hatch" from dangerous surroundings fraught with pressures for involvement in illicit activities.

Enlistment also figures into the picture for youth who realize that they are not yet ready for college or prepared to commit to a career path. In some ways, the military might provide these youth with the moratorium that is not available in their current lives—a time and space in which to learn skills and acquire work experiences that will serve them in their future careers.

### *Less Privileged Striving Youth*

Between the privileged and constrained youth groups are youth from lower socioeconomic statuses who work or attend technical schools, community colleges, or branch campuses of state universities. These young men come from working class or lower middle-class families. Many times, they are the first in the family to attend college. Unlike their more privileged counterparts, their families cannot provide them with realistic role models because they are reaching beyond the typical mode in their family backgrounds.

From the outside, the educational and career paths of these youth may appear haphazard or random. Without the luxury of a moratorium period, they have to wend their way through the world, opportunistically responding to the mix of positive and negative circumstances they encounter. Throughout, they attempt to maintain sight of their long-term objectives, even as they make necessary accommodations that may not necessarily serve to move them closer to their goals. Their activities can take on a “zigzag” look as they respond to setbacks and maneuver for opportunities. Many drop out of school for periods of time while they earn enough money to return.

For these youth, the appearance of randomness, characteristic of the diffuse decisionmaker among constrained, noncollege youth is superficial. While their decision processes do not fit the orderly steps of the traditional rational decisionmaking model, there is underlying rationality in the way they take advantage of opportunities that become available. What may appear to be random acts are often actually the results of flexibility required to adjust to circumstances as they appear.

Without a secure safety net, the importance of timing and luck in the lives of these young men cannot be overstated. Chance encounters can change lives. Some are fortunate enough to encounter a mentor early on who takes them under wing and exposes them to potential work opportunities. Other physically talented youth receive athletic scholarships, without which they would not be able to attend college.

Many of the military's advertisements are geared toward these economically disadvantaged strivers. Over and over in our interviews, we heard reference to many of the attributes that have formed the basis for much of the military's advertising copy in the past few years. For example, for many of these young men, the military presents a rational solution to the lack of funds available for college tuition. Others think of the military as a way to adventure, experience, travel, physical challenge, and greater respect from others. Again, these are all attributes that have been emphasized in many military advertisements.

For others, the military is a safety net. Enlistment would be a fallback option if anything should happen to upset their college plans, or if they lose their scholarships. While young men for whom the military is regarded as "employer of last resort" may not be the most attractive targets for recruiting, nevertheless, they represent a real segment of youth for whom the military can be a future.

### **The Meanings of Propensity**

To understand the meaning of propensity, we divided the young men we interviewed into four groups:

- **Joiners**, who seemed most likely to enter the military;
- **Shifters**, who had seriously considered military service but, at the time of the interview, seemed unlikely to join;
- **Fence-Sitters**, who have given have given military service some (not serious) consideration, and for whom military service remained a possibility; and
- **Non-Joiners**, who had never considered military service and appeared very unlikely to join.

#### *Joiners*

Joiners are a mix of just-about-to-graduate 17-18 year-old high school seniors and older youth who have been out of high school for a few years. Among the older youth, several have had negative experiences in the workplace and elsewhere that have led them to rethink an earlier reluctance to join the military. Consistent with findings in career decisionmaking, we found joiners are primarily from less well-to-do working class or lower middle class backgrounds. Many Joiners have a family tradition of military service with either the father, siblings, or uncles currently or previously serving in the military. There is often a strong preference for a particular service based upon this family tradition. Additionally, Joiners

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tend to have extensive contact with people serving in the military—although the signals they receive from them about military life are sometimes mixed. Several had positive experiences in junior ROTC in high school.

“Discipline” and “having to take orders” figure prominently in these youth’s images of military life, but many see externally imposed discipline as beneficial rather than stifling. Several noted that learning how to take discipline had served an important maturing role in their lives; others look forward to learning this critical life lesson while serving in the military. The military will provide a guiding structure within which to “get their priorities straight.” Boot camp will be hard, but something to “just get through,” part of the “price of admission.”

Many Joiners do not feel they are college material or, alternatively, are not yet ready for college. They may have dropped out or believe they are academically or emotionally unprepared - immature, or lacking the self-discipline to study and not get involved in partying. Others are simply not academically inclined or interested in “book learning,” preferring a more “hands on” learning style.

The primary motivations of Joiners for enlisting in the military, whether by entering ROTC or enlisting, are to gain access to training, benefits, and money for further education. Few of the youth are in any hurry to engage in combat. Theirs is primarily a vision of a peacetime military. Danger is not a major concern, in part because they perceive that the civilian world is equally dangerous.

### *Shifters*

Compared to Joiners, Shifters come from a more diverse range of social class backgrounds; they are fairly evenly represented across age groups. Shifters are less likely than Joiners to have a strong family military tradition and generally have had less exposure to individuals who are serving or have served in the military. Shifters tend not to have strong familial support for following a military path. Some have relatives who served that actively discouraged them from taking the military route.

