

Career Plans and Military Propensity of Young Men:

Interviews with 1995 Youth Attitude Tracking Study Respondents



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**CAREER PLANS AND MILITARY PROPENSITY OF
YOUNG MEN:**

**INTERVIEWS WITH 1995 YOUTH ATTITUDE
TRACKING STUDY RESPONDENTS**

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Dr. Susan Berkowitz had primary responsibility for most scientific aspects of this project. She led the development of the interview protocol and supervised interviews. She analyzed the interview transcripts and authored Chapters 3 and 4. Dr. Shelley Perry directed the project through data collection, resolved logistical and technical problems associated with this relatively new methodology, and authored Chapter 1 and the study methodology appendix to this report. Dr. Michael Wilson wrote Chapter 2 and Ms. Pamela Giambo wrote chapter 5. Study interviewers were Dr. Berkowitz, Dr. Perry, Ms. Giambo, Dr. Haidee Bernstein, Mr. George McFarland, and Ms. Sara Kittree. Mr. Hintze directed sample selection, and Ms. Katie Hubbell provided programming support.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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. Respondents are presented with carefully 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. Although the highly structured, tightly controlled YATS interview process 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 that cause youth to respond in a particular manner. It does not permit probing into the *meaning* of the responses

This study of one hundred and twenty young men from a pool of 1995 respondents was designed to gain insights into career decision-making and military propensity not provided by the standard YATS interviews. Equal numbers of White, Black, and Hispanic men were interviewed and respondents with a broad range of current and past interests in military service were selected. A 45-minute, semi-structured interview protocol was developed. Major topical areas included the career decision-making process, understanding of their interest in military service, and the young men's knowledge of Active and Reserve military service. The interviews allowed respondents to present a "natural history" of their own decision-making process in their own words, 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.

The study explored the factors influencing these young men's life plans, including age, race, ethnicity, geographic location, urbanicity, socioeconomic status, and educational aspirations. Of these, social class, as represented by the young men's parent's socioeconomic status, and educational aspirations were the factors most commonly associated with current life plans. These two factors emerged as powerful predictors of the process in which these young men make important decisions about their future as well as the number and kind of opportunities that these young men feel are open to them. In addition, the study examined the knowledge that young men have about the specifics of military service and the relationship between this knowledge and military propensity.

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Although the richness and variety of these young men's lives and plans defy easy categorization, three reasonably distinctive clusters of respondents were identified, each with a distinctive, detailed set of characteristics. Broadly speaking, clusters are defined by the "overlap" of two sets of factors: (1) Social Class: the socioeconomic status and educational level of the young man's parents and; (2) Career plans and aspirations: the level and relative salience of the young man's educational goals and career plans. 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. Depending on these two factors, youth appear to function in very different decision-making contexts and display very different decision-making styles. The three clusters are identified and defined as follows:

Privileged College Students and College Bound Youth. This group is comprised of middle-class and upper middle-class youth coming from families who take for granted that their sons will attend college. Many of the parents of these youth are college graduates themselves, and virtually all are reasonably successful at their own profession or business. These parents serve as valuable role models and sources of career information. From an early age, these youth are brought up with the premise that college is a minimum for future financial stability and professional success. By and large, youth in this group are not married, have no children and do not have immediate financial or other concerns necessitating immediate career decisions. These youth tend to be rational decision-makers.

Constrained Noncollege Youth. Young men 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. Economic crisis, unemployment, illness, and death often mark their lives. These youth tend to be nondecision-makers.

Less Privileged Striving Youth. These young men fall between the privileged and constrained groups who work or attend technical schools, community colleges, or branch campuses of state universities that come from working or lower middle-class families. Many times they are the first in the family to attend college. Often their families are not able to provide them with realistic role models or financial support. Their decision-making approach, while it does not fit the orderly steps of the traditional rational model, does follow an underlying rationality in the way they take advantage of opportunities that become available. This results in both timing and luck playing large roles in their lives.

General Issues Affecting Propensity

This study looked at how career plans and propensity interact in life patterns. Each YATS respondent's propensity was reviewed. Based on current and past interest in military service, subjects were categorized into four groups: Joiners, Shifters, Fence-Sitters, or Non-Joiners.

Joiners

Joiners are young men whom we judge, on the basis of these interviews, to be reasonably likely to enter military service. Many of these young men grew up in military families and/or less well-to-do working-class or lower middle-class backgrounds. Based on their own observations plus the advice of family and friends, they are convinced that military service will offer them a good life. There is often a strong preference for a particular Service based upon family tradition. Discipline figures heavily into these youth's images of military life. Unlike other youths, these young men see this as part of an important maturation process that will serve to provide guiding structure. The primary motivations of Joiners are to gain access to training, benefits, and money for further education. Danger is not a major concern, in part because they perceive that the civilian world is equally dangerous.

Many Joiners do not feel they are college material or, alternatively, are not yet ready for college. They may have already dropped out of college or believe they are academically or emotionally unprepared. Others are simply not academically inclined or interested in academic pursuits of that nature, preferring a more "hands on" learning style.

Shifters

Shifters are young men who once considered joining the military but have since changed their minds. Shifters tend to give the military credit as being fairer than the civilian world, but they view the civilian world as offering better opportunities and more challenges in their fields of interest. Shifters come from a more diverse range of social class backgrounds and are fairly evenly represented across age groups. Shifters tend not to have a strong familial support for following a military path and some have relatives who served that actively discouraged them from taking a military route.

Shifters fall into two major clusters: college goers and non-college goers. The characteristics of these two types 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 as too highly ordered and disciplined for their personal tastes. In contrast, the non-college goers have a pale,

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undifferentiated image of both the military and civilian life. They are often not very knowledgeable about either the military or civilian opportunities.

Fence-Sitters

Fence-Sitters are young men 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. On average, Fence-Sitters are younger than youth in all other propensity groups. Fence-sitters have a weaker family tradition of military service than Joiners but also receive fewer negative messages about enlistment than do Shifters. Fence-Sitters, like Joiners, see discipline, hard work and security as positive aspects of the Service. African American Fence-Sitters constitute a distinctive subgroup. For these, enlistment is neither a positive choice nor a means to an end, but rather a form of evasion of flight from bad influences, bad neighborhoods, bad jobs, or parents.

In contrast to Joiners, many Fence-Sitters have other options to consider or are under no immediate pressure to make a decision to enlist. Some have alternative career options and some still have alternative means that they perceive as likely ways to pay for college. Still others have a desire to change their present circumstances but are not currently ready or able to make the change.

Non-Joiners

Non-Joiners have little or no interest in joining the military and have very little information about it as a career choice. Non-Joiners come from all socioeconomic backgrounds and few of their families provide strong support for the military as an option.

Within Non-Joiners, two distinct subgroups emerge. These are youth presently attending or expecting to attend college and youth not expecting to attend or return to college. For the most part, College-going youth never seriously consider joining the military. This group sees the military as restricting freedom, creativity or autonomy, which they hold dear. Most regard the military as a useful and necessary institution but for someone else. In contrast, non-college going Non-Joiners life circumstances are very similar to those of the Joiners. However, as a result of twist of fate or other timing factors, these youth have taken a path that has excluded military enlistment.

Propensity and Recruiting

The four propensity categories were compared on several issues related to recruiting. How were the perceptions of the Joiners different from the Non-Joiners? Three areas of study are of interest, images of the military, experience with recruiters, and knowledge of military service.

Images of the Military

In general, the views held across the four propensity groups about the military are not that dissimilar. These images are often based on some personal experience, as a great majority of the youth, regardless of propensity group, have had some direct personal contact with prior or current military service members. In contrast to the military, many youth see civilian life as providing greater freedom, individuality and choice. The differences between the propensity groups are more in relative emphases accorded to the various images, and more importantly in how they are interpreted by the youth in relation to their life experiences and future expectations.

Experience with 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.

Recruiters are most often compared to used-car salesmen, with many youth claiming this very pushiness is what ultimately "pushed them away." Several Shifters report that distasteful experiences with recruiters who gave them misleading information clinched the decision not to join.

Knowledge of Military Service

Most youth seem familiar with educational benefits, and many are familiar with basics such as term of service and choice of jobs. However, many young men were unable to provide any answers to about half of the questions and those answers that were provided were often incomplete or brief showing little in-depth knowledge. These findings were relatively consistent across all propensity groups.

Implications for Recruiting

Propensity is not frozen forever at one point in time, but is subject to change as youth mature and their life circumstances change. Timing is a critical factor influencing military propensity. 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 of high school, but for others the timing may be tied to other landmark events that may be more idiosyncratic. Sometimes the same youth, who a year before would not have given the military a second thought, does a complete about face as a result of their recent experience in the civilian workforce or recent changes to their families socioeconomic status. By the same token, an apparent Joiner can almost instantly become a Shifter when life circumstances change. The Services may benefit from investigating these other "idiosyncratic" events further looking for imbedded patterns that may be exploited.

In general, young men have poor images of recruiters. Young men also reported that recruiters had very little positive influence on their decisions. In fact, recruiters' only helpful role was to provide information to recruits who had already decided to join. Generally speaking, young men reported being turned off by recruiters who pushed too hard or who painted an unbelievable picture of military service. In some cases, recruiters were cited as the main cause for self reported Joiners to reconsider. Recruiters may benefit from this knowledge. Developing training courses or workshops for recruiters that is aimed at developing skills at more subtly selling the military to youth by providing accurate information regarding the opportunities and benefits while avoiding "pushing too hard" would likely be helpful.

The Services appeals to the strong desire of many young men to achieve financial security and independence, particularly through training and education. In addition, many of the minority individuals that were interviewed expressed a desire for an escape from the bad environments that they are currently in. Advertisements and recruiting efforts that convey to young men that the military is one choice that would provide a good and healthy environment, training and financial security may aid many of these young men in their career decision-making process. In addition, many in this group do not express a strong interest in college so advertisements aimed at non-college options as well as college options would likely be helpful.

Images of the military for both propensed and non-propensed youth are very similar. However, the manner in which youth from these groups interpret this information is extremely different. Strengthening the links between the core military image of discipline, teamwork and responsibility and the underlying concepts that youth have about the necessary requirements for future success may foster a more unified and positive interpretation of the current message from which recruiters will be able to build.

Veterans, as always, have a strong influence on young men's interest in military service. As the number of veterans among the population is decreasing, the military will need to place extra care in ensuring that they maximize the proportion of veterans that are providing a positive image and role model for youth. In addition, the military may also benefit from exploring other sources of first hand knowledge that can be provided to young men to augment this dwindling source of familiarity with military service.

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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 nationally representative telephone survey of both young men and women aged 16-24. Propensity, the stated likelihood that a youth will enlist in the military or one of the Military Services, has been the central YATS measure since 1975. Research has shown that propensity predicts actual enlistment, making the propensity estimate a closely monitored measure by military recruiting commands and other personnel managers in the Department of Defense.

Following Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm and the end of the Cold War, propensity declined significantly across a broad spectrum of American youth. For example, in 1992 and 1993, propensity among Black males declined by over 50 percent. Combined with declines observed for other groups of American youth, assessments of probable recruit numbers tumbled as propensity estimates were entered into recruit marketplace models. As a result, the Services reported an increased difficulty in meeting recruiting missions despite the downsizing of the military and reduced accession requirements at this time.

The YATS interview is designed to produce nationally representative statistics regarding the opinions, attitudes, and beliefs of American youth on a variety of issues. Most important is the measurement of propensity. As a result of careful training and monitoring of interviewers, respondents are uniformly 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 valid comparison of YATS findings across years and demographic groups. However, this process, which secures the validity of YATS findings, disallows probing into the *meaning* of the responses. Although we have learned from these findings the percentage of youth indicating positive or negative enlistment propensity, we were not able to probe into why a youth responded in a particular manner.

The follow-up in-depth interviews that this report is based on allowed respondents to recollect and reflect upon their career plans or decisions. A 45-minute structured interview protocol was developed with major topic areas that included the career decision-making process, consideration of military enlistment, and knowledge of the military way of life. Although structured, the interviews allowed respondents to present in their own words a "natural history" of their own decision-making process reflecting the insights, interpretations, events, and constraints unique to their individual experience. The interview protocol included the liberal use of probes to clarify or uncover the deeper meaning of responses

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and questions that offered several different points in which more detail could be provided about the career decision-making process. Interviews were conducted by a limited number of senior and mid-level researchers. Recordings from each interview were transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts constituted the data for the analysis presented here.

The study sample consisted of selected respondents from the 1995 fall YATS administration. In order for this study to concentrate on the essential issue of military propensity within the career decision-making process, we focused on youth whose characteristics placed them in the “prime military recruiting market,” 17-21 year-old high school seniors and degreed graduates. We evenly divided the sample by race/ethnicity groups of Black, White, or Hispanic and by propensity groups. Four propensity groups were developed based on responses to the 1995 YATS survey. The groups were: Joiners, youth most likely to join the military; Non-Joiners, youth least likely to join the military; Shifters, youth who had seriously considered military service in the past, but did not intend to join now; and Fence-Sitters, youth who gave both positive and negative responses to questions about joining the military. One hundred and twenty young men were interviewed. During data collection, we ensured a balance in respondent characteristics such as age, education, employment, and geography. This balance was maintained through the monitoring of these characteristics among respondents and adjusting interviewing assignments as required. A detailed explanation of the study methodology is in Appendix A.

Interview results emerged in three areas: general understanding of career decision-making among young men, understanding of their interest in military service, and the young men’s knowledge of active and Reserve military service. The study findings detailed in this report will be of interest to a wide range of audiences: military policy makers, the recruiting community, and academic researchers in the career-choice field. Future YATS surveys may be informed by our refinement of the propensity groups and detailing of the external factors that influence the career-choice process.

Although the interview respondents are not “statistically” representative, they reflect a broad spectrum of youth from the population of greatest interest to the Department of Defense. Within the respondent group, we have noted some trends that appear to be related to race/ethnicity such as strong family ties among Hispanics. Because of sample size, we cannot draw strong or sweeping conclusions on the basis of this study alone. At the same time, the patterns we observe here are consistent with other facts or findings from other studies. Therefore, we have reported race or ethnic-related patterns as they appear in our sample and encourage the reader to reflect on whether these observations make sense in the context of other information.

The report is organized into five chapters and several appendices. Chapter 2 summarizes the main themes of the analytic findings. Chapter 3 describes interview findings in the area of career decision-making. Chapter 4 presents findings about military propensity. Chapter 5 describes the youth's knowledge of the military. The study methodology is described in detail in Appendix A. Appendices B through F contain exhibits of materials used during the study.

2. SUMMARY OF YATS IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW FINDINGS

This chapter summarizes the substantive results of the study in regards to the career decision making process across the different youth groups interviewed and the relationship that this process has with propensity. However, this chapter should not be regarded as a substitute for reading the subsequent chapters. The in-depth interviews were designed to allow youth to tell their own stories in their own words. The analyses presented in Chapters 3 and 4 retain the flavor of these stories and should be read carefully in order to gain a full understanding of the summaries presented in this chapter. This summary, while accurate, inevitably lacks the texture and context of the narratives themselves.

Career Decision-making

The analysis of youth career decision-making focused on how youth make decisions about their futures, their *styles* of decision-making, and the place military enlistment occupies in their deliberations. We found a constellation of factors such as age, race, ethnicity, geographic location, urbanicity, socioeconomic status, and educational aspirations influenced the way these young men thought about their futures. Of the factors examined, social class, as represented by their parents' socioeconomic status, and educational aspirations (college attendance) were the most strongly linked to the emergence of a decision-making style. As surrogates for the events shaping consideration of the future, these were powerful predictors of the opportunities that the youth perceived as available to them and the approach or style that the youth adopted when making decisions about their future. The importance of current circumstances to future plans and the decision process became clearer during the analysis of in-depth interviews. In many instances, as a result of the current circumstances that the youth were immersed in, many young men felt little opportunity or power to change the course of their lives and that their career horizon was an inevitable perturbation of current circumstances.

Depending on social class and plans for college, youth appeared to function in very different decision-making contexts and display very different decision-making 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-class 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

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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 decision-making styles described by the ‘**rational decision-making model**’ (Lieblich, 1989). That is, they appear to gather information related to future careers systematically, resulting in realistic understanding 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 forcing immediate career decisions. They generally have also 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.

Their parents and their parents’ friends tend to be in occupational settings that can provide them with realistic previews into the middle-class and upper middle-class world of professional work and potential future careers. Surrounded by positive role models, these youth have access to a wealth of informal and formal resources on career options. Their parents usually bear the major burden for financing their education, and it is the youth’s “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.

Decision-making contexts and decision-making 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” and 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. Either because they are not willing or are unable to proactively make decisions about their future careers, these youth tend to be nondecision-makers.

One subgroup of young men in this group 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, a lack of resolve, or a lack of 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 no insurmountable hurdle in their current situation that would 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 decision-makers.**"

A second 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 decision-making. Even at a relatively early age, some have been burdened with adult responsibilities. They may have married early, had children, or undertaken the responsibility of supporting seriously ill parents and 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 removed many options from future consideration for these youths.

A third subgroup are noncollege youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. This group present a mixed opportunity for the military. Clearly, those we have labeled as "foreclosed decision-makers" 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,

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however, for those we have labeled “diffuse decision-makers.” 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. In addition, some of these youth from 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 career.

Less Privileged Striving Youth

Between the privileged and constrained youth groups are youth who work or attend technical schools, community colleges, or branch campuses of state universities that come from working class or lower middle-class families. Many times, they are the first in the family to attend college. As a result, their families often 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 navigate 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 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 advancements. 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 decision-makers” among constrained, noncollege youth, is superficial. While their decision processes do not fit the orderly steps of the traditional rational decision-making 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 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 they nevertheless 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 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.

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Summary of YATS Interview Findings**

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 decision-making, 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 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 also 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 while others look forward to learning this critical life lesson while serving in the military. They see the military as providing a guiding structure within which to “get their priorities straight.” In addition, these youths view boot camp as likely to be hard, but something to “just get through” as 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 of high-school or believe they are academically or emotionally unprepared—immature, or lacking the self-discipline to study and avoid getting involved in partying. Others are simply not academically inclined or interested in “book learning,” preferring a more “hands on” learning style that they feel the military will provide them.

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 and 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 and 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. In contrast to Joiners, having a close family connection to the military does not necessarily lead to positive propensity. Several of the 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 decision-makers 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.

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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, job security and order are all considered positive attributes of military service. 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. Still 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, in most cases, not a positive choice nor 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 a mix of all of the socioeconomic backgrounds. Overall, few, if any, of these Non-Joiners' family contexts provide strong support for the military option. This is in stark contrast with the familial influence exerted on Joiners. 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 (college goers) and youth not expecting to attend or return to college (noncollege goers). 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 homes. The expectations of most college going Non-Joiners never included enlistment and their careers paths were always headed in directions other than military service. Noncollege going 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 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 compared 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 that is difficult but does end and resulting in a more normal, although more regulated, life.

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, and typically 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 groups 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 more importantly, 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 expect 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.

In 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 lower paying and unskilled jobs. They felt that bosses in the civilian world often make unreasonable demands or play favorites and that working conditions can be physically dangerous and are 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: Rather, once the youth had made up his mind, the recruiter became only 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." Youth often questioned why would the recruiters be trying to sell the military so hard if it is really all that great? These youth have realistic enough impressions to know the military is not the NBA or Harvard Law as they feel some recruiters are trying to argue. 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 idiosyncratical. 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

Chapter 5 describes responses to 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 respondents. Of those that did answer, many were able to provide only very brief or largely incomplete responses that often reflected great 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.

3. CAREER DECISION-MAKING

In our “in-depth” telephone interviews with 120 young men selected from the pool of 1995 YATS 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- and longer-term future. We were interested in discerning overall decision-making styles or paths followed by these youth and determining how these styles or paths, in turn, intersected with decisions about joining the military. Factors that figured into characterizing the youth’s approach to decision-making include the amount of forethought, planning, and information-gathering that went into the decision to pursue a particular path; the realism of the youth’s plans and expectations—for example, if the youth has an accurate grasp of the investment of time and resources needed to meet his goals; and the extent to which and way(s) in which the youth sought advice and guidance on future life plans, and from whom. To obtain a comparative perspective with younger (17- and 18-year-old) respondents making the first series of decisions about their futures, we asked the older (21- and 22-year-old) respondents how they had approached making decisions at a similar point in their lives.

Overview

We found it impossible to understand how these youth make decisions about their careers and their lives without first delineating the basic contexts of life circumstances within which their plans are formed. A constellation of factors—including age, race, ethnicity, region of the country, and residence in a rural, small-town, suburban, or urban environment—all importantly shape their decision-making contexts. However, probably the single most influential factor, cutting across all the others, is *social class*, as defined both by parents’ socioeconomic status and educational level, and the youth’s (actual or anticipated) college attendance.

At the two extremes of social class, the youth operate from two diametrically different decision-making contexts that profoundly condition not only the content of their choices (e.g., college or a job), but also their entire approach to thinking about their futures. Middle-class and upper-middle-class college-oriented youth come from families who take for granted that they will attend college, which they consider a minimum prerequisite for future financial stability and success. Surrounded by positive role models, these youth have access to a wealth of valuable informal and formal resources on career options, enjoying a variety of opportunities to “test out” prospective career possibilities. These youth may hold part-time jobs or internships during the academic year, primarily in areas related to expected future careers, and/or work during summers to help underwrite the cost of their education. However, their parents often bear the major burden for financing their education. It is the youth’s “job” to make good on their parents’

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investment by concentrating on their studies and selecting a major that promises a satisfying and remunerative career. While they expect to marry and have children in the future, few have existing commitments that constrain current possibilities or preclude pursuing advantageous future job or educational options. Of all the youth in our study, these young men's life contexts come closest to approximating a psychosocial moratorium as posited by theories of late adolescent and early adult development (Marcia, 1987). These contexts are conducive to freeing the youth's energies and thoughts to focus on their studies and on making clear-headed, advantageous decisions about their futures. Adolescents who go through this process of psychosocial moratorium are theoretically most likely to develop a firm set of career goals with self-confidence, maturity, and a clear sense of purpose.