While Shifters tend to give the military more credit as a fairer and “less back-stabbing” environment than the civilian world, they view the civilian work world as offering better opportunities and more challenges in their fields of interest. Having a close family connection to the military does not automatically lead to positive propensity. Several of these young men’s interpretations of family members’ prior military experiences have led to a negative reaction. A few of these youth also worry about how a life in the military might hurt their future families.

Shifters fall into two major clusters college goers and noncollege goers. The characteristics of these two types of Shifters, and their images of military and civilian life are quite different. College-oriented youth at some point considered and then effectively dismissed the military as a way of helping to pay for college. They tend to view the military (much like Non-Joiners) as too highly ordered and disciplined for their personal taste and as restrictive of freedom, self-direction, and independence. Once having decided against military service as a way of financing a college education, these Shifters “never looked back” and pursued their college education and future plans in much the same fashion as college-going Non-Joiners.

The noncollege goers have rather pale, undifferentiated images of both military and civilian life. Many are diffuse decisionmakers and, as such, do not actively investigate their potential career options. Consequently, they are not very knowledgeable about either military or civilian opportunities. These noncollege Shifters tend to “go with the flow.” When asked about their decision not to join the military, they often appeared defensive and justified their decision after the fact by pointing to friends who returned from military service little improved either as people or in their career prospects or noting the health risks posed by military service. Taking such factors into account, they believe they made the right choice by not enlisting.

### *Fence-Sitters*

Fence-Sitters, like Joiners, are primarily from less well-to-do working class or lower-middle-class families. On average, Fence-Sitters are younger than youth in all other propensity groups. Understandably, more high school seniors are in the Fence-Sitter group than in any other group.

Fence-Sitters have weaker family traditions of military service than Joiners but received fewer negative messages about enlistment than Shifters. Relatives and friends did not generally discourage military enlistment. There was not, however, a strong social network providing support or encouragement for enlistment.

The Fence-Sitters’ images of military life, while a mix of positive and negative elements, are interpreted in a way similar to Joiners. Discipline, hard work, regulation, and order are all considered positive attributes of military service. Job security is also frequently cited as a positive aspect of the military. Boot camp is perceived as arduous and unpleasant but is considered part of the price of

admission. It is something to be “gotten through,” after which military life becomes somewhat like a normal job, except a bit more regulated.

In contrast to Joiners, more Fence-Sitters have other “life options” to consider or are under no great pressure to make an immediate decision as to whether to enlist. Some have alternate career possibilities; others still stand a reasonable chance of finding a way of paying for college. Other Fence-Sitters have a desire to change their present circumstances but are not currently ready or able to make the change.

African American Fence-Sitters constitute a distinctive subgroup. Many view enlistment as a way of escaping from their parents, dead-end jobs, limited environments, and bad neighborhoods. Enlistment is not a positive choice or, in most cases, even a means to an end, but rather a form of evasion or flight. Parents are often pushing their sons to enlist to keep them from getting caught up in illegal activities and “bad influences” in their neighborhoods.

### ***Non-Joiners***

Demographically, Non-Joiners come from all socioeconomic backgrounds. Overall, especially as compared with the Joiners, few, if any, of these Non-Joiners’ family contexts provide strong support for the military option. Several have been actively discouraged from joining by close relatives. Moreover, Non-Joiners’ *interpretations* of their relatives’ and friends’ past connections to the military are often negatively charged.

Within Non-Joiners, two relatively distinct subgroups emerged. These were youth presently attending or expecting to attend college (collegegoers) and youth not expecting to attend or return to college (noncollegegoers). Youth in these two subgroups differ in terms of their socioeconomic status, their aspirations and expectations for the future, and the paths that they took to become Non-Joiners. College-going youth tend to be from middle- and upper middle-class homes while noncollege-bound youth tend to be from working and lower middle class home. (These tendencies are reinforced by the exceptions observed below.) The expectations of most collegegoing Non-Joiners never included enlistment and their careers paths were always headed in directions other than military service. Noncollegegoing Non-Joiners, in contrast, had life circumstances very similar to Joiners but, for some reason or another, were deflected onto a career path that did not include consideration of military enlistment.

College-going Non-Joiners either never considered entering the military because it was simply not the way they were raised—“It was always expected that I would go to college.”—or only lightly entertained the idea during high school and then dismissed it altogether. College-going Non-Joiners generally reject the military because it would restrict their freedom, creativity, autonomy, and initiative, limit their control over their environment, and/or collide with their basic personalities. Moreover, with lives relatively rich in options due to their middle- or upper middle-class status, they simply do *not need* the military. However, most regard it as a useful and necessary social institution and a viable choice for someone else.

The life circumstances of the noncollege-going Non-Joiners resemble those of the Joiners (and others) from similar regional, racial/ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. In some cases, the distinctions appear to be more of degree than of kind, relating to “fortuitous factors” such as timing, twists of circumstances, or “selectively” emphasizing certain aspects of the military (e.g., having to take orders) over others (“being taken care of”). Haphazard was the word used earlier for the path taken by less privileged youth seeking a stable career. This, combined with “fortuitous factors,” well describes the propensity path of these youth. Either through outside agency or a turn of fate, these youth have discovered and taken a path that excludes both their present environment and military enlistment.