At the other extreme are the youth whose life contexts are circumscribed by limited resources, family obligations, strong attachments to local contexts, ill health, and other factors that restrict both the content and the scope of their choices. Going to college might never have been considered, much less taken for granted. These youth are primarily of lower socioeconomic status, and include primarily rural Whites as well as Hispanic and African American youth from both small-town and urban environments. Their lives have often been punctuated with unexpected and premature illnesses, unemployment, migrations, economic crises, separations, divorces, and deaths. Those forced to shoulder partial or full-scale adult responsibilities at an early age are objectively constrained in their possibilities. Others are so closely bound to family, friends, and neighbors that it is almost unimaginable for them to consider leaving, even for better opportunities elsewhere. For this group available role models and sources of career information are restricted. Marked by much more limited access to both monetary and human resources, greater insecurity, and earlier onset of adult obligations and responsibilities, these less privileged young men's life contexts in no way resemble a "moratorium." These youth are rarely at liberty to evaluate all the options or to test out various role possibilities for their futures.

Although there is no perfect one-to-one relationship, these two life contexts tend to correspond to distinctive decision-making styles or youth's approaches to planning for their futures. The middle-class college youth, operating from more secure foundations, are more likely to be "rational decision-makers" who systematically gather and weigh information on careers, matching various possibilities with their aptitudes and talents as well as market conditions. These youth recognize the credential and experience requirements attached to different positions and understand the investment of time, resources, and energy needed to achieve their short- and long-term career goals. Their goals, if sometimes lofty, are usually potentially realizable.

The less privileged youth, faced with so many obligations, responsibilities and uncertainties impeding their ability to make optimal career decisions, fall into two main decision-making clusters. The “diffuse decision-makers” follow apparently formless or vague paths and avoid making a decision, at least until external forces or circumstances finally intrude to force the issue. The “foreclosers” are constrained by circumstances to follow a particular path without having had the opportunity to first explore and test different career options (Marcia, 1987). While both patterns place these youth at a disadvantage in making career decisions that maximize their strengths and talents, the “foreclosers” are in some sense acting rationally within the confines of more objectively circumscribed decision-making contexts.

In many ways, both the prematurely forced choices of the “foreclosers,” and the vague wanderings without choosing of the “diffuse decision-makers” mirrors the concrete uncertainties of these less privileged youth’s lives. Some of both of these types of decision-makers, particularly among the African American and Hispanic youth, are so compelled by external circumstances they can hardly be said to make choices at all. We might not have been able to see that these superficially irrational or diffuse styles actually correspond to a deeper structural reality without first apprehending the unstable and more restricted underpinnings of these youth’s decision-making contexts.

Interestingly, the one point of similarity across all the youth, regardless of decision-making styles, is that friends do not figure importantly into their decisions about their futures. In contrast, family members, especially parents or wives and fiancées, do.

Although a good portion of the youth in our sample fit one of these polar extreme decision-making contexts, this chapter also completes the picture for the youth by examining those “in the middle.” We also begin to consider how these larger decision-making contexts and styles create different likelihoods and potentials for joining the military. A summary of our thoughts on this issue can be found in the conclusion to this chapter.

One word of caution is in order. While providing a schematic preview of what is to follow, these conclusions briefly stated cannot substitute for a close reading of the body of the chapter. Much would be lost in glossing over the richly textured details of these youth’s perspectives and experiences, which breathe life into our abstract concepts and allow these youth to tell their stories in their own voices.

The Rational Decision-maker Model

Most models of youth decision-making are based on a view of adolescence and early adulthood as a crucial life stage, in which the youth forms a sense of identity and a cohesive set of values (Erickson, 1968). This life stage is conceived as a period of psychosocial moratorium, during which the adolescent or young adult is exposed to and “tests out” different adult role possibilities, including those central to career and vocational interests (Lieblich, 1989). Youth are provided “built in” time and space to rationally consider and weigh various career options and to at least begin to take the necessary steps to prepare for the future, free of responsibility for others and demands for performance of adult roles (Lieblich, 1989). The most prevalent model of youth decision-making, which builds on Erickson’s developmental theories, considers two linked processes—exploration and commitment—as central to the youth’s ability to make career decisions (Marcia, 1987). First, a youth must be able to explore different meaningful possibilities for a future career in order to find the one that best suits his interests and abilities. Second, he must make a personal investment in what he is going to do. If a youth is able to explore and then make a commitment to the choice, he has achieved a “career identity” (Marcia, 1987).

According to Marcia’s model, the optimal pattern of rational decision-making occurs when the adolescent can first explore possibilities without having to make a commitment to one or another path. Youth who become “identity-achieved” have typically passed through such a moratorium stage of exploration and testing of alternatives. The rational decision-maker model, then, is essentially premised on the existence of a period of psychosocial moratorium in the youth’s life, during which he has the liberty and luxury of testing out different alternatives while protected from the full consequences of this experimentation.

Yet, the opportunity to enjoy or take full advantage of such a moratorium period is very unequally distributed across the social structure. Due to a variety of external pressures and obligations, some youth may be unable to follow the optimal developmental path outlined above. Some may have to commit to a given job or career without having first had the opportunity to test out various possibilities. In the terms of the dominant model, these “foreclosed decision-makers”—whose options are prematurely ended—are less well positioned for the achievement of a firm career identity. Another group of youth, with similarly limited options, show little apparent interest in exploring possibilities and limited willingness to commit to given career choices. These “diffuse decision-makers” take a passive stance toward their futures, doing little to actively help decide which paths to pursue. In terms of the developmental model presented above, they, too, present a less than optimal pattern for attaining career identity.

Although we did not initially realize that many of the questions in the interview guide were based on the implicit assumptions of the rational decisionmaker model, this became increasingly apparent as we sought to make sense of many of the youth's responses. Therefore, we decided to explicitly address the issue of how well this model fits these respondents, and how the fit varies by age, race, ethnicity, educational background, socioeconomic status, and propensity category. To understand how these youth make decisions, and thus how to frame our discussion of the rational model, it is necessary to first elaborate on the contexts in which these youth make their plans about their future careers.

The Importance of Context

The overriding point that emerges from examining youth transcripts is that career decision-making processes, including choices about entering the military, are made in specific contexts and can only be understood in light of these contexts. To the extent that the youth's life contexts differ from those assumed by the rational decision-making model—which presupposes a moratorium from wider responsibility, and an ability to rehearse adult roles—the model fails to fit. Race/ethnicity, region of the country, small-town or rural versus urban and suburban residence, all define the decision-making context. Perhaps most influential of all is social class, defined in terms of parents' socioeconomic status and educational level, and whether the youth is attending college. Social class differences cut deeply across all other factors; they are inscribed in the youth's lives in a variety of ways that profoundly condition their decision-making.

Decision-Making Contexts of Non-College Youth

Absence of a Moratorium

Even at a relatively early age, a good number of youth (perhaps one-fourth to one-third) are not operating in a period of “moratorium” from adult responsibilities. This is true of some of the White youth and a larger cluster of African American and Hispanic youth from less privileged backgrounds. The principal reasons for the absence of a moratorium in these youth's lives are discussed below.

Family Obligations

A few of the White youth are already married, even at an early age, some have children, and a few still live in their parents' or in-laws' houses. A 21-year-old married White respondent who lives in rural Mississippi and drives a truck for a living suggested wistfully that the time for joining the Army and seeing the world had passed him by. He had decided to enlist in the Marine Corps—"I was gone"—when he met his wife, about 3 months before graduating from high school. That totally changed his life. His main obligations are now to his wife and young daughter. Currently, the family is barely making ends meet and, as a result, his situation will not permit traveling far away from home. "You tell the Army to go to the high school and catch them before they get married," he advised.

As far as these youth are concerned, their life decisions have already been made for them, and it is too late to change. "She's the boss now," says Charles,¹ an 18-year-old, of his bride of 6 months. His wife has decided that he should wait to think about joining the Army until they tire of each other and need a separation to make them appreciate one another again. Charles considered "getting used to living in a girlie room," and not being able to watch television when he wanted, his two most difficult adjustments to married life. The couple lives with Charles' parents and his younger sisters.

Several African American youth, including some still in their teens, are fathers. Most continue to live in their parents' household. Although not married to their child's mother, they take an interest in "staying around" to see their child grow up. Other African American respondents have obligations to their natal families that keep them from pursuing any options, including military enlistment, which would take them out of the local area and away from the parental household. LeVar, for example, is helping his father raise his 6-year-old nephew since the child's mother passed away. He would someday like to join his brother, who operates a business in Germany, and has thought seriously about entering the military, but feels now that his father and nephew need his support and financial help. Another African American youth, Rodney, is concerned about his mother's lung condition and his two younger sisters. "Mom has this kind of like lung disease, and there's no telling how long she'll be around, and I have little sisters and stuff. If I go off and leave, my grandparents are dead." The young man had considered joining the military, but returned home to help out his mother.

The impact of honoring often weighty family responsibilities was strongest for Hispanic youth. Several of these youth are eldest sons in female-headed households and are considered the "man in the

¹ Some youth are given pseudonyms to make following their extended stories easier.

family.” Their fathers are often out of the household or out of the picture entirely, leaving the youth with obligations to help provide for their mothers and younger siblings. In one case, Ramon returned home to be with his mother, who had contracted cancer not long after she and his father divorced. In addition, a few of these youth are married, as well; with their wives integrated into the family household.

Some of these Hispanic youth feel they have been strengthened by the early imposition of full-scale adult responsibilities. Says one young man, “I had to grow up real fast.” For Ramon, returning home to tend to his ill mother had forced him to “get his life together.” It was a sobering, maturing experience that made him realize what is important and provoked an attitude toward school very different than the one he had maintained during his high school years, when he frequently cut class. “Then I had to do it (go to school), now it’s my choice.” He is working full-time as a janitor for a local school district and plans to attend evening community college classes in computer science while maintaining his full-time work schedule. As Ramon sees it, learning to deal with his familial responsibilities has served the same maturing function as joining the military might have served under other circumstances. Several years ago he had seriously considered enlisting in the Marine Corps, but then his parents divorced, and he returned home. He believes he no longer needs the military to teach him discipline and responsibility. His mother, in remission from a serious bout with cancer, still requires his presence, and his employer will help pay tuition costs for classes at the community college.

Other Hispanic youth are not coping as well with the pressures of assuming weighty responsibilities at an early age. In one case, the interviewer worried that one overwhelmed youth might be at risk for a nervous breakdown. In another poignant example, the youth had done everything right while growing up—achieving high grades in school, getting awards for good citizenship, and acquiring scholarship money for college from several sources. In spite of this exemplary effort and acceptance at a 4-year state university, financial pressures had forced him to take a daytime job and attend community college at night. He talks longingly of wanting to attend a 4-year university and major in electrical engineering, but money worries kept him from being able to concentrate on school. At age 20, he is “always tired.” “I don’t blame my mother, she does the best she can, she just can’t help me, and she’s the only one...” He wistfully compares himself to other college students whose parents pay the bills, and who have the “luxury” of concentrating on their studies.

Other Factors That Limit Choice

The rational model assumes that “joining the military” or making any other decision about what he will do with his life represents an active choice for the youth, weighed among a set of possible options. However, in addition to those with family obligations, it is clear that some respondents are really not operating in “pure free choice” situations. Even apart from economic constraints, a variety of “external” factors—including debilitating medical conditions, physical and mental health problems, failure to achieve an adequate score on the military entrance exams, and have not yet obtained a green card (for several Hispanic youth)—impinge on their ability to operate as “free agents” in making choices for their future. For many of these youth across all three racial/ethnic groups, the number of health-related problems reported for themselves and close family members and the degree of concern expressed about getting and staying healthy are quite striking. One White youth, Zane, had lost 60 of the 80 pounds he needs to lose before he can enlist in the Army, Charles has a diagnosed learning disability and is taking Ritalin, which temporarily disqualifies him from a number of options, including enlisting and one Hispanic youth is recovering from a brain tumor operation. Several of the African American youth reported problems with high blood pressure, one has used a kidney dialysis machine for 11 years, and another is in remission from cancer. A few other respondents in all groups seem to be of such low intelligence that the meaning and literal truth of their interviews were unclear.

For a few of the most extreme examples of youth with serious physical illnesses, interviewers found it inappropriate to pursue a line of questioning that assumed the youth has much of a future to which to look forward, let alone one defined by free choice. Also, in several cases, what was initially represented as a “choice”—for example, a decision not to enlist in the military—had in reality been decided by external factors (e.g., a score too low to qualify, a medical condition). Perhaps as a matter of pride, especially at first, several of the youth (especially the African American) seem to have had difficulty admitting that anything but free choice was at play. These youth may be especially sensitive to the implication that something must be wrong with them if they cannot operate as “free agents.”

Local Ties That Bind

Beyond those with specific family obligations to honor or other clearly identifiable external factors constraining their choices, some youth are reluctant or even effectively unable to leave their families, friends, neighborhoods, and familiar local settings. No one specific factor can be pointed to as “the reason;” they simply do not feel free to maximize their choices, when doing so would require putting physical distance between themselves and their loved ones, even only temporarily. This pattern

characterizes many of the noncollege-oriented youth from small towns and rural areas in all three racial and ethnic groups, as well as some Hispanic and African American youth in more urban settings.

Localism is not limited to small towns. This fact is exemplified by a Hispanic youth in New York City, who lives in the Bronx (a New York city borough) and likes “the travel and everything” to work in Queens (an adjacent borough). This young man has no interest in joining the military, partly because, as for other youth like him, Queens is about as far from home as he wants to go.

Hispanic youth—whether from rural or urban areas—are the most likely of the three groups to invoke the need and desire to remain close to family as a guiding motivation for their choices. The importance of staying close to kinfolk runs through many, if not most, of the interviews with Hispanic youth: “I couldn’t leave my family,” “I wouldn’t want to be so far from my family,” “My family wouldn’t know what to do without me,” and “My mother doesn’t want me to go away.”

Rural Whites

The theme of remaining close to and loyal to family is also frequently voiced by White youth from rural areas, especially in the South. Colin is a 19-year-old, White high school dropout, raised in a farming family, who lives in a three-bedroom trailer in rural North Carolina with his parents, fiancée, cousin, and cousin’s girlfriend. Everyone in the household contributes, as needed, to make ends meet. His whole family has always lived in the country and they plan to move further out in a few years to escape the urban development that is occurring in their area. Colin, describing himself and his father as “backyard mechanics,” works at a Jiffy Lube and takes night classes for his GED. It is unlikely he will enlist in the military because it would mean being away from his family for a long time, and he would find that unbearable. He worries that his father (not yet 40), who has high blood pressure, might die or lose his job, and he would be called upon to “start working real hard to help out around here.” The year Colin dropped out of school he “lost three family members in 1 year.” He would like to study auto mechanics and open a shop one day, so he can eventually take care of his entire family. As much as or more than some of the Hispanic and African American youth described above, at 19, Colin seems already old beyond his years, weighed down by worries from living with family circumstances such as sickness and death.

Many of the rural youth in all three groups also enjoy the special pleasures of hunting, fishing, and being in the outdoors. In many rural areas, however, the desire to stay close to home often translates into limited possibilities for making a living. A few of the youth are able to find a way, but it can be hard. One White youth, Bob, dropped out of college after his freshman year because he lacked the self-discipline for

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“book learning” and preferred to be outdoors. After “setting down” and talking over his future with his father, who gave him 6 months before he would “ship him off to the Army,” an older man at his church told him about a job working on a barge on the Mississippi River. “That’s one of the advantages of being from a small town, I guess.” Bob loves his job, already earns more than his father, and works a schedule that gives him time for hunting, fishing, rodeoing, and other activities.

Such rural success stories are relatively rare. A few small town youth have a niche already carved out for themselves in a family business. For example, one 20-year-old youth, now legally blind in one eye as a result of an explosion, works at his grandfather’s store. This young man began helping out several years ago after working all through high school at his father’s gas station, which was sold to a big company. He is not enchanted with the prospect of spending the rest of his life in this job, but has never lived anywhere else; if he ever left, he knows he would badly miss his family. He acknowledges a “whole big world” out there, but really has no idea how to approach it. There is nothing to prevent him from going to college or otherwise striking out on his own, but there is also no particular push to do so.

Like this young man, other rural youth strongly tied to familiar settings appear to recognize that their embeddedness restricts their opportunities and limits their horizons. “It must be nice to live near a big city,” says one youth. “There are so many things to do and see.” Another rural White youth wonderingly described a ride on the Metro he had taken during a visit to Washington, DC. Regardless of their awareness, these youth cannot or will not “make the break,” even temporarily.² Reluctance to leave is often expressed as a vague malaise of venturing “too far” from home and family. In objective terms, “too far” might only be several hours away by car—not much more than daily commuting distance for suburbanites in major metropolitan areas.

In only one case—that of Kevin, a 17-year-old White high school senior from the Midwest—does the youth see enlistment in the military as a way of facilitating an eventual return to loved ones and a cherished way of life. Kevin hails from several generations of farmers and would like nothing more than to follow in his family’s footsteps. However, he recognizes that family farming is no longer economically viable; a message personally driven home several years ago, when his father was forced to sell the family’s land to pay the medical bills for a younger sister who died of cancer. Kevin’s school counselors have also emphasized the futility of preparing for a future in farming. He now plans to enlist in the Air

² One of the most interesting differences between these youth and college-going youth who also are bound closely to local settings is that the college-going youth see leaving home—for example, to attend college—as a means to the end of eventually returning home.

Force for a 4-year stint and then use his earned college tuition money to enroll in a 2-year training program in high tech agricultural machinery repair. He hopes this will be his “ticket home.”

African Americans in Small Towns

The real and perceived restriction of opportunities is probably greatest for African American youth in rural areas and small towns in the South. In the absence of role models who have helped to pave the way out, many of these youth can only envision futures in low-paying, unchallenging jobs in the local area. When their families insist they not “just sit around the house loafing all day,” some consider enlisting in the military as an alternative to flipping burgers or stocking shelves. For these youth, despite the knowledge that enlisting in the military will eventually mean traveling great distances from home, entering the military still seems less threatening than moving to a big city or going to school halfway across the state. Perhaps this is true because they know other youth like themselves who have joined the military. Moreover, in this situation, enlisting is as much a relinquishment of control as a positive act of decision. The youth “solves” the problem of having no money and no viable economic prospects and “gets his mother off his back” by entrusting his fate to another external force that will provide room and board and organize his life for him.

There is another small cluster of youth, mainly from small towns, and mainly African American, who define their future goals primarily in terms of fulfillment of family or religious values rather than realization of professional goals. The job is a means to an end rather than an end in itself or a source of fulfillment. It is not about “making a lot of money” or “having a good financial lifestyle”—desires commonly expressed by middle-class college youth—but about buying a home, building a good credit report, achieving a stable foundation for a family, or following religious beliefs.

One African American youth who exemplifies this pattern already has one child, works days on an assembly line, and takes barbering classes at night. He would like to open his own barbershop one day. His goals are “to get married and raise a family and have a very, very stable job...because I want to be able to take care of my family.” The desire for security is key. Another 21-year-old African American high school graduate currently employed as a security guard has held a succession of different jobs since graduating high school. He works the night shift so he can spend his days doing door-to-door ministry as a Jehovah’s Witness. He is most looking forward to his upcoming marriage and does not really care what kind of job he has as long as it supports his larger life goals of family and religion. (Interestingly, like a few other youth, he does appear to derive some satisfaction from the challenges of his job, but almost seems ashamed to admit it.)

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Another African American youth in the deep South, also engaged to be married, is letting his fiancée guide their future plans. He once considered joining the Army on the buddy system, but has high blood pressure (as did the buddy) and scored too low on the entrance exam. His fiancée, who is in the National Guard, is now at the center of his plans. “I was going through kind of some bad times before, but right now, you know, me and her we talked and we straightened everything out. We both know what we want.” It appears he has largely entrusted his fate to his fiancée, as he might earlier have done with the military.

Urban Minorities

As with the Hispanic youth in New York City mentioned earlier, the fundamental issue in rootedness is not *geographical*, but *psychosocial*: an anxiety or feeling out of place in unfamiliar settings. For the most part, within these psychosocially circumscribed boundaries, urban youth tend to have access to better and more varied opportunities than their small-town and rural peers. Without having to travel beyond Queens, the Hispanic youth in the Bronx is completing a training course in airplane maintenance and working part time as a delivery person. He has found a reasonable, if modest, niche, which might not have been a possibility in a more rural environment. Nevertheless, some African American youth in the inner city feel as restricted in their options as their small-town peers, and with them it often takes on a harder, angrier edge.

For some African American and Hispanic youth in urban areas, attachment can be a double-edged sword. The neighborhood, so seductive in its familiarity, is also a place where it is all too easy to succumb to gang involvement or participating in illegal activities such as dealing drugs. Says one African American youth: “There’s no opportunities here, there’s no jobs, just drugs and hanging out. A lot of people, that’s all they do is get high. That’s why I started playing ball...” For some of these youth, enlisting in the military is not just a way to avoid sitting around doing nothing, but also a strategy for escaping pressures for involvement in illicit activities. Says one 18-year-old African American: “If you’re not in college in _____[name of place], you need to go to the service. This place is a trap for just becoming a bum.” Another African American youth says he had thought about enlisting when his family moved into a bad neighborhood. “I’d rather go to the military than be one of those hoodlums around here. That’s the way I felt at the time, but we moved out of that neighborhood and this is better.” These examples speak to another largely unrecognized aspect of context: residing in different neighborhoods, even in the same city, can apparently shape a youth’s decisions differently.

A few of the youth are so torn between loyalties to home and family and the promise of external opportunities they seem immobilized by indecision. Perhaps the most striking example is Juan, an obviously intelligent, 19-year-old Hispanic admitted gang member. Juan, who (by his own description) has a shaved head and a body covered with tattoos, has won a scholarship to a prestigious culinary school on the East Coast. Discussing the pleasures of cooking in almost poetic terms, he clearly sees becoming a master chef as fulfillment of his life's true vocation and recognizes this scholarship as an opportunity of a lifetime. At the same time, Juan is in pain over the prospect of leaving his family and neighborhood to venture across the country to a place he has never seen. Leaving is also tinged with a feeling he may be betraying his roots and fierce ethnic pride. He sees enlistment in the military as the alternative to cooking school; in the short run, this would allow remaining closer to home. Not knowing which way to turn, he marks time in an unchallenging menial job and hangs out with his "brothers" in the neighborhood, a grave source of worry to his mother.

The young men described in this section—those with family obligations, strong ties to local settings, external factors constraining their choices, and noncareer orientations—all function in contexts that in some way violate the "pure assumptions" of the "rational decision-maker" model as to the conditions that maximize the ability to make the best possible and personally most beneficial choices. Worried about economic insecurity and the specter of illness, the essential fragility of their lives, while inscribed differently in the three racial and ethnic contexts, is largely defined by social class. As shall be seen, this stands in dramatic contrast to the stability of the life contexts of most middle- and upper middle-class, college-going youth.

Decision-Making Contexts for Affluent College Youth

College-oriented middle- and upper middle-class youth from professional and business families, both those who are clearly college-bound or already attending college, are at the opposite end of the spectrum from those discussed above. Their parents are typically college graduates themselves, or else rose in the ranks at a time when a college degree was not a necessity for success, which has made them even more adamant about the importance of a college education for their children. The largest cluster of these youth are White. Some are Hispanic, including a few South American dual citizens sent to college in the United States who expect to return home after graduation or completion of a graduate degree. Fewer of these youth are African American.

Period of Moratorium

Among all respondents, it is the middle-class and upper middle-class, college-bound and college-going youth who best fit the central conditions of the rational decision-making model:

They are enjoying a period of relative moratorium from wider obligations and responsibilities

In dramatic contrast to their peers previously discussed, these youth are largely free from the burdens of adult responsibilities and worries. They are not married, do not have children, and generally live away from home. They anticipate having a wife and children some day, but this is still largely abstract and in the future. At most, these youth may hold part-time jobs during the school year and work during summers and/or semester breaks. These college-going young men are not all carefree: some are very preoccupied about their career decisions, especially as they approach the end of their college days. Of those just about to graduate some are grappling with conflicting desires to make a lot of money and find intrinsically satisfying work. Others are choosing between entering the working world and continuing on to graduate school.

Many of these college youth are very strongly attached to their families, and some even hope to return to their home communities one day to settle down. However, they generally recognize the need to be away from home, at least for a while, both to grow as individuals and to acquire the skills and educational credentials to pursue their chosen career paths. They are not bound to local contexts in the same way as noncollege youth. Without immediate obligations rooting them to a given place, these youth are physically and psychologically freer to pursue the best opportunities over a much wider geographic area.

Fewer Life Disruptions

These youth are not nearly as likely as the noncollege youth to have their lives “unhinged” by unexpected external circumstances or family tragedies. Because of this, they have the “luxury” of focusing on their futures and the opportunity to try out various adult role possibilities.

These are the peers so envied by the Hispanic youth from a struggling single-parent home who longs for the luxury of concentrating on his studies. These middle-class, college-going youth are not beset by concerns about illness and death, fears that the family will lose its livelihood, or worries about suddenly having to move. They are reasonably secure in the basic structures that undergird their lives and life

choices. This has tremendous advantages in freeing their energies to focus on schoolwork and future careers.

Even when their lives are disrupted by family tragedy, middle-class, college-going youth will probably not suffer the same consequences as the young men described in the previous section. As seen earlier, a number of Hispanic and African American youth's lives had been defined by a need to return home to support and care for sick parents and other relatives. Only one White youth told a similar story of his father's death precipitating a return home after his first 2 years in college. Coming back to the local area meant transferring to another less desirable university. Whatever its drawbacks, enrollment in this university allowed him to continue his education "right away...and not lose a beat." This youth's father's sudden death has clearly impacted his life, and feelings of obligation to his mother may keep him from pursuing better job opportunities outside the local area. Nevertheless, this family tragedy has not derailed his basic life plan or even cost him time out of school. Like other college-going youth, he is preoccupied with "getting a jump start on his career" and has already lined up a job in his chosen field of physical education. Moreover, with his (apparently unsolicited) help, his mother has been able to keep his younger brother at an "upper crust," out-of-state private college.

The "Social Contract" of College Attendance

From a very early age—or, as one youth put it, "since I came out of my mom"—these youth have largely taken for granted that they would be attending college. "I *always* knew I would be going to college, it was just assumed." This was also true of most of their friends. They were raised on and fully accept the premise that a college education is a basic prerequisite for any kind of future financial stability and success. As Steven noted:

Both my parents went to college, my sister went to college, I felt that was one of the best ways to show yourself you are succeeding and not doing manual labor. Not that anything is wrong with manual labor...it's just...well my father is quite successful at what he does and growing up I saw what college, how it had paid off for him and our family...It wasn't something I was pressured into...it was something I wanted to do...No other thoughts crossed my mind..."

Going to college was such a basic part of the environment in which Steven and others like him were raised, that it seemed inevitable; they had to say they had not been pressured into the idea. Unlike some baby-boomers at their age, these youth have never seriously questioned the basis of their privileges. Uniformly grateful for what they have been given, they seek only to reproduce or better their financial situations in the next generation. In looking toward the future, says Steven, "...I hope I can provide for my family the way my father has been able to provide for us. That's one of the things that pushes me as hard

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as I push myself is that growing up I was very lucky...and I didn't take anything that I have now or had for granted because I know how hard my father worked to get those things."

Part of the implicit "contract" with their families is that they will not have to sustain the main financial burden for their own college education. As befits a period of moratorium, the youth's main "job" during this time of his life is to go to school. Although they have since recognized the value of this opportunity, one youth's parents "were not thrilled at first" when he took a part-time job in his chosen field during the school year. They were concerned that working might deflect the youth's attention from schoolwork. Another youth's parents told him to take as much time as needed to choose a major because "this is what you'll be doing for the rest of your life." However, if he should ever drop out or fail, he would "have to pay back every cent." He feels this is "understandable...because shelling out twenty-something-thousand a year for my education is not cheap."

Once in college, these youth have mostly resolved the issue of how to underwrite the cost of their education—the main reason why they might ever have considered enlisting in the military. "Fortunately, my family could afford college," said the 21-year-old son of an executive vice president of a tool manufacturing company. Several have high school friends whose families were not doing as well, and who enlisted in the military or joined ROTC as a way of subsidizing a college education. Recognizing that under less economically advantageous circumstances they might have had to do the same, they are grateful at not having had the same constraints.

One of these youth, Jeremy, had applied to the Air Force Academy—the only Service academy that really "grabbed" him—right out of high school. He still wonders if he would have been happy there, but once refused admission, he has moved on and made other plans for his life. Today, like most of his college-going peers, he believes any further connection to the military would only have cost precious time in launching a planned career in industrial design. These youth are in a terrific hurry to get onto the first rung of what they realize will be a multitiered, multiphased career ladder. Once they have a year or two of college, most see any subsequent involvement with the military (including ROTC) as an unnecessary delay in pursuing this goal.

Not surprisingly, it is these college-going youth from well-educated and reasonably prosperous families who most closely fit the "rational decision-maker" model in how they think about, plan for, and pursue their career paths. These youth investigate different career possibilities in areas of interest, research the range and scope of opportunities and potential for growth and advancement, and know the specific credential requirements attached to different positions.

The Role of Parents, Family, Friends, and Neighbors in Facilitating Career Choices

Many of these youth's parents have played an active role in facilitating their choices, for instance, by helping gather information on different colleges or assisting in narrowing specific career options. Eric, a college sophomore, now extremely happy at a small liberal arts college, admits that in his senior year at prep school he was more interested in playing golf than applying to college. His father did "a lot of research" and ended up finding four of the seven schools where he applied. The only condition laid down was that the school could not have an average SAT score of less than 1000, because "he wanted me to go to a school that I wasn't just going to screw around...an academically well-rounded school." Eric does not consider that his father "did all the work," because "I wrote all the stupid essays." Another youth had thought he would study architecture, but was dissuaded from this path after several deans told him how badly overcrowded the field had become. In the course of investigating other possibilities, his mother discovered information about industrial design, now his chosen field.

The point is not that these youth have been spoon fed by their families; they have been raised in settings that provide ready access to a valuable store of information, expertise, and contacts. Their families and neighbors have served as bridges linking them to these invaluable material and nonmaterial resources, and have provided role models for emulation and discussion. For example, a number of these 19- and 20-year-old college youth have held internships or summer jobs providing first-hand exposure to the kinds of work environments they hope to pursue in the future. In one case, the job was at the company of which the youth's father is executive vice president. "I don't know if my Dad pulled rank to get it for me," he says, rather gamely. Another youth's mother helped land him a summer job doing actuarial work with a neighbor's insurance company. This initial contact has since blossomed into a continuing association, and the youth has assumed increasing levels of responsibility in his work. By contrast, while less privileged youth may feel close to family and neighbors, these ties do not generate similar opportunities. Their social networks are very different.

Opportunities like these have given the college youth a chance to "rehearse" and reality-test their plans and to begin to create a network of professional contacts. "I was calling multimillionaires by their first names!" says one awestruck 19-year-old. Several of these youth believe exposure to real-world work environments has been far more valuable than classroom studies. As one youth put it: "I learned more in one summer than I did in two semesters at school." Growing up in middle-class professional homes has also provided strong positive role models. "I know from my Dad it won't be any 40 hours a week," says one youth when asked what he would expect his future work life to be like. Another youth

indicated his father “always had time for my sister and I, but he would usually go in on weekends to tie up loose ends and stuff.” While they expect to work hard, they also expect to enjoy what they will be doing. “I know sometimes I won’t feel like going in, but mostly it won’t really feel like work, because I’ll be doing something I really like,” says one youth, whose plans to work full-time after graduation at the same firm at which he had interned. Less privileged youth are more likely to want to “take care of” their parents and to look on future jobs as a means to this end rather than a source of intrinsic fulfillment.

Decision-Making Contexts for College-Going Youth of Less Privilege

White Youth

Not all the White college-going youth in our sample are the products of privileged or securely middle-class families. Some have working-class or lower middle-class origins and are the first in their families to go to college. Several of these youth are also tightly bound to local contexts and families in the same way as noncollege youth. Because they lack the economic base of the more affluent youth, as well as the multiple formal and informal sources of support, contacts, and information on career options, these youth are not as firmly ensconced in the world of college and its many benefits. They are often enrolled in community colleges, less prestigious public colleges, or small branch campuses of state universities. In comparison to their more affluent middle- and upper middle-class peers, more live at home for some portion of their college years. Following a pattern set in high school, they may work considerable hours during the school year, often at jobs unrelated to their future goals. They are employed mostly to help pay for their education or accumulate enough savings to move out of their parents’ home or transfer to another school. Living at home and working long hours just to make ends meet, they cannot avail themselves of the same opportunities to participate in campus life and activities as their more affluent peers. These less affluent youth may also miss out on internship possibilities.

These youth tend to have a more tenuous foothold in college than their solidly middle-class peers; they are more likely to have seriously entertained the idea of dropping out, or to have “stopped out” of school, or temporarily “retreated” to a community college environment. Phil considered dropping out of college, but then realized he did not want to “end up” like the men he works with at a furniture factory. “There’s nothing wrong with manual labor,” Phil says, but physical labor has been very hard on his co-workers. Another youth dropped out of school, but after working awhile at the kind of “drudge” job that his father has held all his life, the youth decided it was time to “drop back in” and “stop being such a knucklehead.” The youth is now motivated in school because, “I don’t want to end up like my father...I want to get ahead.” Whereas the middle and upper middle-class youth tend to emulate their fathers and

hope to do as well for their future families, these youth in a sense must surpass their fathers and break with the past and family traditions to “get ahead.”

Another White youth from a modest small-town background was the first in his family to go to college and the only one of his high school friends who went away to school. At first, like many others, he “went crazy with the partying and drinking” when attending a 4-year university away from home. Although he did not flunk out of school, he decided he should go home and regroup and “remember why he had gone to school.” He returned to his hometown and took classes at two local colleges before successfully transferring to a state university, where he is now completing his junior year. This youth is now doing “all right” academically and plans to contact alumnae of his fraternity for information on internships and jobs in his chosen field of correctional counseling. He had briefly considered enlisting during his senior year in high school, but after deciding to go to college wrote it off as an option. If unable to get a job in his field after graduating from college, he might think again about joining the military, but this would be a very low priority. He does not believe the military would provide an opportunity to apply or enhance skills in his chosen career area. However, he concedes he might have considering enlisting had he been contacted by recruiters after he first returned home, “at loose ends.”

This youth’s brief consideration of military service has specific implications for recruiting. It is one of many examples that points to the critical importance of timing: If the youth is not contacted at the “right time” in his life (which can vary from one young man to the other), the opportunity is lost to the military, usually for good. Most of the youth, across all categories, were sensitive to environmental cues, such as the presence of recruiters at their high schools, only if they seemed immediately and directly relevant to them at the time.

African Americans

Although they better fit the rational decision-making model’s criteria than their noncollege-going African American peers, the life contexts of African American youth attending or planning to attend 4-year colleges and universities are still distinctly different than those of the White college-going youth. Even more than the White working-class and lower middle-class youth just described, many of the college-going African American youth have a fragile foothold in college. Only a very few of the African American college students are the second generation in their family to go to college. In fact, there was only one African American respondent who had always taken it for granted he would attend college. Both of his parents are college graduates, and he is enrolled at the same institution where they studied.

Athletic Scholarships

Many of these African American college youth are in school on football or basketball scholarships and worry about what would happen if they were to sustain a physical injury that could finish their athletic career and end their college career. Since sports is their main ticket to college and the middle-class, many of these African American youth are highly vulnerable. In fact, plans to attend college were disrupted for a number of African American youth who were not offered the athletic scholarships they originally expected after having been forced to sit out a semester or two of play in high school because of injuries. One of these youth is about to enlist in the Air Force. A few of the White college students also mentioned sports injuries, but for them the consequences were generally minor. For example, one White youth gave up playing college lacrosse after sustaining an injury to his hand. Lacrosse was never this youth's main reason for attending college. His father is paying for his education, so having to quit the team—while disappointing—did not upset his basic life plan.

In comparison to their middle-class White peers, fewer of the African American students would have a familial economic safety net if they were to lose their athletic scholarships. Even though becoming a professional athlete is not a completely unrealistic possibility for some of these youth, most are hedging their bets by choosing majors that promise good jobs on graduation, should they not make it into the pros. Nevertheless, successfully juggling schoolwork with commitments to the team can be difficult, especially for those without strong academic preparation for college-level work. Several of these African American youth would seriously consider enlisting in the military if, for whatever reason, they should have to leave school: enlistment is their primary fall-back option.

Special Programs

Another “cluster” of African American college students are those whose exposure to special programs at the secondary or post-secondary level provided firsthand knowledge of specific types of jobs that helped set them on a particular academic and career track. Albert, a 21-year-old, now obtaining a 5-year college degree in physical therapy, credits his success to having attended a high school devoted to the health professions. He never considered joining the military because he has known since his early years in high school that physical therapy is what he wanted to do.

One urban youth interviewed works as a phlebotomist and is taking community college courses to begin preparing for a career as a nurse, and then, hopefully, a pathologist. He was introduced to pathology as a profession at a special program in which selected students observed medical facilities and procedures.

The students had the opportunity to interview different staff members about their jobs and speak at length with a staff pathologist about the nature of her work and the academic qualifications needed to pursue it. In his senior year of high school, he had seriously thought of enlisting in the military, but the recruiter told him he was overweight. Since then, his life has traveled a different path, and he tries to “keep himself straight” by going to church with his grandparents.

Hispanics

The Hispanic college-going youth is a very diverse group, which on the whole resembles White college-going youth of similar social class status. From the perspective of ethnic identity, one youth was raised in a Spanish land grant community in New Mexico, whose residents have been “in this country” since the 1600’s. Another represents the fourth generation in this country and identifies himself as Hispanic American, but not with any particular national group and no real idea where his family came from originally. Another youth, studying film and theater production at a major California university, immigrated from Argentina with his parents when he was 9 years old. A few of these youth, including a 19-year-old Ecuadorian and a 20-year-old Puerto Rican, whose parents have stayed in their homeland, live with other relatives while attending school here. The Ecuadorian youth, an energetic go-getter who has been in the United States for less than a year, intends to study finance and accounting so he can open an import-export business in 10 years. Other Hispanic college-going youth fit the more “typical” profile of second-generation Mexican Americans in Texas or Puerto Ricans living in the Northeast.

Some come from families who can afford to send them to college. Others are financially independent, but still managing quite well with a combination of scholarships and part-time jobs. Relatively few are in a situation of duress such as that of the youth described in the first part of this chapter, who was unable to make use of his scholarship because he had to go to work full-time to help support his mother.

These Hispanic youth are pursuing a range of majors from engineering to computer imaging and criminal justice. Except for having stronger ties to relatives beyond the nuclear family, they are very much like their Anglo counterparts from similar socioeconomic backgrounds. Some had briefly entertained the idea of enlisting in the military as a way of helping to pay for their college education, but changed their minds once they won scholarships or found another vehicle for underwriting their college costs. Says a 19-year-old: “That thought of even going into the Air Force...it was no longer on my mind...what was more on my mind was just trying to continue my education in college and hopefully land a career some day.”

A few of these youth indicated that they would enlist if all else failed—as one youth put it, somewhat tongue-in-check, “if something tragic happened, like I got married...something really tragic like that.”

Decision-Making Styles and Approaches

The previous section examined the *contexts* within which the youth make decisions about their careers and future plans. This section focuses on their individual *styles* and *approaches to* decision-making. The youth’s decision-making styles are so closely bound to their life contexts, it would have been unfair and potentially misleading to discuss approaches to decision-making before delineating the radically different contexts within which decisions are made. At the extremes, the two polar opposite decision-making styles parallel the two most different life contexts. Although there is no perfect one-to-one correspondence, in general, the rational decisionmakers are heavily represented among the middle-class and upper middle-class college youth. The youth who display the most “diffuse” and unfocused approaches are disproportionately drawn from those in the least economically privileged and most psychosocially circumscribed life contexts.

Defining Decision-Making Styles

We define *decision-making style* as the overall manner or approach the youth uses in making decisions about or plans for his future. We examined three distinct, yet interrelated dimensions of decision-making in our effort to better understand the youth’s overall decision-making styles: Readiness, Information-Gathering and Follow-Through, and Realism.

Readiness

Readiness is the youth’s perspective on how well prepared he is at this point in his life to make good decisions about what he will be doing in the short- and long-term future. Readiness can be expressed in internal terms (“I feel I have matured enough”), external terms (“life is going okay”), or both (“I am mature enough and I don’t have anything standing in my way”).

Surprisingly few of the youth, of any age or racial or ethnic group, are willing to say they are not yet ready to make to make good decisions, or will admit they are still in the throes of changing their minds about what they are going to do with their lives. A few of the younger African American and Hispanic youth answered “not really,” “no,” or could give no reason why they were in a good position to decide

their future plans. A Hispanic youth: “No, because I haven’t really thought about it.” One 18-year-old African American youth says “...no [I am not in a good position] because I am young and don’t know where to go. When the time is right I will know.” A 20-year-old African American youth in the South who works 50 hours a week and failed the qualifying exam for military service³ says, “I don’t have enough time to decide what I want to do.”

One 18-year-old White youth indicated he was not quite ready for college. “I want to get a feel for something before I actively pursue it.” He does not want to waste time and money pursuing a plan, only to discover he has selected unwisely. He is contemplating joining the military and for now will work on his Dad’s ranch and try to “figure out the options.” A 19-year-old White youth discovered the hard way that he was not ready for college—“I went to college, and the next thing I know, I don’t know nothing!” He has dropped out of college and plans to enlist in the Navy as a way of straightening himself out, and to “get a jump start on things. “I know what I want to accomplish in life, so I just have to go out and start working on it.” These two youth confirm the notion that enlistment can often be the route of choice for youth who need a period of time in which to organize their thoughts and plans to their best advantage. In these cases, the realization that they are not yet ready to go to college reflects a level of self-awareness missing in many other youth of similar age.

Another cluster of mostly younger (17-19-year-old) youth, African American and some Hispanic, answered the question in very externalized terms: “I have to show more responsibility because I’m older, and that’s about it;” “At this point in my life, it’s time for me to start making my own decisions...because my parents are already talking about how its time for me to get out of the house;” “I guess, because I’ve been trying to really graduate [high school] this year...I’ve been talking to my counselors, teachers, and stuff....They tell me try and do something with your life.” What is most striking about these responses is how much the youth seems to be repeating what others have told him, rather than speaking from some kind of internal voice.

Colin, the 19-year-old White high school drop-out, who dreams of opening an auto mechanic shop one day, is going to do what he can, but beyond that will cast his fate to the wind: “I just need to have fun and do my work and hope all the cards are played right.”

³ During the interviews, youth referred to “passing the test” associated with qualifying for military service. The test to which the youth are referring is the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery or ASVAB. The ASVAB is both a selection and classification test used during the military entrance process. The Services use the ASVAB to determine if an applicant qualifies for entry into a Service and if the applicant has the specific aptitude level required to enter job specialty training programs. When youth refer to passing the test, they are referring to either the minimum scores required to enter the military or more specific measures that determine if they are qualified for a specific occupation or career field.

**Career Plans and Military Propensity of Young Men:
Career Decision-making**

Other youth express their readiness by pointing out they have successfully assumed responsibilities on their own, achieved some degree of financial independence from their parents, made decisions, or tested out various possibilities, and seen the consequences of their choices. Their answers often reflect both internal and external factors. For instance:

“I’m about halfway through college. I don’t really have anything that can stop me from that ...I can make a lot more decisions. I’m not really restrained from a lack of money or because of this or that.”—a 19-year-old Hispanic college student, attending college on the proceeds of his deceased father’s military annuity.

“I’ve gotten a lot more responsible since high school.”—18-year-old Hispanic college student.

“I have enough experience to know.”—18-year-old White college-bound high school senior.

One 19-year-old White high school graduate who has made frequent job changes has now decided to enlist in the Army as soon as he can lose 20 pounds. “I’m finally getting it together...It’s like I’ve been bouncing from job to job...and I never really had anything steady.” For him, enlistment is a way to gain access to a structured environment where he can develop better job and interpersonal skills.

The Hispanic youth are most inclined to view their readiness in terms of not yet having a family to tie them down. Says one 21-year-old art student: “Now is the only good time. Later on in life...if I’m married, if I have children, you can’t really decide to change your career or what you do around that time...” Another 22-year-old Hispanic youth feels that “by age 25 you need to be set.” What’s important is “not so much...money or jobs,” but being able to start a family.