## **Findings Across Propensity Groups**

A few findings apply almost uniformly across propensity groups. These include common images of military life and the general lack of an ideological position regarding military service, a negative assessment of recruiters, and the all important place of timing in directing career decisions. Each contributes to the meaning young males ascribe to their propensity.

### *Images of the Military*

At the most general level, the images youth hold of the military as contrasted with civilian lifestyles, and even their ideas about the relative advantages and disadvantages of each, are not that different across the four propensity groups. For youth, the military evokes images of *discipline, hierarchy, and having to take orders*. Boot camp is nearly universally seen as a time of trial and testing. It is a difficult time but it does end and then the military life becomes more normal - although more regulated than civilian life.

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The images youth hold of military life are not without foundation. The great majority of the youth, regardless of propensity group, have had at least some direct personal contact with prior or current service members. Having some direct understanding of military life, they also recognize that movies and television shows seldom present an accurate portrayal of military life. Although several youth admitted that particular movies have contributed to their impressions of what military life is like, these media images were chosen selectively, to reinforce a mental picture already held about the military.

In contrast to images of the military, civilian life suggests *greater freedom, individuality, and choice*. Although youth in each of the four propensity hold similar images of military and civilian life, there are differences in how youth in these groups evaluate these images. The differences across groups are more in the relative emphases accorded to these various images, and above all, in how they are interpreted by the youth in relation to their life experiences and future expectations. Middle-class, and, to a lesser extent, less advantaged youth seeking to improve their prospects foresee futures in which they will have a good deal of autonomy and self-direction in their work. They will be as likely to be giving as taking orders. These youth react negatively to the image of the military as a hierarchical organization in which one is told what to do and may be subjected to arbitrary authority.

By contrast, several of the youth from less privileged backgrounds have observed or directly experienced what they view as the unfair and arbitrary nature of the workplace for those with less well-paying and unskilled jobs. Bosses can make unreasonable demands or play favorites; working conditions can be physically dangerous or unsafe to one's health. When viewed from this perspective, military hierarchy and structure can appear advantageous. Because of hierarchy, roles and responsibilities are presumably more clearly defined, and thus possibly, more just.

***Assessments of Recruiters***

Youth's views of recruiters are almost uniformly negative. Although Joiners are a bit more charitable than those in the other three categories, even they complain of recruiters being both pushy and unresponsive to their needs and concerns. In general, recruiters made little difference to the central decision to enlist: Once the youth had made up his mind, the recruiter became the means to the end. In a few cases, favorable experiences with recruiters from a particular branch may have swayed a decision in that direction.

Recruiters are most often compared to used-car salesmen, with many youth claiming this very pushiness is what ultimately "pushed them away." Why would the recruiters be trying to sell the military

so hard if it is really all that great? These youth are realistic enough to know the military is not the NBA or Harvard Law. Several Shifters report that distasteful experiences with recruiters who gave them misleading information clinched the decision not to join. Although these perceptions may only imperfectly mirror these youth's actual interactions with recruiters, they deserve to be taken seriously if for no other reason than that they importantly influence and help to justify behavior.

### *Propensity as Dynamic*

*Timing* is a critical factor influencing military propensity at two levels. On the individual level, whether a particular youth will be favorably inclined to join the military can depend on reaching him at a propitious time in his life. For many youth, this corresponds to the junior or senior year in high school, but for others the timing is more idiosyncratically variable. Sometimes the same youth, who a year before would not have given more than a passing thought to joining the military, does a complete about-face after spending time in the work force. By the same token, an apparent Joiner can almost instantly become a Shifter when his life circumstances change. This happened to one youth, who, in the interval between the YATS and our follow-up interview, discovered that his estranged father plans to send him to college.

Cases like these highlight the critically important fact that *propensity is not frozen forever at one point in time, but is subject to change as youth mature and their life circumstances change. At a larger level, this also means that propensity groups do not neatly correspond to distinct types of youth with differently inscribed characteristics.* Once having foreclosed the military as a possibility, the college-going Shifters become pretty much indistinguishable from the Non-Joiners. Similarly, African American, noncollege-going Fence-Sitters are not very different from Shifters except in factors of timing and circumstance; for the most part, even the Non-Joiners in this racial group correspond to a movement along essentially the same continuum. This fluidity of propensity does not mean that all youth are potential “converts” from one category to another, or all “conversions” are equally likely. It does underline the dangers of assuming an immutability to constructs such as *propensity* that we use to look at these young men's lives.

### **Knowledge of Military Service**

In-depth interviews with young men included specific questions about various aspects of active duty and Reserve military service. Some aspects are better known than others. Most youth seem familiar with educational benefits, and many are familiar with basics such as term of service and choice of jobs. However, over half of the questions elicited “don't know” responses from one-fifth or more of the

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respondents, many of the answers were brief or incomplete, and many responses reflected uncertainty (e.g., “I believe it’s four. I don’t know. Make it four.”). Though many young men know something of military service, their knowledge is very limited.