As noted above, sometimes a statement of not being in a good position to decide is an expression of maturity. Interestingly, the cluster of youth most willing to make an outright “confession” of nonreadiness or who are more tentative and considered in their responses are all just about to graduate from college. These youth are grappling with issues such as how to reconcile a desire for financial security with a need to find satisfying work. Some are having second thoughts about whether they chose the right major or trying to decide if they should go straight on to graduate school. As one of these youth stated when asked if he was in a good position to make decisions on his future: “Yes and no. Yes, because I’ve had to make thousands and thousands of decisions about randomly different things. Right now, I think the problem is I’m not sure what makes me happy, so I’m not sure exactly what I want to do.” This youth majored in business but wants to work in a field that allows him to concentrate on his interest in people.

Scott, another confused 21-year-old youth also about to graduate from college, is similarly seeking both happiness and wealth. He majored in accounting at his father's urging, but really wants to go into his father's large-scale construction business. His father fears that construction is too risky—"you can lose your shirt"—and would rather his son be a banker or at least get a general business background. The youth would like to apprentice at his father's firm to learn the business from the inside; he worked there as a laborer during summers while he was growing up. However, this youth is also considering the possibility of going back to school, to a graduate program or add-on program in building science, or may even do a fifth year of accounting. Right now, "he just doesn't know" and is concentrating on graduation as his most immediate goal.

Information-Gathering and Follow-Through

The information-gathering and follow-through component of decision-making style has to do with the extent to which and ways in which the youth gathers information about schools, jobs, training options, and future career possibilities. How thoroughly does he investigate the possibilities, and how does he process the information? Also, once having gathered the information, what steps does he take to follow through in terms of concrete actions?

In the "rational decision-maker" model, the youth approaches information-gathering systematically and thoroughly, tapping multiple sources of information, weighing the respective strengths and weaknesses of different options for his purposes, and then coming to a considered judgment on what best suits his needs. Further, once he has run it through his mind, perhaps discussed it with others, he will move from thought to action, and take the necessary steps to set the decision into effect.

A number of youth did approach the various "phases" of their career decision-making in precisely this fashion. Several took vocational aptitude tests as high school students or ran computer programs to identify certain professions as especially suitable. Most of the college-going youth had a fairly well-developed sense of what they were good at and tried to match this with various information bases on available careers. For example, several excelled in math in high school, which led them to consider fields such as accounting, finance, and actuarial work. Those with a bent for art investigated architecture, computer graphics, or design.

As demonstrated, the middle-class, college-going youth often received a good deal of help and support from family and friends in researching and collecting the information. Parents would compile lists of schools or look up career possibilities in directories. These youth also got "real world" guidance from

people in various professions. Scott spoke with the deans of several architecture schools about his interest in the field. They all said architecture was badly overcrowded, and he should only pursue it if it was something he was absolutely committed to do. On the basis of their comments, he decided to look for another field in which he could combine his artistic and mathematical skills, and his mother “came up with” industrial design after reviewing career literature. Scott’s case contrasts starkly with those of several Hispanic and African American youth who say they are going to community college to study architecture because they have a notion it is connected with their enjoyment of drawing. They have not researched the specifics enough to know what majoring in architecture entails, much less have any idea the field is overcrowded. The idea of being an architect sounds substantial and dignified; it appeals to their imaginations. There is no one available to tell them differently.

Realism

Realism has to do with whether the youth has a firm grasp of what will be required in time, energy, education, and material resources to achieve his stated career goals. Given his resources and talents, what are the chances he will be able to reach these goals? Can he differentiate a lofty, but potentially realizable, goal from a totally fantastic pipe dream? Is there a fall-back plan or built-in flexibility, if things do not go as hoped?

For the most part, affluent college-going youth have dreams, but not pipe dreams. Even when ambitious and a bit grandiose, these youth’s future plans are potentially realizable. They recognize, at least in a general way, the sequence of steps that needs to be followed to fulfill them. Thus, although relatively few of these youth may actually own their own company by the time they are 35—something to which quite a few aspire—when they do reach that age, most will have acquired the academic credentials and some of the job experience needed to do so.

Perhaps the most poignant example of “pipe dreams” is Antoine, a 19-year-old inner-city African American youth, who speaks of going to Duke University and being drafted to play in the NBA. Antoine did not play on his high school basketball team, is barely getting passing grades in a continuation school, and has no idea how such a dramatic change in his circumstances might occur. He finally acknowledged that in a few years he is much more likely to be flipping burgers at McDonalds than to reach the NBA. Even if working at McDonalds paid well, he says, he would be ashamed to have his friends see him there. His mother, instrumental in making sure he was at home for the scheduled interview, wants to “put me in the Army...to make a man of me.” Antoine expresses no interest in enlisting, and says he has no idea what his mother means.

For Antoine, exposure to media images of sports has only exacerbated the painful gap between reality and fantasy. Contrast him with Eric, an effusive middle-class, White college sophomore whose sister jokes he is “already a suit at 19.” When asked about his hobbies, this youth read off a list of his many extracurricular activities from his resume!

It might seem harsh to emphasize realism when what these youth can realistically expect is so drastically different from one end of the social class ladder to the other. Antoine, for example, is engaging in pure fantasy, albeit a fantasy with a superficial credibility, because a handful of other African American young men have successfully followed such a meteoric path to fame and riches. This fantasy is a shield for his ego; a protective device that allows him to get mad at his friends when they say he’s “not gonna make it” (“I don’t listen to them”) into the NBA, and turn a deaf ear to his mother’s pleas to consider enlisting. It helps him push back thoughts about working at McDonalds and keeps him from facing reality. The true realist is Kevin, who wishes he could be a farmer, but after a somber evaluation of the situation has opted to enlist in the Air Force in order to eventually get trained in how to repair high tech agricultural equipment. Kevin has found a realistic way to keep his rather modest dream alive.

When the college-going youth take risks in deciding what to do, they are usually calculated risks: they know the situation is uncertain and have thought about how they will handle the worst case scenario. As noted previously, several of the African American youth attending large universities on major athletic scholarships hope to make it into the pros but are only too aware of the dangers of not having a fall-back plan. They are majoring in fields such as engineering and business, professions in which they stand a chance of getting a decent job after graduation. Many of the middle-class college-going youth have lofty goals, such as owning their own firms. They are optimistic, but also realistic in recognizing this might not happen: says one youth, “And if I do get to open my own company—and that’s a big if...” These youth are experienced enough to know that things will unfold with time. For all their advantages, they are less likely than the youth from less privileged backgrounds to see success purely as a matter of will.

A Hispanic youth studying theater and film direction acknowledges that his chosen career is not the most stable field. But it is his one consuming passion. He is getting his degree from one of the best film schools in the country, has interned for theater companies, and has an assistant’s job lined up at a film studio after graduation. He has thought hard about the economic uncertainties and decided that, for now, it is enough if he can just pay the bills. He is truly in love with his chosen field and can hardly contain himself when talking about the artistic challenges. He is also very aware of the fine points of differences between the film world and the theater community and is carefully weighing the advantages and

disadvantages of the two. He is going to follow his dream, but on the basis of accurate information and reasonable, if hopeful, expectations— not blindly.

Relatively few of the noncollege-going youth can realistically dream about anything quite so compelling as this youth's possible future as a film director, or those who anticipate owning their own consulting companies or becoming "a big corporate lawyer." A handful of African American youth with a passion for drawing are attending art schools, hoping to become cartoonists. A few of the noncollege Hispanic youth have successfully worked their way up in their jobs; for example, one is head of security for a shopping mall, another is a fire safety inspector for a theme park. Without going to college, these youth have found a niche in which they can excel and take pride. Then, there those like Bob, who works on a barge on the Mississippi River. These youth speak of their lives and futures with some of the same grounded optimism as the college-going youth. But there are many fewer of them relative to their college-going peers: these days Horatio Alger almost always wears a suit.

Diffuse and Foreclosed Versus Rational Styles

In contrast to their middle-class peers, many of the youth from less privileged contexts might appear to be "irrational decision-makers". Their focus on external readiness, absence of careful information-seeking and follow-up, and lack of a clearly articulated plan for the future actually reflect the uncertainties of their lives. Some of these youth—especially the less privileged African American and Hispanic youth—can be so propelled by circumstances beyond their control, it may be stretching it to say they make decisions at all. College-going middle-class youth can speak with reasonable assurance about future plans; by contrast, these less privileged youth may seem to be temporizing, vague, or purposely evasive when they are actually expressing the objective situation that their lives are governed by a host of mostly uncontrollable external factors. Some of these youth, the "foreclosers", have been forced to make decisions sooner than the college-goers, and, as a result, have not had the same opportunity to explore and test out various options. Others are "diffuse decision-makers" who seem to be following a vague, ill-considered or even random path.

A "diffuse" style did not immediately emerge as distinctive. At first, the youth's stated plans, on the face of it, seemed reasonable: "I will go to community college and study computers." (This is a pro forma response for many of these young men). However, further probing would reveal failure to take any concrete steps to follow up on these plans: the youth had not requested catalogues or information, made no effort to obtain an application, and entertained only the vaguest idea of what aspects of computers he

will be studying. The youth's reasons for not having followed up often ring hollow: "I ain't had the time," "I don't have a car to drive there," "I'd rather hang with my buddies."

The youth had another "plan," maybe even a third: to move to Memphis and study electronics or to go to work at his brother-in-law's auto body shop. The youth was equally vague about the details associated with the second or third plan. He cannot articulate which he would prefer to do and why, or under what conditions he would be more likely to follow one plan over the other. As one interviewer summarized his interview with one of these youth: "The respondent seems to experience difficulty taking action needed to achieve either long- or short-term goals."

After additional probing by the interviewer, it finally emerged that there really was no plan, only the appearance of one.⁴ The illusion of a rational or temporal logic may be an artifact of the phrasing of the questions or the result of the interviewer's efforts to make order out of chaos. Most of these youth recognize they are supposed to have plans, because the adults in their lives have told them so. They realize it is "uncool" to admit they are not in a good position to make decisions, have not really given much thought to their futures, or have essentially given up control over their lives. In a certain sense, the critical difference between these youth and Antoine is that their "plans," on the face of it, sound more realistic. Only a few of the respondents were candid enough to announce they are basically "happy-go-lucky," "taking it day by day," or "not a very serious person."

Although somewhat more common for those still in their teens, among the less privileged youth, the diffuse decision-making style is not as closely tied to age as might be expected. Quite a few of the 20- and 21-year-olds are still unfocused, drifting from job to job, with no apparent pattern or plan to what they are doing. They seem to be waiting for "something" to happen to kick their lives into gear. That "something", if and when it comes, will almost certainly be an external force, rather than an internal trigger. Perhaps the youth's mother will finally decide she has had enough of his "layin' around" and issue an ultimatum, or an old friend will come back to town with a plan that includes the youth. The "triggering" function is sometimes served by the initiation of family responsibilities. For example, several of the Hispanic youth indicated that having met and gotten serious with "the right woman" had rescued them from an aimless existence, in which they had mostly been interested in "hangin'" with their buddies.

⁴ In the first batch of interviews of this type, the interviewers and lead analyst attempted to discern a logic behind these youth's apparently haphazard descriptions of their plans. It becomes evident that this was a distinctive pattern, especially prevalent for African American and, to a lesser extent, Hispanic youth, in more circumscribed contexts. Their language belied the essential lack of logic because they spoke as though they were planning to actually do all these things.

Career Plans and Military Propensity of Young Men:
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In contrast with middle-class college-going youth, these less privileged youth, as a whole, have been immediately thrust into the real world arena, ready or not. College provides a somewhat sheltered environment that allows for a developmental progression in decision-making. Some of the middle-class college youth, who by their sophomore or junior years had a clear sense of future career direction, admit that when they first started college they “didn’t have a clue” what their major would be. One college freshman, who readily concedes he has yet to formulate a plan for his future, is fairly confident that when the time comes to declare a major, he will be ready to make a considered choice. His parents do not expect him to know what he wants to do “right off the bat;” that’s what college is for, they said. They would be concerned about wasting their money, however, were he to arrive at his junior year in a similarly undecided state. The expectations for college-going and noncollege-going youth are clearly very different on this score, placing a more immediate burden on those least prepared to handle it: hence, the “foreclosers” and the “diffuse decision-makers.”

Conclusions: Decision-Making Styles, Decision Contexts, and Joining the Military

There is a three-way interplay among decision-making contexts, decision-making styles, and choosing to enter the military.

The "diffuse decision-makers" are most likely to be from the least privileged, most circumscribed contexts. For these youth—many of whom are African American and Hispanic,—if the timing of the external stimulus is right, enlistment in the military is a *possibility* for those who: (1) can meet the ASVAB qualifications and meet the physical and medical criteria; (2) have no predisposition against entering the military or moral or religious objections to military service; and (3) have families who support this choice, or at least, are not strongly opposed to the idea. However, given the indeterminacy of their "decisions," even those who announce clear intentions to enlist might still change their minds if something else were to occur.

Enlistment also emerged as an option for those youth from less privileged, more circumscribed backgrounds who better fit the "foreclosed" or even the "rational decision-maker" model, especially if they are free from family responsibilities and willing to "make the break" from local settings. Kevin would fit this characterization: He is ready to make decisions, knows what the options are, and has decided to enlist as a way of serving his country and meeting his goals. The other White youth described above who have come to the decision to enlist after dropping out of college or going from job to job would also fit into this category. Perhaps at an earlier point they were "diffuse decision-makers" who have since had the chance to mature and are now in a better position to realistically assess their prospects and plans, which in an objective sense are more limited than those of their more affluent, college-going peers.

The "rational decision-makers" are heavily, but again, not exclusively concentrated among the college youth. These youth, if they ever considered enlistment or joining ROTC did so at a particular point in time, when they were evaluating different ways to help pay for college. A few thought about applying to one of the Service academies; Jeremy did so, but was not accepted. The important point is that once this critical window had passed, further involvement with the military was decisively closed off as an option. It no longer fit with their increasingly more detailed short-term or long-term plans. Decisions about which colleges to attend were made on the basis of which schools offered the most attractive programs in their chosen major fields, not whether the ROTC program on campus was strong.

Career Plans and Military Propensity of Young Men:
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Enlistment would be a fall-back option for some of these youth if anything should happen to upset their college plans, or if they should lose their scholarships. This is particularly true for the African American youth attending college on athletic scholarships who do not enjoy the same family safety net as many of the White and some of the Hispanic youth and are subject to fairly intense pressures in school, on the playing field, and at home. As we will see, enlistment also figures into the picture for youth who realize they are not yet ready for college or prepared to commit to a clear path. However, as will be seen in the next chapter, any enlistment decisions for the youth in this or any other category, must also be filtered through the particular prisms of the youth's family context, religious beliefs, and personal experience with and views toward the military.

4. THE MEANING OF PROPENSITY

Chapter 3 delineated two very different decision-making contexts—defined primarily by social class, and to a lesser extent by racial and ethnic and rural/urban differences—within which these youth make choices about their futures. These two types of contexts provide very different resources, possibilities, opportunities, and life chances. These contexts, in turn, interact with the individual youth’s approach to decision-making, and with timing to create differential possibilities and potentials for joining the military. This chapter builds on this foundation by exploring youths’ views toward and perspectives on joining the military in greater depth and on explicating the varied meanings and personal and familial bases of propensity to join the military.

In the larger YATS effort propensity to join the military is a key measure. As a yearly survey of youth, YATS is designed to map trends in propensity across different categories and groups of youth. While YATS provides a reliable statistical measure of changes in propensity, the close-ended format of the survey provides little freedom for probing in detail the meaning of youth’s responses. Specifically, the meaning behind a youth stating that they will “definitely” or “probably” be serving on active duty in the military in the next few years or that they will “probably not” or “definitely not” be serving is often unclear. The intent of this qualitative study was to explore the meaning of propensity in greater depth.

Use of the open-ended interview format allowed the youth to “tell their stories” in their own terms. We were able to gather perspectives on various subjects that bear on the specific content of the individual, familial, and social facets of propensity. This methodology enabled us to go behind the straightforward demographic correlates of propensity, to flesh out more fully grounded, multidimensional portraits of the youth in various propensity groups.

These “portraits” describe youth images of military and civilian life; their sources of information about military life and about school and work; the nature of their contacts with others who are serving, or have served, in the military; their assessments of the advantages and disadvantages of military versus civilian lifestyles; and their perspectives on how they imagine they would change as individuals if they were to enter the military, as opposed to how they envision themselves changing if they were instead to go to work or attend school. We examine whether different characteristic patterns or configurations emerge for different propensity groups, and how these distinctive “clusters” relate to the decision-making styles and contexts elaborated in Chapter 3.

Career Plans and Military Propensity of Young Men: *The Meaning of Propensity*

The portraits are organized by four propensity groupings, labeled *Joiners*, *Shifters*, *Fence-Sitters*, and *Non-Joiners*. *Joiners* are youth who appear most likely to enter the military. *Shifters* are those who had seriously considered enlisting but, at the time of the interview, appeared very unlikely to join. *Fence-Sitters* are those who have given military service at least some consideration, and for whom military service remained a possibility. *Non-Joiners* are youth who never considered military service and appear very unlikely to join.

Young men who, on the basis of their 1995 YATS responses, appeared to fit into these categories were selected for interview (see Appendix A). Some were later reclassified, either because they had changed their mind since the YATS interview or because the YATS-based classification was inconsistent with our general sense of these categories. Some, for example, who said they had “seriously” considered military service for 5 or 10 minutes, seemed more appropriately classified as Non-Joiners than as Shifters. Thus, YATS data were used to select respondents for in-depth interviews, but the information from these interviews, along with their YATS responses, was used to put them into the categories reflected in the following discussion. In the following discussion, references to “original” classifications refer to those based on responses to YATS in the 1995 Fall administration.

Conceptual Framework

We explored several interrelated facets of youth lives and views to more fully understand the meaning and nature of military propensity. These can be divided into three component dimensions: *Images*, *Social and Informational Bases*, and *Interpretation*.

Images. This has to do with the images the youth hold of military life, as contrasted with their images of life going to college or working. How sharply drawn are these images? What do they suggest about the youth’s conceptions of what either type of lifestyle would be like day-to-day, and over the course of time? The youth were also asked what they perceived as the major advantages and disadvantages of military as opposed to civilian lifestyles, both for themselves as individuals, and more generally.

Analytically, our central concern was to see if we could find meaningful differences among groups along this dimension. Do Joiners hold more positive or more sharply defined images of the military than Non-Joiners? If so, what is the specific content of the differences? Similarly, do the youth in different propensity groups recognize the same advantages and disadvantages to military and civilian lifestyles, or

are their views divergent, and if so, how? Finally, to what extent are the differences framed in terms of individual preferences and proclivities?

Social and Informational Bases. This addresses the sources of the youth's information on, and images of, the military as compared to civilian lifestyles. Knowledge is socially grounded in the sense that youth will tend to evaluate what they hear and read at least partly in light of the source of the information in relation to them. This dimension of propensity encompasses such things as: the extent and nature of the youth's contacts with others who are serving or have served in the military and who these people are vis-à-vis the youth; the youth's primary sources of information on and exposure to military and civilian lifestyles; the extent and nature of the youth's contacts with, and their impressions of, military recruiters.

The analytic issues here revolve around differences among propensity groups in these key social and informational elements. Are Joiners more apt to have had direct exposure to military life, or be "military brats?" Are Non-Joiners less likely to know people serving in the military? Finally, are there differences across propensity groups in terms of the nature or extent of contacts with recruiters?

Interpretation. This final dimension has to do with the way(s) in which the youth make sense of the images and information on military and civilian life; how they "process" the material through the prisms created by their individual life contexts, personal and familial experiences, and views of themselves as individuals.

In theory, two youth might hold the same images of military versus civilian life, have identical sources of information, and be operating out of highly similar decision-making contexts, yet "emerge" as different in their propensities because they interpret this material differently in relation to their own needs or criteria. Clearly, some youth are more reflective and thus better able to self-consciously articulate these issues than others, but this interpretive dimension is usually in play, at some level, for most youth. In a sense, it is the critical determinant and should be "superimposed" on the other two dimensions.

In the remainder of this chapter, we examine each of the four propensity groups, in turn. We will briefly describe the adjustments made to the initial classifications based on YATS survey data, and then provide descriptions of salient characteristics and experiences of each group. Summaries for each group are provided at the end of each section, and summary observations for all groups, with ties to the decision-making styles described in Chapter 3, are presented at the end of the chapter.

Joiners

Joiners were initially classified on the basis of YATS survey responses. They had indicated that they had previously seriously considered joining the military and mentioned military service among their future plans. As a result of information gathered during the in-depth interviews, a large proportion of these youth were reassigned to other propensity groupings. Many were reclassified as a consequence of their decision-making style. They were actually “diffuse decision-makers” whose YATS survey responses suggested a stronger sense of decisiveness than they actually exhibit. In response to discrete questions about career plans, they appear to have direction and a plan. Based on the deeper questioning in the in-depth interview, however, apparent decisiveness gives way to reveal a diffuse, unfocused approach to career decision-making. They were better described as Fence-Sitters than Joiners.

Some “Joiners” were reclassified because of changes in circumstances occurring in the interval between the YATS survey interview and the in-depth interview. For example, one African American youth who was a likely Joiner when interviewed in the fall of 1995 became a Shifter by the spring of 1996. Early in 1996 this youth discovered that his father intended to pay for his college education. This youth no longer needed the military to finance his education, so enlistment was no longer even considered an option.

Family Footsteps

How do Joiners compare to other youth? As a group, they are more likely to have a familial background or connection to the military and to have had a positive Junior ROTC experience in high school.

One Joiner, a Hispanic high school senior, has mapped out a career trajectory totally modeled on his father’s life: He will take Army ROTC in college, graduate as a commissioned officer, stay in the military for 20 years, then get a job like his father’s, where he “won’t have to wear a suit” and “be like everyone else.” Interestingly, this youth, who has known since age 13 that he wanted to join the Army, and unexpectedly enjoyed his time in Junior ROTC, rejects a work environment where there are “stupid regulations to follow, dress codes, and all that.” He has dismissed the idea of enrolling in the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) because “there’s always discipline.” He hopes to avoid being subjected to discipline, the predominant image called to his mind by the military, by entering the Army as an officer. He puts emphasis on the image that the Army “takes care of you” when you need to be taken care of. After 20 years, when more able to stand on his own, he will be free to pursue a “more relaxed life.” These contradictory images are woven together to form a rationale that reconciles a dislike for discipline

with a plan to devote 20 years to an institution he regards as defined by discipline and chain-of-command. This youth is only 17, and his father is still his primary role model.

Another 17-year-old Hispanic high school senior plans to apply to the Air Force Academy. If his application is rejected, he will enlist in the Air Force for 4 years, then use the money to pay for college. His ultimate goal is medical school. This youth also seeks to follow in his father's military career footsteps, and participated in Junior ROTC in high school. He associates the military with images of discipline, respect, and management. Civilian life is less disciplined, and college would entail "a lot of partying", one reason he will enlist rather than join ROTC. This youth feels the military offers the advantages of travel and provides a better environment in which to raise children, but is ambivalent about military recruiters who are "salesmen at heart."

Ambivalence and Mixed Signals

Other confirmed Joiners are ambivalent about specific aspects of military life or have gotten "mixed signals" with respect to their plans to join. One 19-year-old African American youth, whose father spent 20 years in the Army and now drives a truck, plans to enlist in the Air Force for only 3 years, "just enough time" to learn specific skills. He is attracted to the Air Force because it is the "least military" of the branches, and wants to get training in drawing and truck driving. His real love is cartooning, and he would like to obtain his own copyright as a cartoonist. He is rather uncertain about how to pursue his cartooning interests. He feels he was not meant to own his own business and would be unsuccessful at college because he is poorly prepared. He talks mainly to his father about his plans; both his father and his uncle advise him that joining the military is "the best thing to do." The military does not exert a strong appeal, but given his family history and limited possibilities in a small southern town, it seems the most realistic possibility. Enlistment will at least expose him to travel, give him more discipline, and help him to "make decisions with better taste."

A 19-year-old White Joiner had always sought to avoid the military because his father, an enlisted man in the Navy, never made very much money. He grew up in a family with constant worries about making ends meet, and decided that college was the best guarantee of having a life without such worries. A wealthy relative agreed to finance his college education, but the youth quit after a very marginal freshman year ("I didn't actually flunk out"), in which it became obvious that he could no longer get by without applying himself in school. His friends in college also got caught up in the partying and dropped out even sooner. This youth had considered joining ROTC, but his university did not have a Navy ROTC

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program, and by family tradition, the Navy is the only branch that interests him—he has very strong negative views about all the other branches.

Now chastened, this youth intends to enlist in the Navy for 4 years and to use this experience as a way of developing better discipline and saving money for college. He sees the 4-year commitment as a way of preparing himself for re-entering college when he comes out, by which time he vows to be “dang sure” to be ready to buckle down to his studies. His family, both immediate and extended, supports his decision to enlist, as does his fiancée, although somewhat reluctantly. Like most of the youth in our study, he does not solicit advice on his future from friends.

“The only thing I’m using the Navy for is to get the benefits, the money, and maybe see a bit of the world,” said this youth. “I’m not looking to carry a gun and shoot at people and all that.” This youth expects to be homesick at first, but for the most part, it will be an interesting learning experience, and “mellow out and become more like a normal job” once boot camp is over. Like many youth, he is not especially worried about danger or interested in fighting to defend his country. The first recruiter with whom he came into contact was “very, very pushy” yet also vague on the specific information the youth sought. “I just blew him off [the recruiter] until I was ready and didn’t care who it was at that point.”

Another Joiner, a White 17-year-old high school senior, plans to enlist in the Army (He likes the Marines better, but they are “unfriendly” to families). He is similar to other youth in feeling unprepared to handle college now because he would party too much and “not buckle down.” This youth’s father would rather he go to college “and get a real job,” but he guesses his father is supportive of his decision because “you’ll never starve in the military, but you’ll never be rich.” His father would like him to be a millionaire someday—“which I know is not going to happen”—but knows he’ll “do okay and be able to pay my bills” in the military. Depending on whether he likes the Army or not, this youth’s plan is either to enlist for 4 years and then go to college, or go to college for enrichment after retiring from the Army. He wants to join a special forces unit like the Green Berets: “I don’t want to be a grunt!”

Interestingly, this youth plans to enter the military in spite of having been raised in a church that teaches that “the military is wrong and killing people is real bad. You shouldn’t be a soldier and...shouldn’t serve your country.” Nevertheless, as a younger child he had been drawn to the Marines because of the uniform and “what it stands for.” Service to country is one of the images he associates with the military, along with working out, getting up early and being subjected to physical and mental stress. This youth knows a lot of people serving in the military who have offered tips on how to get along and has talked to “more recruiters than I can count on my fingers and toes.” Recruiters tell “90 percent truth and 10

percent lies.” He views boot camp as akin to a fraternity hazing: “I’m probably going to feel about six inches tall—when they start yelling at you—but when I get through boot camp, I’m going to be able to look back and say, you know, that was fun.” This youth is a bit ambivalent about taking orders from people who may not have done anything to earn his respect, but apart from this foresees no major difficulties. Although he believes the military will change him for the better, he also recognizes some people enter the military “a really cool person” and come out a “real [expletive].”

An articulate 19-year-old White Joiner from a small town with limited opportunities “unless you have a certain last name,” also grew up in the military. His father was a career military man. He is still somewhat hesitant to break away from family and friends and fearful of committing himself and discovering he will not like it and then “be stuck,” as has occurred with several of his friends. His father, now retired, had a good experience in the military, but his friends in different branches report the military has not “lived up to its promises.” The job training he would receive in the Army is uppermost, since he was “never really that smart in school” and the “college scene really isn’t me—I don’t drink much, put it to you that way.”

This youth looks upon entering the military as a way of “shaping up,” gaining job training, and escaping the limitations of a small town. Having been raised in the military and lived in many places has given him a broader perspective on the world than most of his small town peers. He knows “there’s a whole world out there,” whereas his friends in town “think this is all there is.” While he considers himself reasonably disciplined, he feels he could now use more discipline, since for the last few years he has been living with his mother. His father supports his plan to enlist, but his mother is not really happy with the idea because “she’s afraid I’d become like my father.”

Like several other Joiners, this youth sees the military as a fairer, more “honest” system, with less underhanded “office politics” than other work environments. The downside is the loss of freedom. However, his experience with the recruiting process so far has been negative. The first time he took the ASVAB he reports that he was going through rough times and, as a result, scored very low. The second time he scored much high. Reportedly, his second score is being considered invalid because it is so much higher than the first, and he is being required to take a third ASVAB. He is very upset because he believes he is being accused of cheating and “they must know there’s no way you can cheat on a test like this.” Along with his mother’s misgivings, and his fears of being “stuck,” hard feelings around this test issue are holding him back from making that final decision. However, at 19, he recognizes that “he is not getting any younger” and believes the military will no longer want him if he waits much longer. By his own admission, enlisting is the most likely scenario, since he really has no alternative plans, and his father

is very influential in his life. He believes the military will make him a “better person” and force him to decide on his long-term goals.

Discipline As A Recurrent Motif

The 17 year-old mid-western farm youth described in Chapter 3, Kevin, who plans to enlist in the Air Force for training as an agricultural mechanic, also falls into the category of a Joiner. Although his father could not serve in the military because of “bad eyes,” a number of his uncles did; so again, there is a clear family precedent for choosing the military option. Kevin’s cousin, several years his senior, followed exactly the same path he plans to pursue. “I’ve had quite a lot of relations that have been in the Air Force and really liked it. I have about the same opinion as my relatives on most things. I’ve talked to a lot of my friends that have gone in the Air Force. They say it is really a “good deal.” Kevin enjoys widespread support for his decision from family, friends, and his school counselors. For whatever reasons, college is just not in the picture, even though his high school grades are now excellent. No one in the family has gone to college. Moreover, he prefers physical to mental labor and enjoys “hard work” and tinkering with machines. He would not apply for a scholarship to technical school because he believes it would be like taking charity: “I’d rather work and save up the money if I had to, I don’t believe in getting something without working for it, that’s just the way I am.”

The military lifestyle conjures up images of service to his country and discipline, which he regards as a very positive thing. Like a number of other Joiners and other youth interviewed, Kevin tells a story of having been wild and out-of-control several years ago. His parents are divorced, he was living with his mother at the time, and then his father took him in and “brought him in line” through imposition of strict discipline. His grades shot up and he now holds two responsible part-time jobs in addition to his studies. If it weren’t for discipline, “I wouldn’t be talking about future plans,” like others his age who “won’t amount to much.” His younger brother, who lives with their mother, is “just like I was then,” but “I can’t talk to him—I just don’t understand him.” Discipline...“keeps you in line, a pretty good way to go...discipline is what you need. You don’t go around like a chicken with its head cut off.”

This positive view of firm externally imposed discipline is a strong part of Kevin’s attraction to the military, although his ultimate desire is to get a better job afterward. He watches no television, so media influence on his views is minimal. The Air Force recruiter was “a good guy,” but it did not really matter since “I had my mind set on it anyway.” Kevin’s views of recruiters are certainly more positive than most. However, the basic point is the same: once the youth has made up his mind, the recruiter does not

exert a decisive influence in either direction. Recall, for example, the youth who “blew off” the pushy recruiter until he decided for sure, then “it didn’t matter who” the recruiter was.

Another Joiner is a 19-year-old first generation Mexican American high school graduate who participated in Junior ROTC and plans to enlist in the Marines for 5 years if he can pass the Texas skills test. This youth envisions the military as “physically hard,” feels it is time for him to do something with his life, and was influenced favorably by TV advertisements. Junior ROTC taught him discipline and how to march. The biggest advantage of enlisting in the Marines, apart from discipline, is that it will give him an as yet undetermined career; whereas the biggest disadvantage is that he’ll get “kicked out if I mess up.” This youth was unable to articulate differences between military and civilian lifestyles, and is interested in becoming a policeman. He is a classic “diffuse decision-maker” who may well end up in the Marines if he passes the test, because it is the path of least resistance. He has friends, but no relatives, serving in the military.

Another 18-year-old Hispanic high school senior is only waiting for his braces to come off before enlisting in the Marines, which he expects to be his career. His grandfather and father both served in the Navy, an uncle was a Marine in Vietnam, and he has friends in all branches of the Service who speak of it very positively. This youth is probably the most “gung ho” of all those interviewed. “The Marines are toughest—they get more respect and are better trained for hand-to-hand combat.” The military life calls up rather stereotypical images of travel, adventure, and respect (although he can’t say why). The movie “Full Metal Jacket” contributed to his favorable picture of military life. This youth, who also believes the military is “easier” than the civilian world because “everything is provided,” has a rather interesting, though not uncommon, perspective on boot camp and, more generally, on the role of stress in military life. “In boot camp they yell at you all the time...they get you used to it so when you come out in civilian life, nothing really bothers you—you don’t just snap sometimes.” While his is probably the boldest articulation of the perspective that military life inures a person to abuse, he is not the only youth to express this as a positive benefit of the military

Some of these youth may well need to be taught how to subject themselves to discipline and exert stronger self-control. One 17-year-old White high school senior from a small town plans to enlist in the Army; several misdemeanors on his record have barred him from his first choice, the Air Force. He views the Marines as “too primitive,” claiming “the only person who would benefit is one who likes to go out and shoot people.” His main goal in enlisting is to get job security, benefits, and job training. His current plan is either to enlist for one stint, then use the money for college or, if he likes it, to reenlist. He has gotten mixed reactions from those currently in the military with whom he has spoken about his plans.

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Some “say they want to get out themselves,” others advise him to take a few years of college before enlisting so he has a clearer sense of what type of training he wants. He believes he cannot afford college at this point and has a realistic view of what military life is like from having lived on an Air Force base with his sister and brother-in-law for 6 months the year before. He observed military life firsthand and spoke with his brother-in-law at great length about the daily regimen.

This youth has a history of getting into fights and of public intoxication. He matter-of-factly reports, “I was a laborer at a saw mill and that went along pretty well. It was really hard work. The pay was good. The boss tried to kill me. I got chased and shot at.” Military life will be restrictive; “you can’t quit, grow hair, put on weight, or set your own schedule—you’re government property.” Boot camp will be “a pain—something I won’t like but will have to put up with.” Joining the military connotes loss of freedom and “losing all my hair.” Going to Bosnia would be “all right.”

This Joiner sounds like a similarly rebellious working class Non-Joiner who believes “he would never last” in the military because of his “bad attitude.” This Joiner’s responses suggest he may not enjoy the best relations with his parents and might have “been shipped off” to live with his sister and brother-in-law because he was getting into trouble, disobedient, and difficult to manage. The military, with its all-encompassing structure and strictness, may hold a certain polar attraction for this angry, directionless young man, befriended by the Army recruiter who took “a very personal approach,” which greatly encouraged the youth in his decision to enlist.

Perhaps the most thoughtful of all the “Joiners,” Jacob, a soft-spoken 17-year-old White youth, may end up not joining the military at all as a result of “technicalities.” Jacob, home-schooled since he was in second grade, has given considerable thought to his decision to enlist in the Air Force, consulting with his parents (“whose opinion I respect enormously”), grandparents, and friends. As a true rational decision-maker, he carefully researched the opportunities in the military and weighed the relative advantages of the military and college, his other major option. He also “prayed on” the decision and felt it “was right in my heart.” At some point, Jacob had been wavering between the Army and the Air Force, but decided on the Air Force because the recruiter was more responsive and interested in his case. Jacob is something of an anomaly in that he acknowledges that the YATS survey probably played a role in clarifying his preference for the Air Force, although not his basic desire to enlist. Jacob’s father is in the Reserves, his grandfather served in the Navy, and he also has a cousin and a friend in the Service.

Jacob views the differences between the military and college, as well as the relation between these two environments and his individual needs, in a far more sophisticated fashion than most of his peers. The

military provides a “structure to keep you in place,” requires more interdependence and teamwork, is more disciplined, focuses on “hands-on” training rather than education in an esoteric sense, and allows him to “pay back for what they give me in a free country.” The military also provides broader exposure to people and places, as he would most likely attend college locally. The issue of danger is moot because “wherever you are there is always danger.” By contrast, college is a more individualistic environment, where you sink or swim on the basis of your own efforts and are responsible entirely and only for yourself. College also focuses on “education” as distinct from “training.”

After careful consideration, Jacob determined that the military environment would better suit both his personality needs and his desire to acquire technical training in communications and computers. It would also be more beneficial financially in relieving his parents of the cost of his education, as there are a number of younger siblings “coming up” and he is worried about the expense of attending even a local state college. He feels he is a person with a lot of good ideas and little “follow through,” so for him the discipline would be a boon. “There are a lot of kids my age who are really off the deep end,” he notes—echoing the statements of others above. “The discipline would be good—not that I’m saying every little delinquent should go into the Armed Services, but as for me personally, I know where I lack and I think the discipline would be good for me.”

The stumbling block to going ahead with his plan is that the Air Force may not accept his home-school diploma as a bona fide credential, and Jacob is unwilling to enter as an alternative credential holder because this would limit his options. He believes his home-school certificate is at least as good as a regular diploma, but “we are going around and around” as to whether he will have to take tests to acquire CLEP credits, which is “awfully expensive.” The Air Force recruiter is “trying his best” but is inexperienced and Jacob’s case was clearly throwing him for a loop.

Jacob interrupted his first interview session to keep an appointment with the recruiter and then discussed the results with the interviewer the following evening. He was obviously frustrated and puzzled as to why the Air Force would not accept a credential recognized by most colleges as adequate for admission. Unless the issue were to be resolved soon and without requiring much additional expense on his family’s part, he would, with some disappointment, simply opt to go to college while there was still time to submit an application. For this sensitive youth, the hardest part of accepting this turn of events would be to think he did not “measure up” to Air Force standards. However, “if it didn’t work out, so here is my other option, so continue on.” In this latter thought, he echoes the voices of several college youth who had at one point considered the military, either as an enlistee or through entry into one of the Service

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academies and had subsequently moved on with their lives. If we were to recontact him in 2 years, Jacob might look like any other Shifter, illustrating once more the key importance of timing.

Timing is Critical

Timing is also a critical factor in the cases of the two youth, one originally classified as a Shifter and the other a Fence-Sitter, who now can both be considered Joiners. One is Zane, a 19-year-old White high school graduate, whose propensity shifted radically between YATS and the in-depth interviews after he was fired from his most recent job under what he considers unfair circumstances. Zane has held a succession of low-paying jobs, including fast food, lawn care, supermarket checkout, building maintenance, and factory work, in a matter of only a few years. He describes himself as “bouncing from job to job as long as I’ve been alive.” The last job “...was working out real well. And I was good friends with all the owners and all the managers, but then one of the managers, for some reason, she just...flat out told a lie that got me fired that had nothing to do with me.”

At the time of the follow-up interview, Zane had not been employed for 3 months, and as a result, had fallen behind in car payments. He needs to lose another 8 pounds (he has already lost 12) before he can qualify to join the Navy, which “you can rely on as a steady job for at least the next four years.” He was brought to this decision by disgust at having to “kiss up to everybody so you can keep your job” in the civilian world, and by owing his parents a lot of money. He has a preference for the Navy because his father served in that branch, and he loves the water. He is considering either pursuing the medical field or else a Navy program to be trained as a military policeman and become a civilian police officer upon release.

Zane’s parents strongly support his enlistment decision, however, others in his life are fairly neutral. This is not the first time Zane has considered enlisting, but in the past, he had always “set the thought aside” because it was not really his goal at that time. He has one friend and one cousin in the military, both females, who “love it.” Enlisting will provide a good opportunity to “get some schooling, attend college, and travel...get all my debts paid off; insurance, medical insurance” is “a bonus.” Zane pushes away thoughts of military discipline because he realizes he is not a very disciplined person, adding that, “When I want to be, I can be all right.” Boot camp will be “a wonderful opportunity to get in shape.” The recruiter is not really very influential in the decision process, but “is sort of like the means to get in.” He believes that media portrayals of the military focus on wartime, whereas in peacetime “everybody has a job and does a job to keep the military going and keep it strong—it’s like an everyday thing...It’s almost no different than a civilian job except that you’re taken care of.”

Not surprisingly, in addition to job security, Zane sees a more professional working environment as one of the strongest advantages to being in the military. He describes the scene of his most recent firing, with the owners “cussing at me because I was just trying to explain my case,” and feels this would not happen in the military, where there is mutual respect and working together toward common goals. The military will make him “more disciplined...wiser...more experienced and ready for the type of life I want to have.” Although he might never have been brought to the point of making the decision to enlist, this youth now speaks in a voice strikingly similar to the voices of most of the other White Joiners.

Another 19-year-old African American high school graduate originally categorized as a YATS Fence-Sitter has now become a Joiner. Since YATS, he had lost his most recent job as a part-time server and busboy at a Holiday Inn and does not see college as an option. He plans to enlist in the Air Force, although his friends in the Army are trying to convince him to go into the Army with them. This youth’s father had been in the Air Force, where he learned welding, one of the skills this young man wants to develop while serving in the Air Force. The word that best characterizes this youth’s taciturn responses is “resigned.” Everything is “all right,” or “fine.” Some of the sense of resignation may come from having made a decision to turn down a football scholarship to a Division 3 school several years before, because he “thought he could do better than go to a D3 school.” The youth now feels he is being rushed by everyone, especially recruiters, to make a decision. He hopes to play football in the military, too. He feels by the time he is 25 he’ll be in a good position to make decisions because “I will have had some experience.”

For this youth, the military calls up images of war and travel. His short-term goals are to “get through the military” and be able to get a job making \$10-\$15 an hour after he gets out. His parents “wish me luck” on entering the military, but they are also concerned about the dangers of war; this thought also troubles him as “I’m not ready to go to no war yet.” He will probably become a better

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person in the military, he feels, because it would change his attitude away from “street sense,” toward “home sense,” which he explains as follows:

“Street, like in the street, people try to get you onto drugs and violence, crime. At home [in the military] you would be away from parents, knowing they would wait...that you are trying to do something for yourself.”

The subdued tone of this youth’s interview, as well as his sense of resignation in entering the military to flee a bleak environment, are repeatedly echoed in the interviews with African American Shifters and Fence-Sitters, including many of those originally categorized as Joiners.

Joiners: A Summary

The life stories of youth who seem most likely to actually enter the military reveal a number of common “threads” or themes, woven together in several characteristic ways:

- They are mostly from less well-to-do working class or lower middle-class backgrounds and small town environments.
- Many of these youth have a familial basis or tradition of military service, often strongly rooted in one or another branch, although this may not be without ambivalence and contradictions. Several had positive experiences in junior ROTC.
- They also tend to have extensive contact with people serving in the military, although the signals they receive from them on military life are sometimes mixed.
- Many of the youth do not feel they are college material or are yet ready for college. They may have dropped out or, more often, believe they are academically unprepared, emotionally immature, or lacking the self-discipline to study and not get involved in partying. Others may simply not be particularly academically inclined or interested in “book learning,” or may prefer a “hands on” approach.
- Relatively few of the youth mention serving their country as a major motivation for joining the military. The few who did were often a bit apologetic about it, prefacing their remarks with “I’m not all that patriotic, but...” as if embarrassed to admit they might have larger social or ideological motivations. By the same token, one youth is expressly going against the teachings of his church by enlisting.
- The primary motivation for joining the military, whether by entering ROTC or enlisting, is 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.

- “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.”
- Although these youth generally have somewhat more favorable views of recruiters than others in our sample, they are still not uniformly positive by any means. Recruiters do not appear to make a critical difference in making a choice of whether to join, but may influence the choice of which branch of the Service the youth will join once he has definitely decided to enter the military. “Pushy” recruiters are ignored, “blown off” or endured, until the youth have made up their own minds.

The “Unlikely” Joiners

About half of the youth originally identified as Joiners on the basis of their YATS responses can be more appropriately described as Non-Joiners, Fence-Sitters, or Shifters. A small part of the discrepancy between their YATS responses and our assessment based on the in-depth interviews can be attributed to changes in circumstances in the interval between interviews. For example, one African American youth who was a likely Joiner when interviewed in Fall 1995, by early Spring of 1996 had discovered that his estranged father in another city intends to pay for his college education and set him up in business. The youth no longer needs the military to finance his education.

More often, the youth are “diffuse decision-makers” with rather formless plans whose YATS responses suggested a stronger sense of decisiveness than they actually feel about what they will be doing. For these youth, there is a big difference between entertaining thoughts of enlistment and really intending to act upon them. How do the other youth originally categorized as Joiners compare to the “true” or likely Joiners described above? Is there anything different about the themes or “threads” that weave their way through their stories? Beyond this, how similar are these youth to those in the other propensity categories?

It should come as no surprise that we have already “met” many of these young men, as individuals or in groups, in Chapter 3. Among them are:

- The 18-year-old married White youth who has to “get used to living in a girlie room” and is taking Ritalin for Attention Deficit Disorder;

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- The 260 pound White rural southern youth who lives in a trailer with his mother, father, girlfriend, cousin and cousin's girlfriend, and is deeply attached to his family;
- The African American youth helping his father care for his nephew;
- An 18-year-old Hispanic youth with no green card;
- A legally retarded 21-year-old African American youth with what the interviewer politely reported as "an unrealistic perception of his capabilities";
- An 18-year-old African American youth from a small town in the South who doesn't want to "do this sittin' around the house";
- The 19-year-old Hispanic gang youth with a scholarship to a culinary school and strong attachments to his neighborhood;
- An 18-year-old African American high school senior living in rural Mississippi who "really doesn't know" what he's going to do;
- A 19-year-old first generation Mexican American whose frightened sister asked the interviewer, in Spanish, if her brother would have to go to jail if he did not join the Army; and who says he'll "most definitely join if nothing works out," but "I can be sure one day and the next day don't know"; and,
- A 20-year-old African American high school graduate with a fast food job he hates, who has twice failed the written exam to qualify for the military.

Thus, about one-third of the original group of supposed Joiners, fall into this cluster of youth with: obligations to family, strong ties to local contexts, factors of health and mental ability that mitigate against a "free choice model," and/or "diffuse decision-making" styles. Given the understanding of youth from less privileged and more psychosocially circumscribed contexts developed in Chapter 3, as well as the initially misleading impression of decisiveness communicated by many "diffuse decision-makers", it is not hard to see why there are so many "false positives" in this cluster. It may be that these youth really did see joining the military as a likely option at the time they answered the YATS, or perhaps took it as the easy way out of thinking very hard about their responses. Whatever their reasons, they are more aptly classified as Non-Joiners, or Fence-Sitters, at best.

The question remains as to whether these youth are different than the "true" Joiners in any systematic or meaningful way. Are their images of military life somehow different? Do their social environments or family backgrounds include other elements? Is it ultimately a matter of decision-making style, or even just happenstance? The answer is not simple or straightforward. Certainly, these youth strongly resemble the "true" Joiners in their socioeconomic and small town origins. Many of the same

themes and patterns also recur through all their life stories; it is just that their stories are woven together in slightly different ways, or “converge” at different points.

Several of the youth who now appear unlikely to join, many of whose life histories were presented in Chapter 3, are simply too bound up in family obligations and local contexts to enlist. The one married White youth still imagines he might enlist if his wife “lets him,” but also simultaneously envisions a host of other possibilities, including going to community college, joining ROTC and “learning to fly” or becoming a lawyer. His interview has a somewhat manic quality as he jumps from topic to topic, admitting that getting up early would be a problem, and he “really does not know much about the military.” He realizes he is “a spoiled brat” and the military would probably help him recognize that life “is not just a game,” but then again, it really is a game. This youth’s father could not serve in the military because he was crippled, but his uncle was in the Air Force, and is now in “the Confederate Air Force.” However, these family members “never really talked. I couldn’t even get them to say anything [about their experiences in the military].” His cousins are all in jail. After discussing the military’s advantages in providing job security (“doing your job and not messing up”) and funds to go to school and dismissing danger because “you can get killed walking down the street,” he acknowledges it would be hard to leave his family. He finally discloses the psychological function that envisioning enlistment really serves for him. “If I wasn’t even thinking about going into the military, I’d probably be scared of what I was going to do. Not really scared, but, you know, confused, real confused, because I wouldn’t really know how to go to college. I really wouldn’t have much of a job at all...”

This youth, despite a combined SAT score of 1310, is like many of those described above in feeling ill-equipped to cope with the world of college, and facing limited job opportunities. Yet he knows almost nothing about the military and really does not expect to be leaving his family. For him, joining the military is a kind of “fail-safe” fantasy that keeps him from becoming too depressed and anxious about the grim realities he faces. Also, he is still dependent on Ritalin, which he needs to continue to take for at least another six months for his ADD condition, while completing high school “as fast as I can.” If not on Ritalin, “I am not that bad. I’m just really mean to my little sister.”

Another of these young men, the southern White youth also described at length in Chapter 3, would not want to leave his very interdependent extended family unit or put his parents through the trauma of wondering if he were killed in a battle overseas. His views of the military, although recently somewhat improved, have been strongly colored by unpleasant experiences with his mother’s “boss man,” who had been a Lieutenant Colonel in the Army, and who, according to the youth, is a violent alcoholic, and treats his mother badly, expecting her to lift 100-pound sacks and operate equipment in dangerous, icy conditions.

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He figures her boss got this way by being in the Army. While in high school, the youth had considered enlisting in the Marine Corps as a way of getting money for school. “Back then, I was worried about education. I was, like, I’ve got to get it. And now it’s like if I get it I am happy and if I don’t, oh well...” This youth had dropped out of high school and is now completing his GED independently.

For this overweight youth, the military evokes images of team work, respect, trying new things, keeping to a schedule, travel, and a physically demanding environment. They “make you run” and “quit smoking.” He gets his ideas on the subject from television and reading books on the Civil War (“It’s my tradition--people say I’m a racist, but I’m no racist”). High school was boring and repetitive. He is still considering becoming a policeman, but his mother is “like no, I am not going to have anybody shoot at my youn-gun.” She is opposed to his enlistment in the military for the same reason, whereas his daddy says “it’s your decision, it’s your life.”

Three of his friends are in the military police, and his girlfriend would have joined if she had been tall enough. Although one of the recruiters he encountered was a nice guy and “not pushy at all,” most are “a pain...because they keep pushing and pushing and pushing, and I am the kind of person that once I say I will think about it, I will think about it, and if I want to join I’ll call you back. They aggravate you, they annoy you, they come to your work place when you ask them not to. They basically push themselves on you. And a lot of times that makes me feel like well, if they want to be this pushy, I don’t want to be in the military.”

This youth, unlike the “true” Joiners, has little positive family support for enlistment and very unpleasant associations with the military. He is entwined in a situation of financial interdependence from which it would, at this point, be difficult to disengage. Moreover, he is no longer so worried about getting an education. Were he to decide to shift his focus away from the goal of owning his own mechanic shop, he could turn to police work, which would not necessitate leaving his family. Thus, although he strongly resembles many of the “true” Joiners in his social class and regional small-town background, as well as his basic images of the military and attitudes toward life, he is a very unlikely candidate for joining. Moreover, his admittedly very negative views of recruiters are not atypical and may serve partly as a “post hoc” rationalization for a decision not to enlist.

These two White youths differ from the White “true” Joiners in ways that seem more idiosyncratic than anything else. Both have strong familial obligations that keep them tied to where they are, and neither has much active “push” from family to join. Both might well have joined if the timing or circumstances had been slightly different. By contrast, the relatively large number of African Americans who fall into

this category of youth who seemed to be YATS Joiners, but are actually Fence-Sitters or Non-Joiners, is particularly noteworthy. The following six portraits are presented as a cluster in an effort to discern distinctive attributes of these youths' lives, images, attitudes, or experiences that help to cast light on this phenomenon. This, in turn, may help to form an understanding of how the meanings of propensity may vary across racial groups.

African American Unlikely Joiners

A 21-year-old African American high school graduate, committed to helping his father raise his nephew, was described in Chapter 3. This youth had unpleasant experiences with pushy recruiters, which has helped to validate his stance that enlistment is a fallback position, to be used only if all else fails. As he so interestingly puts it: "If I can't succeed in nothing else, then I am going into the military." For this youth, whose brother is in the Army, the military inspires images of war, exercise, digging trenches, and other "stupid stuff." On the positive side, it offers improved social status and a source of employment. At his present job, "I don't think I am going to get no higher."

This young man admits to being quite confused about what direction his life might ultimately take. He aspires to raise a family and own a house because this is "something they can never take away from you." His father favors enlistment because "it will keep me straight and out of trouble or whatever, because you know you can go like lay low...it's a bad place—you got drugs and every thing, so he wants me to get away from it." Although he participated in high school Junior ROTC and found it a good a source of discipline "for troubled youth," he heard from some of his friends that "it ain't a Black man's Army." His brother, serving in the Army, feels he should go with the Air Force if he does enlist, because they "help their people out more than what the Army do." The recruiters are the "ones push you away from it because they be telling you all these fibs." In the final analysis, this youth will probably stay put for a while, and may or may not enlist depending on how old he gets and whether he can find a viable niche at home. Moreover, he fully admits, "I still got my childish ways."

This African American youth is being pushed and pulled by conflicting pressures to remain where he is, or enlist in the hopes of gaining greater financial security. He is tied to his home environment through feelings of obligation to his family, but his father would still like to see him enlist if it means his definitively escaping the clutches of the bad neighborhood. However, the attractive pull of the military is not all that strong. He worries that the military might be racist. His images of military life are overall also quite unappealing.

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An African American youth, originally categorized as a Joiner, also seems an unlikely prospect for enlistment. This 21-year-old unemployed youth, although quite articulate, is legally retarded, and remains his adoptive father's ward. This youth dropped out of one high school where he had discipline problems, then went back to another. He rattled off a series of possible future careers, all equally unrealistic, that includes opening a horticultural nursery, pursuing a career in marine biology, or enlisting. The reality is that his plans are closely tied to his father's plans for the foreseeable future, and he would probably not qualify to enlist in any event. In addition, he presents a history of difficulties with controlling his temper, the remedy for which is to "keep to himself." Even so, the military evokes images of hard work and learning to take orders—something he acknowledges he very much needs to learn.

Another of the African American youth in question is really a Fence-Sitter, at best. This 18-year-old high school senior from a small town in rural Alabama regards joining the Marines as a fallback option if he does not get into a technical school of choice. He spoke of having considered the military in the past-tense ("I thought about it"), and sees it as "better than no option." His plans are quite vague and formless, defined more by what he wants to avoid than by what he wants to have happen. In the short-term, he says, his plans are "staying in high school," and "don't make no great offenses." Of the longer-term future: "I don't want to do this sitting around the house. I don't want to do that. I think if I started to do that I'd go into the military." The military inspires boyish images of adventure, travel and physical exertion—it would be "fun," all except for the possibility of war. An uncle is the only really influential adult figure in his life of limited exposure to the world, and restricted vistas. Although this youth may, in fact, end up enlisting in preference to "sitting around," there are few stimuli actively pushing him in that direction. He is a prototypical "diffuse decision-maker," for whom the military is better than nothing. It may boil down to a question of which option takes least effort, as this youth is also quite vague about what he would want to study if he were to get into technical school.

Yet another externally motivated African American "diffuse decision-maker", also an 18-year-old high school senior living in the deep south, feels no particularly strong affinity for military life, but is under pressure to "go with what others say." Having friends who are planning to join the Army "makes me want to go ahead and sign." His teachers and others at school have stressed the value of military service for getting a job when you get out. He feels pushed and unready to make any decisions about his future, and talks vaguely of maybe going to college, then after college pursuing "some type of business and stick with it." The advantages of the military are that "you ain't got to spend no money at all" and you get paid to travel. The major disadvantage is war, as well as being away from home and getting lonely (It is interesting that this youth did not understand the words "advantage" and "disadvantage" until the interviewer rephrased the question more simply).

However, there are some complicating factors in his family environment. Although he defensively claims “I ain’t no mama’s boy,” his mother does not want him to go into the military because his dad was drafted to fight in Vietnam right out of high school, and as a result never fulfilled his own desire to go to college. His mother most likely wants her son to avoid repeating this same scenario, although, in truth, this youth does not seem either strongly motivated or academically prepared to attend college. In addition, a cousin who served in the military came home quite traumatized: “He be more quieter...amongst hisself. You know, like nobody there.” Taken together, these conflicting pressures have so far produced confusion, with the hapless youth at an impasse that could last a long time.

Another young man in this cluster, a 20-year-old African American Fence-Sitter, is in some ways in the opposite situation from the youth just described. He holds actively negative images of the military, which he equates with being “locked down,” just like being in prison. His friends have no influence on his choices, and his buddies in the service say “It’s a drag.” His father and uncles served in the military, but he never talked to them about their experiences. His mother, however, is extremely anxious that he enlist, and he is tired of his fast food job: “I don’t need to be scrapin’ and scrubbin’ and burn myself and stuff and ain’t getting paid worth a damn.” He has twice failed the military qualifying exam, which bodes poorly not only for any future in the military, but also for the realistic prospect of succeeding in college. Of college, he says—“It ain’t kind of like going the way I planned, but I’m still going to try to enroll.” Hearing this youth’s glum story almost makes one appreciate the imagination, if not the realism, of the inner city youth who fantasizes about Duke and the NBA.

The last African American youth we will discuss in this section was also originally considered a Joiner, and can now best be classified as a Fence-Sitter. However, this 17-year-old high school senior presents such an interesting and hopeful contrast to those just described, it only serves to throw their stories into bolder relief. This youth’s first preference after graduation is to enter an apprenticeship program in ship design, during which he will be paid. He has a cousin currently enrolled in this program and is familiar with all the requirements. After his freshman year in high school, this young man was doing poorly and “hanging out with a bad crowd.” He decided to change high schools and move in with relatives in another city; the result was that he raised his GPA from a 1.0 to a 3.83 over two years. Aside from working to make his “very religious” mother proud as the first member in his family to “walk” at high school graduation (both his sisters had gotten their GEDs), he was also determined to prove himself to his high school football coach, who “didn’t think he could do it.” This young man told the story with the relish of someone who likes to rise to a challenge. In case he does not get into the apprenticeship program, he is also submitting applications for athletic scholarships to several 2-year colleges, with his coach’s help.

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Finally, joining the Navy is his fallback plan if the other two options fail. Although he concedes that the military is probably lower in priority than it was at the time of YATS (one possible reason he was initially categorized as a Joiner), he still holds this out as a possibility, especially if it can be guaranteed that if he performs well, he will be able to become a Nuclear Field Engineer.

This youth is following a very rational and considered plan in his pursuit of an office job, where he will not be “out working in the hot sun” and will be “directing people, not having people direct me.” In talking about how his plans are shaping up, he says, “It’s just that I’m seeing different things I can do and putting them all in perspective.” This youth is clearly not a “diffuse decision-maker” taking an unrealistic, “scatter-gun” approach, or assuming a passive-aggressive stance toward his future.

This young man’s images of the military are that it provides a set career, discipline, teaches respect, and involves “being taken care of.” When he thinks about going to college, images of “not playing” and of “jumping on the work before it jumps on you” spring to mind. This youth feels that the Navy recruiter with whom he spoke did not listen, and tried to rush him. In talking about what his friends are doing, he matter-of-factly stated that about one-third are going to college or trade school, one-third are joining the military, and one-third are going straight into the labor force.

That this youth has managed to assume some measure of control over his choices and his destiny in the midst of this environment only illustrates the absence of similar patterns in the other five youth’s lives. While this youth speaks of having met a challenge by changing schools and raising his grades, the others present themselves as largely passive vessels or resentful victims of circumstances beyond their control. They are mostly fleeing from or trying to avoid something (e.g., sitting around the house, getting caught up in drugs and crime, a hated fast-food job), or responding to external pressures or stimuli to do something with their lives, even if they do not feel ready. By contrast, this youth is envisioning his options and striving toward an admittedly abstract, but still symbolically important goal of holding a White collar job. This seems to be his goal, as well, not one that a family member or anyone else has projected onto him. It is very interesting, in light of these contrasts, that as he gets closer to clarifying his goals and priorities, enlisting in the military moves down a notch or two on this youth’s list. Developing a perspective on how this happens, helps to explicate the racially-specific bases and meanings of military propensity for African American youth, who are, as we see, operating in distinctively different settings than the White and many of the Hispanic youth.

The remaining youth who fall into this “unlikely” Joiner cluster, will be discussed, as appropriate, in the sections that follow.

Shifters

Shifters were defined as youth who at some point in the past had seriously considered joining the military but have since decided against this course of action. Results from the in-depth interviews raised questions for some regarding the time period they used in defining this category as well as the degree of self-reported seriousness. For a few youth, “at some point in the past” referred to their preteen years only. This “point in the past” was judged a bit remote in the context of career decision-making. For others, the “serious consideration,” after probing, consisted of entertaining the idea for 5 or 10 minutes. As a result of these observations, some youth were subsequently reclassified as Non-Joiners, since they had not given serious and timely consideration to enlisting in the military.

College-Oriented Shifters

The largest single cluster of Shifters is composed of college-bound or college-going youth who considered entering the military as a way of helping to pay for college, but have since found other ways of financing their college education; or else once having set their directions toward college, they dismissed the idea of pursuing the military option further. A few are not Shifters by choice. Jeremy, now 21, was denied admission to the Air Force Academy right out of high school. A White high school senior was recently rejected from the Navy because of an undisclosed medical condition. A 20-year-old Hispanic college student, recently diagnosed with a brain tumor, acknowledged he would no longer be eligible for military service even if he were to change his mind. But apart from these few cases, most of the college Shifters at some point opted not to pursue the military option, or else they just fell by the wayside.

Recent Shifters

A few of the Shifters have only recently decided against joining the military. Because their decisions not to join have not yet been assimilated into historical memory, they may provide a more accurate picture of what can make a youth “turn the corner.” A 17-year-old White high school senior, not allowed to enlist in the Air Force because of an undisclosed medical condition, feels this decision was unfair and ironically comments that “people who want to join can’t get in, and people who don’t want to join, can.” This youth comes from an Air Force family. However, even before he got the news, his father and uncle had discouraged him from enlisting because the “military has changed,” is “not as good as you think,” and “you have to take a lot of crap.” This youth likes the perceived security of military life. He now plans to attend college, where he looks forward to meeting new people and having a different kind of life.

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Another 17-year-old White high school senior bound for college has only recently decided against entering the military, largely because he feels he was misled by a recruiter about benefits and the probability of admission into a special nuclear power program. His father, an officer, looked into the information he was receiving and found it inaccurate. "He [the recruiter] told me about the nuclear power program and all that nice stuff, you know, it sounded real good, but when my father asked around and I got deep, deep into it and kind of scooped away the topping...there is nothing there, it's all just air." By the time this situation was clarified, it was too late to go into the ROTC scholarship program at college, and he does not want to wait for an entire year before beginning college. Part of this youth's desire to be in the military stems from his intense feelings of admiration for his father, for whom the military has "worked out well." Of his father's being in the Army, he said, it has given him "a lot of connections...and probably the most accurate information you can get."

The only African American Shifter in this college-oriented cluster has somewhat more positive views of recruiters and of the military than do most of his peers. This 18-year-old high school senior had only recently heard that he had been awarded full football scholarships to several 4-year universities. Before receiving notification of these scholarships, he had seriously considered enlisting as a way of paying for college. At that time, he was concerned that a shoulder injury sustained during his senior year might have kept him from getting good offers. This youth indicated that recruiters had "presented themselves well." The military evokes images of staying in good physical shape and providing an education, although he admits he did not get "deep, deep into it." Television is the primary source of his images of the military. Most of his friends "don't want to hear nothing about the military." His parents do not push him in any direction and allow him to make his own decisions. Were anything to happen to his scholarships, the military would again become an option.

It is also instructive to glimpse those youth originally classified as YATS Joiners who are now more aptly viewed as Shifters. The story of a 19-year-old African American youth shows what a difference a week can make. At the time of the YATS survey, he was resigned to the idea of entering the military as a way of getting money to go to college. He "really doesn't know" what the military teaches, and associated a military lifestyle with unpleasant images of war, fighting, and boot camp. However, 1 week before the follow-up interview, his father, who lives in another city and has been estranged from the youth and his mother for years, unexpectedly got back in touch, offering to pay his son's college tuition if he comes to live in Memphis. The father also promised that if his son helps him out, he will one day inherit the father's restaurant. Thus, in a matter of 1 week, the youth's original plan was overturned in favor of moving to Memphis, enrolling in college, and learning the restaurant business.

Although initially classified as a Joiner, a 21-year-old White college student was moved to reexamine the idea of entering the Air Force to learn to fly at this point in his life. This college youth hails from an extended family of Air Force officers on both sides. He has concluded that if he had wanted to fly, he should have made the decision much earlier. At this point, it is not worth the “investment” of time and resources to pursue something that still might not come to pass. He has heard, through his father, that many of the slots are already guaranteed to students from the Academy and to ROTC graduates. He might have joined Air Force ROTC as a freshman, but it was not offered at the small liberal arts college he attends. At the time, with his parents stationed overseas in Japan, it was more important to feel comfortable in his new college “home away from home” than to seek out a campus with Air Force ROTC. In the meantime, he became enamored with the campus, his professors, and the small college atmosphere, and simply got too enmeshed to seriously consider leaving.

Although this young man has enjoyed his life as the child of an officer, he does not know if he would be able to put his future wife and children through the lengthy periods of separation. Like other youth from military families, he believes military life involves more respect and less office politics than the civilian world. By contrast, in the work world, you are “more in control,” more independent, and better paid. Still, affinity for many aspects of military culture does not prevent him from regarding recruiters as “car salesmen.” His images of the military derive from his own experience, family stories, and, as he somewhat abashedly admits, movies such as “Top Gun.” (“I just know whoever reads this will be laughing at me!”) He has two close friends in the military: one who joined the Navy to pay for medical school, the other, in Air Force ROTC, who has “always dreamed of flying.” A strong focus on future goals helps to mitigate any current problems they are having adjusting to life in the military. As for himself, this youth believes he is already disciplined and quite perfectionistic, but would become “even more precise” if he were to enter the military.

Not-So-Recent Shifters

Most of the Shifters now attending college had made their choice not to join the military several years ago, usually (although not always) by the end of their senior year in high school. These young men have long since assimilated this choice, and its repercussions, into their life plans, and have moved on accordingly. The decision not to enter the military is not remembered as a definitive moment in their lives. This is in many cases entirely appropriate, because it was not a heavily considered or weighty decision even at the time. The only youth who still seems to be musing on “how it might have been” is Jeremy, rejected 3 years ago for admission to the Air Force Academy, who wonders if he would have been as happy there as one of his friends has been at West Point. In any event, these thoughts (if not brought on entirely by the interview) have certainly not stopped him from going on with his life. For the most part, once these college youth passed the critical juncture, they either effectively forgot about the decision not to join the military, or subsequently drew on it to justify the correctness of their choice to pursue the college-going path.

Not surprisingly, most of these college-going Shifters sound very much like the college-going Non-Joiners in their conceptions of military versus civilian lifestyles. These youth are also relatively quick to give examples of friends who did join and now say the military has failed to live up to its promises, or to point out cases of enlistees who have returned from their stints in the military and are still unable to find jobs. Several Shifters attending classes with fellow students now returned from the military, regard these youth as having lost valuable years of their lives to the military to no apparent benefit. Seeing that these young men have returned to civilian life, seemingly at “ground zero,” only reinforces their sense of having made the right choice in not having joined in the first place.

One such 21-year-old youth, for example, rejected the idea of joining the Army about 3-1/2 years ago, but stopped thinking about it once he decided to attend college and pursue a degree in criminal justice. “Seeing Rambo and all those guns on television looked exciting. Then I figured I didn’t want to get shot.” In his view, the decision to join the military is best made right out of high school, or as a way to make money for college; by now, he’s “too old.”

Justifying the Decision of Not Having Joined. A 19-year-old Hispanic college student had briefly considered joining ROTC, but now sees that everyone he knows who served in the military has regretted it. His uncle and grandfather died in combat, and his father died of a rare blood disease the youth believes was contracted while his father was fighting in Europe during World War II. This youth attends college on the proceeds of his late father’s military annuity. For understandable reasons, this youth believes

military service is low paying and dangerous. It asks you to put “your life on the line, and no amount of money is worth that.” This youth is preparing for a well-paid career in computer graphics, where he expects to be largely self-directed in his work. He seeks control over his working life and conditions, something he feels he would give up entirely if he were to enter the military. Recruiters were especially aggravating—they called him “constantly” even though he said he did not wish to be contacted. The military, he said, is a good choice for some, but not for him.

Scott, a 21-year-old White college senior introduced in Chapter 3, presents an interesting divergence from the common Shifter pattern, in that he considered joining Air Force ROTC in his junior year in college, to fulfill a desire to learn how to fly. Scott is just about to graduate from college, and still up in the air about the direction his life will take. However, he rather quickly dismissed the thought of entering ROTC this far along in his college career, because it would cost him too much time—“Maybe if I would have come down as a freshman and looked into it, I probably would have...I never even considered being a pilot until maybe last year...and it’s hard to give up on everything else just to follow a dream like that...that spontaneously.” He has decided he can always get his pilot’s license later on in life if the desire remains strong.

As far as what military life is like, his images are of hard work, discipline, and loss of freedom. The military is for “people who have gone astray and it puts them back on track...” and who “enjoy getting told what to do and what to think.” He does not see himself as the right kind of person for a military life, although he might be able to swallow it as an officer in order to satisfy his love of flying. The theme that the military is a good place for those who need guidance and structure to keep them on the “right path” is a constant refrain in the interviews with these college Shifters. Most can point to examples of friends or acquaintances in high school who entered the military as a way of getting away from problems with drugs or discipline. However, these youth do not see themselves in the same category as these other youth. For the most part, they no longer travel in the same social circles. As one 21-year-old college Shifter said, “I don’t know anyone [in the military] because, you know, I went a different route.” Several of the Shifters also emphasize that the military stresses externalized discipline rather than self-discipline. They believe this is unwise and keeps you from thinking for yourself.

A 21-year-old Hispanic art school student, who briefly but seriously considered enlisting in the Army right out of high school, is now convinced he made the right choice after watching news programs showing how military personnel have been unwittingly exposed to dangerous drugs with potential for causing genetic damage. This youth has no relatives in the military, but does have two friends who “got more

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violent” after serving, and has seen young men come out of the military after 4 or 5 years still lacking a clear sense of direction.

Non-College-Going Shifters

A second, somewhat smaller cluster of Shifters is made up of young men who did not pursue postsecondary education and thought about enlisting as they were leaving high school. However, for one or another reason, they did not follow up on entering the military right away. Subsequently, they: (1) changed their minds about the desirability of joining the Service, (2) got involved in a job or another line of work, (3) acquired new or unexpected family responsibilities, and/or (4) attempted (often only half-heartedly) to enter the military, but were turned down for medical reasons (e.g., overweight, high blood pressure) or failed the qualifying exams.

A 19-year-old African American high school graduate seriously entertained the military as an option when he was in 10th grade but did not seek out contact with a recruiter at that point. Later, he decided he did not want to get involved in war. By the time a recruiter did get in touch, he had made up his mind against enlisting. This youth now has a daughter to help raise and also expressed concerns about the hazards of exposure to toxic chemicals in the military. Nevertheless, he still recognizes the military has definite advantages in helping a person to get good credit and “move up in the world.” Several Hispanic youth tell similar stories.

Two of these noncollege Shifters tell stories that bear on the perceived role of recruiters in precipitating decisions not to enlist. One 20-year-old African American high school graduate was “completely committed” to entering the military, but then “totally changed his mind” once he compared the information given him by the recruiter with information from his brother, who was in the military at the time. He felt the recruiter deliberately misled him, leading him to abandon the idea of joining the military. This youth also has a daughter to help support. Whether or not it is an accurate description of what actually transpired, his story is revealing of the level of suspicion felt by many youth, especially (but not only) minority youth, toward the claims and promises made by recruiters. Many of the respondents demonstrated extreme sensitivity on this point; they are deeply suspicious of being “made a fool of” by recruiters.

A Hispanic youth, now 21 years-old, was warned against falling prey to the easy blandishments of recruiters by his own father, a 20-year veteran of the military who had himself been a military recruiter. This youth had considered enlistment when he first graduated high school, because he did not want to go

to college. This youth was initially concerned that “some of the guys [recruiters] just acted desperate,” and was afraid if he went to see recruiters, he would get pressured into joining and then would “be stuck for 4 years.” He also claims he knew he was being misled by the recruiters on what he could reasonably expect to get in the military, given his test scores.

This youth regards the military as providing a variety of possibilities, help in gaining job skills, good benefits, and help with relocation. The disadvantages would be getting homesick and “not being able to get out.” This youth, although defensive about not having gone to college, has enjoyed a successful job history, with several promotions, in a plastics company. He has worked with his father in developing an investment portfolio and still considers the prospect of going into business with family members in Florida. He has recently met a young woman with whom he is serious and plans to settle down and start raising a family before long.

Ramon, the Hispanic youth called home to care for his mother had come very close to enlisting right out of high school. As he described it, “I felt I was really going to go. I was talking to them. I was getting to know what they were doing in boot camp and was quite up with them and wanted to go, but I didn’t make the jump.” The military teaches discipline, but while he needed that discipline in high school, he feels he no longer does. His life is now set, with work, night school, and helping take care of his mother. Moreover, like many Hispanic and African American youth, Ramon does not like the idea of “being sent off to another country to fight somebody you’ve never met before.” He believes this is qualitatively different from defending your country from invasion on home turf.

Bob, the White youth working on a barge, is a Shifter as well. Bob’s life story is quite similar to those of many of the White Joiners: He got caught up in partying and socializing during his freshman year and decided to drop out of college. Right after this, he returned home and took a low- paying job at a local steel mill. Bob’s father gave him a 6-month period to decide what he was going to do. During this time, he contacted an Army recruiter and might well have enlisted had the river barge job not come through in a matter of only a few months. Bob is now happy where he is; he sees himself as a “homebody” basically disinterested in leaving his strong local family ties or experiencing foreign cultures. He believes the job training he would get in the military would make it impossible for him to ever return home because there are no high tech jobs available in his local area. He is also concerned that he would have a difficult time taking orders in the military because he tends to have a “hot temper” and springs to the defense of the underdog.

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The interesting thing about Bob is that he might well have enlisted and done well in the military. Although concerned that his hot temper would get him “locked up,” he also indicates he is a team player who always looks after his co-workers’ needs and is being promoted to deck engineer in part because of this. Bob’s grandfather and father both served in the military. However, he would not repeat what his enlisted friends say about military life, because “that would be rude.” They don’t like much about it, and this definitely influences his views. The recruiter exerted no influence on his decision one way or the other. One advantage of the military would be that he could get money to go back to college and “make something of himself,” if he could learn to exert self-discipline; he might also “lose his hot head.” The disadvantages would be having “a lot of people over you,” being less likely to be forgiven if you messed up, not being able to quit, and being told where you had to go even when no war is on. Bob doesn’t believe being in the military would change him as a person unless there were a war—“war changes everyone”—but considers it a valuable way for some people to learn to assume responsibility and “realize where they want to go in life.” While right now the military does not seem the way to go for him, if his job were to end some time in the next few years, he might reconsider.

Bob’s story highlights several points of more general relevance for unpacking the multilayered meanings of propensity. First, timing and fortuitous coincidence again play a key role: had the barge job not come through quite so quickly, he might well have turned the corner and opted to enlist rather than remain in the low-paying steel mill job. Once he did decide to take the barge job, however, Bob was in a position to fashion a rationale for not joining that fit with his image of himself as a “hot head” and “defender of the little guy,” as well as a “homebody” with little interest in foreign places or cultures. The fact that Bob’s friends do not have much good to say about the military life validates his stance. Nevertheless, it is interesting to speculate on whether his views of military life would be quite so well defined if he were unhappy with his current job, since he obviously also recognizes clear benefits to military life and has not absolutely ruled out the possibility of entering the military at a future time. The point is not that these youth self-servingly manufacture images to suit their needs, but that they can create their perspectives by selectively drawing on a variety of often contradictory images, which can be fit together with varying emphases depending on variations in their life circumstances.

Shifters: A Summary

- In comparison to Joiners, Shifters present a more diverse range of social class backgrounds, are from more varied parts of the country, and hail from a broader base of urban and suburban as well as small town environments.

- Shifters are fairly evenly distributed across age groups of youth. Considerably more than one-half are college-goers or college-bound; these youth are about evenly split between Hispanics and Whites, with only about one-half as many African Americans.
- Shifters are also less likely than Joiners to have strong family traditions of career military service or to possess as dense a network of connections to persons who are serving or have served in the military. They received more negative feedback from close family members with respect to joining the military: several were actively discouraged by family members who themselves had had military careers.
- Shifters take a dim view of recruiters. Several say that receiving false or misleading information from recruiters was the “coup de grace” that clinched their decision not to join.
- The Shifters fall into two major clusters, whose characteristics and 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 the Non-Joiners) as too highly ordered and disciplined for their personal taste and as restrictive of freedom, self-direction, and independence. The noncollege goers have rather pale images of both military and civilian life. After seeing friends and associates return from the Service little improved either as people or in their career prospects or reading or hearing about the health risks of military service, they believe they made the right choice by not enlisting.

Fence-Sitters

Fence-Sitters were defined as youth who appear to be considering the option of entering the military, even if only as a very outside possibility, at some time in the foreseeable future. Based upon findings from the in-depth interviews, this appears to be a very porous category. In discussing Joiners, it was noted that several youth originally categorized as Joiners were subsequently recategorized. The majority of Joiners reassigned were placed in the Fence-Sitter category. What appeared on the basis of survey responses to be a strong likelihood of enlisting proved instead to be an option under consideration. In this vein, several original Fence-Sitters were reevaluated and determined to be Non-Joiners at the time of the in-depth interviews.

Not surprisingly, Fence-Sitters tend to be younger than youth in the other propensity groups. A relatively large proportion are high school seniors still actively weighing options and contemplating future prospects. Also, in comparison with the other groups, fewer Fence-Sitters are college-bound or attending college.

As Yet Undecided Rational Decision-makers

Fence-Sitters can be grouped into relatively distinct clusters. One cluster is mainly comprised of high school seniors who are actively considering their futures, but have not yet settled on a definite plan. A few believe they are not yet mature enough to make the best choices. The important distinction is that these young men do appear to be headed toward a clear decision point, which seems likely to occur some time during the next few months to a year.

One such youth is an ambitious, thoughtful 17-year-old college-bound Hispanic high school senior applying for Navy and Air Force ROTC scholarships, as well as several other types of college scholarships. Before the initial YATS interview, he had briefly considered, but then pretty much dismissed the idea of applying to the Naval Academy. However, the YATS interview motivated him to get more information about ROTC programs. He believes ROTC is far preferable to enlistment because you get to attend college, “don’t start off at the bottom,” and after 5 years, can decide to stay or leave. This youth is clearly undergoing a period of intense self-exploration and growth. Earlier this year, he had been convinced that he wanted to study engineering in college. However, subsequent experiences in Boy’s State and working on the high school yearbook brought out previously unrecognized interpersonal and leadership skills. Consequently, while engineering is still a possibility, he now feels he wants his work to involve interaction with people. As far as readiness for decision-making, he volunteers, “I don’t feel like I’m responsible and mature enough to make the absolutely right decision. I feel like I’m kind of to the point where I can go in the right direction.” However, he expects that college will provide the necessary experience to support future choices.

This young man’s father and uncle both enlisted in the Army. The uncle injured his hand and “was dismissed” with no recompense; although he never “spoke bad” about the Army, his father had an uneventful, not very satisfying experience and left after 5 years. The youth’s feelings about the Air Force are far more positive, partly because another uncle, an environmental engineer, is “making good money” and has had a favorable experience in that branch. Several teachers who were in the Navy “speak real well of it,” so he is also quite favorably disposed toward the Navy. On the other hand, the Marine Corps calls up images of “somebody that’s not very intelligent...not the best bunch.”

The foremost reason he would probably not want to stay in the military after his 5-year ROTC commitment¹ expired is that he might want to start a family at that point, and military life is hard on kids.

¹ The payback commitment for ROTC training is 2 years of military service for every 1 year of ROTC college scholarship. Military service can be performed either in the active or Reserve Component or any combination.

His cousins complain of having had to move a lot, and his aunt and uncle are now divorced. He has pretty much ignored the recruiters at his high school, and has not been influenced by commercials. The military brings good job security and benefits, but also entails loss of control over basic decisions, though this is mitigated by increasing rank. Entering the military at this point in his life (here he was clearly thinking in terms of enlistment), would make him more set in his ways and less open to new experiences. Ultimately, a decision about entering ROTC will probably depend on how the scholarship situation sorts out, as well as any further changes in his ideas about his own interests and capabilities.

Another in this group of “still deciding” high school seniors is an outdoorsy, 18-year-old White youth who has a lot of options to explore before he can safely say, “I plan on doing this and this by this and this time.” However, this type of game plan is his ultimate aim. Possibilities at this point include: going to one of a number of schools; “going out and getting a job,” possibly in metal fabrication; joining the military “for training and financing;” and staying at home and working with his father on the family’s ranch, with an eye toward eventually starting one of his own. The one certain thing is that he does not believe he is ready for college: “I want to get a feel for something before I actually pursue it, because if I’m in college and change my mind that’s a minimum \$5,000 loss.” According to this youth, most people his age think about college as “just a whole lot of partying and drinking,” ignoring the more important, serious academic side. He does not intend to make the same mistake.

While still on his list, joining the military has the lowest priority right now. He comments, “I believe I will stay out of the military unless I fail at other things...I’m keeping it as a...less-priority option.” This youth is not fond of traveling and prefers to stay in his “own little regime.” Responding to the YATS interview helped him get his thoughts in order, so he was not “bouncing around trying to figure it out.” He associates military life with hard work, discipline (an absolute necessity for the military to function properly), and having to take your job seriously. Although worried about the prospect of physical danger, if he did enter the military, he “would not be afraid.” A friend recently returned from boot camp demonstrated the “cha-cha kill” maneuver, which was “pretty neat.” This young man was hotly pursued by a recruiter who finally backed off after recognizing that he was “stubborn” and not willing to immediately sign on the dotted line. If he were to enlist, he believes he would become more patriotic and self-disciplined.

In his love of the outdoors, dislike for “book learning,” recognition that he is not (yet) suited to college, and desire to remain in his “own little regime,” this youth resembles Bob, the barge worker, and several of the White Joiners. Little about his basic profile or attitudes, except perhaps a distaste for travel, precludes joining the military. Yet, once he does decide on a plan, he will probably never “look back.” This young

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man does have a resource many others lack—namely, the possibility of staying home and working in a family enterprise. In fact, his immediate plans call for him and his twin brother to help out their father on the ranch at least until the most demanding season is over.

Another White 17-year-old high school senior is similarly “looking at all the options,” which for him include beginning a career in law enforcement, joining the music program in the Marine Corps (he is a drummer), or working in his family’s hardwood flooring business. For the time being, he is focusing on plans to spend the summer touring with the Drum Corps. This youth identifies the military with order and discipline, and believes military service “improves people.” He has yet to have personal contact with recruiters, although a representative of the Marine Corps visited his band class and disseminated information on the music program. It was “a treat” when a group of recruiters came to his high school and “stood against the wall perfectly still.” This youth is still very young and unsettled in his plans and aspirations. The special music program in the Marine Corps is attractive, but so is the idea of working in the family business, which he has done for the last four summers. At the same time, he is about to take a one-semester course in law enforcement to further explore his interest in this area. At this point, it is a toss-up as to which of these possibilities he will pursue. Meanwhile, if inspiration does not strike sooner, he will use the Drum Corps experience to put off making a definite decision at least until the fall and also to see how well he adapts to the drill and group living situation, which in many ways mimics conditions in the Marine Corps music program. It is noteworthy that, like the youth just described above, this young man has the “luxury” of falling back on a family business if other options prove less than desirable. For both these youth, some of the ability to “stay on the fence” derives from the back-up security this provides, especially since they both enjoy this type of work.

Two other 17-year-old White high school senior Fence-Sitters differ from those just described in that they both view enlistment as a fall-back option only if it becomes difficult to pay for college. One of these youth would much prefer to go to college, but with five brothers and sisters at home, is worried about finances. He is waiting to hear about the outcome of his applications for financial aid and scholarships. “If I don’t got the money to pay or the student aid scholarship, I’ll just have to go in the military because they have that GI Bill stuff.” That this is the option of last resort is suggested by his not really having thought about the military, although “it ain’t going to be no cakewalk.” Military life evokes images of loss of freedom and painful separation from family: an uncle in the Service finds being apart from his family especially hard.

The 17-year-old White son of a school principal wants to enroll in his state university and study architecture. However, the family is currently having financial problems, so he may opt instead to go to a

junior college for 2 years on a football scholarship, then transfer to the 4-year university. Since responding to YATS he has learned of the possibility of the football scholarships, which makes him lean away from enlistment. Still, he might be swayed back in the other direction if he fails to receive a large enough scholarship or discovers he cannot transfer his junior college credits to the university.

This young man's sister, who enlisted in the Navy 3 years ago after flunking out of her freshman year at college, is his primary source of information on military life. After comparing notes with her, he believes the Army recruiter told him a lot of untruths about the advantages of the Army over other branches. This has made him suspicious of recruiters. His sister has advised him to also look into the Navy and the Air Force, the two branches she thinks treat their enlistees the best. This youth's image of military life, heavily based on his sister's largely favorable reports, is of a "different kind of fun experience." The discipline would be okay. Boot camp means getting "treated bad," but "it's part of the military and you've got to go through it." After boot camp, according to his sister, "It's kind of like a job really...you get ordered around, but you've just got to work your way up in the officer ranks." The prospect of going to war, however, is unappealing. Also, he worries about spending 4 years doing something he really may not like, just to earn the money to pay for college. The main reason he would choose college over the military is that it will enable him to start his architectural career sooner, which would likely translate into faster movement up the ladder. Although he might follow his sister's lead and join the military, he will probably find a way of attending college. Interestingly, like many college-bound and college-going youth, this young man frames the choice as enlistment versus college, essentially discounting ROTC as an option.

Hispanic Fence-Sitters

The noncollege Hispanic Fence-Sitters form a distinctive sub-cluster. One 18-year-old who immigrated from Nicaragua at age 10 would likely be a Joiner, except that he lacks a green card. He participated in high school ROTC, scored high on the ASVAB, and has friends but no relatives in the military. His family is opposed to enlistment because "it's too dangerous." However, he has no other plans for his life, and is attracted to the idea that the military would help support his family if anything were to happen to him.

Another 18-year-old Hispanic high school senior, with no idea of his father's whereabouts, immigrated with his mother when he was only 7 years old. He includes himself in the category of those not ready for college straight out of high school. He has his sights set on a career as a police officer, following the lead of his two uncles, who are strong role models. Police work "runs in the blood."

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Although he does not need the money to pay for school, he is also thinking of first enlisting in the Army or Air Force for a few years, mostly to satisfy a need to “not stay in one place.” Seeing how he scores on the ASVAB will help decide this. Military life evokes thoughts of adventure, experience, travel, and physical challenge. The military would probably make him more courageous and a better student, and win him greater respect from others. At this point, the youth could easily go either toward the military or an immediate career in law enforcement. He is unusual, if not unique, among the Hispanic respondents in not wanting to stay in one place (a trait he also claims to share with his uncles) and not mentioning being away from family as a major drawback to military life.

Originally classified as a Joiner, Juan, the 19-year-old Hispanic youth who won a scholarship to a cooking school, is having a hard time tearing himself away from family and friends in the neighborhood. Juan is also considering enlisting in the Navy, in part because he would initially be stationed closer to home than if he were to go to culinary school in a completely unfamiliar place. His uncle served in the Army, his father in the Navy; although he has lived with his father for the past 2 years, they “don’t talk much.” The military conjures up images of discipline, respect, taking orders, and seeing new places; it would be “like a whole other world” to him. The prospect of going to war is frightening. Juan believes entering the military would make him more tolerant and “less temperamental.” While the culinary school scholarship probably provides the “objectively” best opportunity, Juan might well enlist, perceiving it as a less immediately threatening option. At the same time, deeply rooted in the local environment, he might just stay where he is. It is difficult to predict what, if anything, will provoke movement, or in what direction.

A 19-year-old first generation Mexican American Fence-Sitter, also initially considered a Joiner, is equally at sea. He will “most definitely join the military if nothing [else] works out.” In the same breath, he admits, “I can be sure one day and the next don’t know.” This “diffuse decision-maker’s” parents say the choice is up to him, because they do not want to get blamed if he “messes up.” “It ain’t nobody’s fault but your own if you go in.” He associates the military with gaining respect, serving his country, and “opportunity”—a vaguely understood concept, largely devoid of any real content, that corresponds to what he heard recruiters say at his school. The main advantage of joining would be getting paid to learn a trade; the main disadvantage, leaving his family. As for danger, “it’s something you got to go through anyway...if not here, over there.” While he has no clearly developed alternative to enlistment, he is also experiencing no pressure to make an immediate decision.

Another 20-year-old Hispanic Fence-Sitter expressing a similar tentativeness seems loathe to absolutely foreclose any possibility that might provide opportunities or “open doors.” On entering the military: “I’m not sure, but I think I will...I’m not, maybe not...but in a few years.” When pushed, he

asserts: “It would be a decision I would probably think about...I think I’m between definite.” Since responding to the YATS interview, he has heard that the Navy offers better technical training than the Marine Corps, so he would now consider that branch. At the same time, he wants to become an emergency medical technician, and “many opportunities are opening up” at his job, where he has already been promoted to the position of fire safety inspector.

No Junior ROTC program was offered at his high school. If there had been such a program, “I would already be gone [into the military].” This youth has many friends serving in all branches of the military. Most do not like it, but are “making the best of it and taking advantage of the opportunities.” He claims his friends’ dislike for the military has not really influenced him. However, he was greatly put off by a pushy recruiter, who came on so gung-ho, it pushed him away. If the recruiter had behaved in a “more professional” fashion, he feels it might have made a difference: “I am the type of person who really doesn’t like anyone to push anything on me.” This young man’s images of military life are quite vague, especially when compared to his vision of life as an emergency medical technician or firefighter. He has a difficult time imagining how he might change as a person if he were to enter the Service. Overall, it appears that the time when this youth would have been most likely to enlist has already passed. In contrast to the other Hispanic youth described above, he seems more firmly ensconced and content with his current job.

These Hispanic Fence-Sitters have mostly already passed the “critical” high school senior decision point, yet remain still uncertain of their long-term career plans. A few envision alternatives to enlistment in careers as police officers or firefighters. No one seems to be pushing these youth to “get out of the house” or make a definite decision by a certain point. This is partly a cultural difference, the “other side” of the strong attachment to family, which places very little premium on establishing individual independence from the parental household. For the most part, families are neither actively encouraging nor discouraging enlistment. Several youth are first-generation in this country and do not have relatives who have served in the United States military. A few of them also seem to hold notions of military life partially derived from other countries.

These Hispanic Fence-Sitters’ images of the military are largely positive, focusing on discipline, service, and respect—an association especially strong among all the Hispanic youth in our sample. However, if these Hispanic young men do not enlist soon, their chances of ever doing so will probably decline with time, as new commitments and obligations are forged. Over time, they will likely come to resemble the Hispanic Shifters, who at one point flirted with the idea of enlisting, but then “found the right woman” and settled down to job and family.

African American Fence-Sitters

Enlisting to Escape

Several of the African American Fence-Sitters are like their Hispanic peers in having vague plans that include joining the military as one of several loosely considered possibilities. They are different in more often having parents who are actively lobbying for enlistment as a way of getting them out of the house and off the streets. We already encountered many of these youth in the section on those originally categorized as Joiners. The recurrent theme of these interviews was of joining the military less to embrace any positive benefits, than to escape from home, a dead-end job, or a bad neighborhood.

One such 19-year-old youth, who, like several of those described earlier, has a child to help support, is “thinking of trying to get into the military or something like that.” In high school, he was not much interested in the military, but now his folks are pressuring him and he has a “nowhere” job “he can’t survive on.” Since YATS, he has broadened his vistas to now consider either the Marines or the Navy. He is anxious to escape his parents and “be out on my own...doing my own daily things.” He comments: “I just want privacy. I don’t want looking over me...and if I went into the Service, then I wouldn’t have to worry about that...you know, I’d just be there.” His mother actively supports the idea of enlistment to rescue him from hanging out with his friends and the dangers of the streets. However, although speaking as if enlistment were his most likely current option, he knows nothing about the recruitment office in his town, and even asked the interviewer for information on how he could “get involved.” Of all the branches, this youth is most attracted to the Marine Corps because they seem “the most disciplined.” The military suggests images of war and travel. None of his relatives served or are now serving in the military, and he has not heard from his one friend in the Navy since he enlisted and left town. Nothing could be more evocative of where this young man is coming from than his statement that joining the Service would be “like going away somewhere away across town.”

Considering Enlistment Despite Strong Negative Views of the Military

Several of these African American Fence-Sitters are like the White Fence-Sitters who view enlistment as a fall-back option if they are unable to go to school. One 19-year-old inner-city high school senior, Clarence, states a preference to attend college and study architecture. While working part-time at a car wash, Clarence has gotten a taste of the jobs available to someone without a college degree, and seen that they are “crap.” An older sister currently attends college and works part-time at a bank; an older brother works as a cook. If he were not admitted to the local 4-year university of his choice, he

would either join the Marines to learn “skills,” or attend a 2-year college. Although claiming to be confident of admission to the university, Clarence indicates his high school grades were only “okay” (a “C” average), and seems to be holding back something about his past that he believes might affect admission (He is old to be graduating from high school and also mentions having had some unnamed “problems” in his recent past). Right now, if he had to choose between the Marine Corps and a 2-year college, he would still lean toward the Marine Corps, but not as much as when he answered YATS. At that point, “Things wasn’t really working out...it seemed like a good choice then.”

What is striking about Clarence is that despite a negative impression of the military, he is still seriously considering enlistment. He said:

"The military isn't my way, you know. I mean, I just don't believe in that stuff, the military and everything that they do, that they believe in. And I'm not a big fan of war...I don't think we actually need war to deal with our problems, but the people in the military obviously do, because they just...use guns and all that garbage. I mean, it's not really my way, but it will help me through financially...because they do have good points to it, and there's bad points to it. So I would just deal with it."

One would expect this kind of strong statement from a confirmed Non-Joiner, not a youth who currently ranks entering the Marine Corps as a likely second-choice option. Clarence’s images of the military are of war and corruption, and he feels all branches are much the same in “teaching the skills of war.” By contrast, he associates college with “higher learning,” gaining knowledge, and getting smarter—one of the very few youth in the sample who mentions the intrinsic, rather than just the extrinsic material benefits of a college education. His friends who were in the Service describe the discipline and training they received, but this does not affect his views. Talking to recruiters “was just basically another task.” At the same time, the Marine Corps appeals most because Marines go through the hardest training and have the most adventure.

Clarence’s practical side tells him that joining the military would not be so bad. Although going directly to college would enable him to become an architect sooner, the Armed Forces would pay more than a job he could get as a high school graduate. “You need money...the world runs on money and power...If you get more money somewhere, then that’s where I’m going to go.”

One of the most unique of the African American Fence-Sitters (initially classified as a Shifter) is a 19-year-old urban high school graduate, whose main motivation for enlisting in the Air Force or Navy would be to earn the money to open his own barbershop. He already practices “backyard barbering” on the side, but wants to buy property and start a shop where he can be boss. A few other African

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American respondents also aspire to small business ownership, but he is the only youth in the sample who sees enlistment as a potential vehicle for achieving this goal. He had just spoken with the Navy recruiter on the morning of the interview, but is still unsure if he will go ahead and enlist because he first wants to see if he can find another way to swing the shop.

Because of the danger, this youth's father would rather he go to college than enlist. However, his father views joining the military as better than staying around with nothing to do and getting in trouble. Some of this young man's buddies are working, some not; others have enlisted in the military or are "locked up." Those who joined the Service did so for want of anything else to do. They have children and went to "get some money and travel...see the world before they settle down." This young man considers the military preferable to college because he never much liked sitting in a classroom. Thinking about owning the barbershop inspires images of making money, whereas the military makes him think of "when the drill sergeant be all up in your face yelling and spitting in your face." Still, this prospect does not faze him, since the solution is obvious: "when you do something wrong they yell in your face, so don't do nothing wrong." While joining the military would clearly be a means to an end, like several of the Joiners, he is starting to steel himself for what it will take to "get through."

Among the other African American Fence-Sitters, one 18-year-old would prefer to go to college but will enlist if his plans do not work out. Another is choosing between joining the military and driving a truck for a living; he would like "to stay on the road all the time." A third youth, Rodney, discussed in Chapter 3, had been counting on a basketball scholarship to a good college, but after he broke his ankle, "it was pretty much over with." He has recently returned from another state, where he had been living with his father, to help tend to his sick mother and younger siblings. Having only been able to get work as a short order cook makes him feel he should enlist. However, with obligations to his family, Rodney will probably not join the military if he can get a better paying job in the area. He is also considering enrolling in a 2-year college. Rodney is deeply concerned about his situation and worries about his future "all the time."

Right now, all three of these youth are still very much up in the air. Their mixed images of military life include hardship, hard work, travel, independence, discipline, lack of freedom, being away from home, and serving and protecting the country. They do not expect to like boot camp or their sergeants (who will "probably be like your bad cousin"), but their friends report once you get through basic training, things ease up considerably. Their friends in the military also say, as one youth put it, "to take all that stuff the recruiters say and just blow it in one ear and straight out the other."

African American Fence-Sitters often began to seriously consider the military only after getting a dose of reality in the form of low-wage menial jobs. Several have children whom they help to support, but apparently feel no immediate obligation to marry their children's mother. These Fence-Sitters' parents, while hesitant to recommend a potentially dangerous course of action, generally prefer that their sons enlist rather than "hang out" and risk getting into trouble. They may apply pressure to get their sons out of the house; the youth, in turn, react by seeing the military as an escape. Those who are fathers look upon enlistment either as a way of helping fulfill their paternal financial obligations or escaping to "see the world." However, once they are out of the high school recruitment "circuit," enlistment typically requires some initiative or at least overt action on their part, and this is where the process often stalls.

Fence-Sitters: A Summary

- The Fence-Sitters, like the Joiners, mainly come from less well-to-do working-class or lower-middle-class families. However, in contrast to the Joiners, they represent a wider spectrum on the urban-rural continuum. They are somewhat younger, on average, than the youth in the other propensity groups, with more high school seniors.
- African Americans and Hispanics outnumber Whites in this category. By comparison to the Shifters (and Non-Joiners), fewer Fence-Sitters are college-oriented. Like the Joiners, several of these youth believe they are not yet or may never be ready for college: They dislike "book-learning" and prefer a more active life. Those who would like to go to college right away are worried they might not be able to afford it.
- Fence-Sitters have weaker family traditions of military service than the Joiners; none had exposure to junior ROTC in high school. While not actively discouraging military involvement, their relatives and friends report mixed experiences in the military and do not provide a strong overall social network of support or positive impetus for joining.
- By contrast to the Joiners, more of the 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. The Hispanic noncollege youth are not experiencing the same family pressure as their African American peers to be out on their own and distance themselves from their buddies in the neighborhood.
- The Fence-Sitters' images of military life, although a mix of positives and negatives, show some of the same elements as the Joiners, including a positive evaluation of discipline, hard work, regulation, and order. Hispanic youth frequently mentioned service and respect as attributes of military life. Job security and "being taken care of" are considered major advantages. Boot camp is just something to be "gotten through," after which military life becomes much like a normal job, except a bit more regulated. African American Fence-Sitters tend to have more negative or "empty" imagery of military life,

which corresponds to a view of enlistment as escaping from a negative rather than embracing a positive.

- Recruiters are viewed overall with scorn and mistrust. Several respondents in this category told tales of “pushy, used car salesmen” recruiters; one Fence-Sitter claimed a particularly pushy recruiter was a major reason he has yet to (and may not) enlist.

Non-Joiners

Non-Joiners were defined as youth not intending to enlist and who have never considered enlistment. All but one of the youth originally classified as Non-Joiners remained so classified following the in-depth interviews. (The sole exception was a 21-year-old married truck driver who revealed during the in-depth interview that he was about to enlist before meeting his wife just prior to high school graduation. Technically, this youth would be classified a Shifter.) Combined with the youth reclassified as Non-Joiners originally assigned to other propensity groups, the Non-Joiner propensity group became the largest of the four.

College-Oriented Non-Joiners

The Non-Joiners fall into a few main groups. The largest grouping is comprised of college-going or college-bound youth. White and Hispanic youth are about equally represented; fewer are African American. These young men either never gave the idea of entering the military any thought at all or else considered it very lightly, usually late in high school, as one of a quick succession of options.

Surprisingly few of these college-going youth express general philosophical or religious objections to the military as an institution or to the idea of military service. They simply state that the military never appealed to them or was never a part of their upbringing. Others have no major objections to military life; however, they feel it is a viable choice for others, but not themselves. These Non-Joiners’ views of military life are very much like those of the college-going Shifters described above. Overall, these college-going Non-Joiners have had less contact with recruiters than the youth in other propensity categories. However, it is hard to say what is cause and what is consequence. Many of these youth paid no attention at all to recruiters or went out of their way to avoid them because they had already psychologically eliminated the military from their list of considered options. As several of them put it, joining was never, or no longer, “a thought in my mind.” Said one youth: “I had my mind set [on college] early in my senior year and that was another reason I didn’t think about the military...It wasn’t a thought in my mind, I guess.”

Non-Joiners from Military Families

Although some college Non-Joiners come from military families, this connection has not translated into a desire or impetus to follow in their family members' footsteps. A 20-year-old White college junior whose father is a Navy officer recognizes many benefits to military life, including travel, excitement, and the opportunity to be outdoors. However, this young man, majoring in accounting, simply "wants something different" for his life. He sees no realistic opportunity to practice his accounting and business skills in the military, and like many of his college-going peers, believes the civilian world offers more control over basic life choices. He has spoken with his father, now retired, as well as his grandfathers, about life in the military but thinks times have changed too much for his grandfathers' stories and observations to have much present-day relevance.

Interestingly, this youth "honestly can't think of anyone" he knows now serving in the military. The college he attends is "not big on ROTC" and basically lacks a military subculture. Although his father was able to avoid disrupting their family by settling down in one place once the youth reached his early teens, this young man still feels the military is hard on families. He pays no attention to recruitment literature and regards recruiters in a negative light. Echoing the sentiments of several of the college-goers in all propensity categories, he feels that anyone who would fall for the recruiters' lines would be just the sort of person the military should not want to recruit in the first place.

Another White college student, whose father is an officer in the Marine Corps Reserve, sees the military as a viable choice for some of his peers, but believes it would only delay him in launching his career. His best friend attends VMI, which is "the right place for him." This young man's father had to drop out of college and enter the Marines to "straighten himself out" and "learn discipline." Consequently, the father feels strongly that his son should not have to go through the same thing he did. It would appear that the father has little to worry about on this account; this youth seems extremely disciplined, both as a student and an athlete. As for many others like him, the prospect of entering the military calls to mind images of loss of control, and maintaining control is clearly very important to this youth.

This youth's story illustrates the important point that having close relatives in the military does not automatically lead to a positive enlistment propensity. The specific interpretation of the meaning of entering the military, as understood in the context of the family's history and the youth's life, is more determinative. In this case, the youth's father had been "forced" to turn to the Marines as a way of

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straightening out his own life. For his son to have to do the same would count as both personal and familial failure.

The mother of Eric, a 19-year-old college Non-Joiner (the “suit” described in Chapter 3), had served as a nurse in Vietnam, and according to Eric’s father, for a long time would not talk about this part of her life. But by the time Eric was in elementary school, his mother had become quite vocal, speaking out about her experiences and attending the opening of the Vietnam Women’s Memorial in Washington, DC. Eric is adamant that he “wants nothing to do with combat,” stating that this is “the way I was raised.” He paid no attention to recruiters at prep school and throws all mailings from the military “right into the garbage can.” The military evokes images of war and regimentation; images of the work world, based on real life experiences, are positive and vivid, focusing on independence, cooperation, and mutual respect. An officer of his college’s Young Republicans chapter who criticized Bill Clinton for being a draft dodger, Eric sheepishly admits that if the draft were reinstated, he would probably go to Canada rather than fight in a war.

Earlier in this chapter, we presented the theoretical possibility that two otherwise very similar young men could hold parallel images of the military and operate in similar decision-making frameworks, but emerge with different propensities as a function of interpreting this information differently in relation to their own perceived needs and sense of themselves as individuals. Eric tells of a high school chum who was like him in virtually every respect, including a shared political conservatism, except that the friend was “really into the military” whereas Eric himself was “a wimp” in this respect. They used to joke about it. Eric’s friend is now happily attending West Point.

Not surprisingly, Non-Joiners are somewhat more likely than the other youth to associate the military with images of war, combat, and shooting. For the college-going youth, these are accompanied by images of regimentation, routine, lack of creativity, loss of freedom, inflexibility, and “belonging to the government.” Many of these youth feel the military quite simply has “nothing to offer” them, or would be a waste of time in light of their career goals.

The Military “Screws With Your Head.” Phil, a 19-year-old White college-going Non-Joiner from a lower middle-class background, described briefly in Chapter 3, was “not raised for” the military and is unsure if he could endure the “yelling and the abuse...having to be perfect...to do this or that.” Both his uncles served in the military but had “bad experiences” (which they have never discussed with him in any detail), which has led them to discourage him from entering. Phil’s friends in the military also say that “it wasn’t what they thought it would be.” One longhaired high school acquaintance, forced to shave off all

his hair in order to enlist, developed mental problems while serving in the Marines and eventually had to be institutionalized. Said Phil of this friend: “I think he might have went nuts. I have nothing against it [the military] but I am not the kind of person who could handle stuff like that.”

Others in this cluster of Non-Joiners report similar stories of friends, or friends of friends, who “lost it” or “had their heads screwed with” in the military. For Phil, the primary disadvantages of the military are that you cannot quit, have to “do it their way or else,” and if war ever came, “Oh man, I would die...being in college you don’t have that worry.” Phil gets his ideas about military life from firsthand contacts as well as movies on Vietnam, allowing that “some (but not all) of that stuff is true.” While recognizing that in civilian life some people run the risk of becoming “bums,” he believes this would never happen to him.

Military Requirements in Conflict with Basic Personality Needs. Other college-going Non-Joiners feel their basic personalities and personality needs are at odds with the demands and requirements of military life. One 20-year-old Hispanic psychology student indicates he is a “pretty nice guy” and would probably not do very well in the Service. A 20-year-old Non-Joiner college student, also Hispanic, said: “I don’t lean toward the military because I already have a lot of interest in life.” He adds that the military is not an environment in which you can excel and distinguish yourself as an individual. You cannot “invent things and be great and outstanding...you’re doing the same things everyone else does.” Another Non-Joiner, a 22-year-old White soon-to-be college graduate, voices similar views. In the military, he believes, the really important decisions get made at the very top. Whereas in the civilian world of policymaking (which he has come to know through job exposure), the real action takes place at the middle levels, with “people just like me...except they dress a little better.” This youth considers the military bureaucratically hidebound, rewarding obedience and conformity, and sees himself as thriving best in milieux that encourage individual initiative and risk-taking.

There are fewer African American youth than White or Hispanic youth in this cluster of college-going Non-Joiners, and they differ somewhat both from one another and from the Hispanic and White youth. One African American Non-Joiner has attitudes toward the military and his future career which closely resemble those of the other middle-class college-going Non-Joiners. He has carefully planned out a career path that involves graduate training in computer systems at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Like many of his peers who associate the military with images of war and death, this youth never gave the thought of entering the military serious consideration. Recruiters are “an annoyance.” An uncle was badly injured in Vietnam. He asserts: “I just don’t like military life. I had a lot of uncles go

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through it. From what I hear it wasn't for me...As a little boy I never liked it...It's something in my heart I don't want to do."

A second African American Non-Joiner, Albert, briefly profiled in Chapter 3, is enrolled in a 5-year program in physical therapy. Although holding no philosophical objections to military life, which he associates with rather benign, positive images of team work and computers, he never gave even the most fleeting consideration to the possibility of entering the military. This young man attended a specialized health sciences high school and simply never heard anything about military options at an appropriate time. This is not to say he would necessarily have leapt at the chance if contacted by a recruiter. Attending a specialized school had clearly set him on a track toward a medical or health-related career. Any decision to join the military would most likely have depended on being persuaded of the availability of favorable opportunities in these fields.

Had he not linked up with a special "stay in school" program, a third 20-year-old African American Non-Joiner, Terry, a graphic arts major currently enrolled at a community college, might well have become a directionless "diffuse decision-maker". This program limits the number of hours per week he can work while attending school, but guarantees full-time employment during breaks and summer vacations, as long as he maintains a certain grade point average. Terry found out about it 3 years ago while working part-time at the U.S. Census Bureau and has been a participant ever since. In the beginning, it was rocky going both at work and school, and he "messed up a lot." But the support and encouragement he received from his co-workers at the Census Bureau ("who are like mothers to me"), taught him what to expect in college, gave Terry the motivation to continue and succeed in both environments. This experience has totally transformed Terry's sense of what he can accomplish in life, and has encouraged a long-range vision for the future that involves "marriage, family, kids, house, college (for the kids), and retirement," rather than "getting an apartment and buying a car, and that's about it." Said Terry:

"Before I started working at the Census, I had no intention of ever going to college...When I got there I started getting the feel of being successful...and I just wanted more...and so I just took that initiative to go to school and try to make something of myself."

He now plans to transfer to a 4-year institution and major in computer graphics, and has already won a "reward" for redesigning several forms for the Census Bureau on his own initiative.

Terry is opposed to military service on moral and religious grounds: He equates the military with bloodshed and violence. Raised in close proximity to a major Air Force base, he is quite familiar with

military life and once thought about joining “for maybe one day and that was basically it.” He subsequently ignored recruiters “because I really didn’t feel like that was where I wanted to go.” Terry has several relatives who have served or are serving, in the military and who function as strong negative role models for him. “It seems like nothing good came of their lives,” he reports. One uncle who saw battle has “nothing really to show for it,” which “is kind of sad.” Some of his uncles and cousins got involved with drugs, and came out of the Service with various diseases. “They didn’t really care about who they are or what they did.” While acknowledging that the military may not be responsible for making his relatives this way, he also sees that enlistment did nothing to turn their lives around. Firsthand knowledge, Terry’s primary source of information on military life, is reinforced by movies he interprets as conveying the futility and senselessness of military involvement.

Non-College Non-Joiners

The Non-Joiners who are neither attending college nor college bound are a rather diverse lot. Many more of them are African American or Hispanic than White. Not surprisingly, a few are "diffuse decision-makers" originally classified as Shifters or Fence-Sitters.

White Non-College Non-Joiners

Two of the White youth in this category, Charles and Colin are both from rural areas of the South and were initially categorized as YATS Joiners. A third White Non-Joiner, also from a rural area in the South, is a 21-year-old high school graduate working at his grandfather’s store, profiled in Chapter 3 as an example of a youth with strong ties binding him to the local context. Although classified as a YATS Fence-Sitter, this youth is very unlikely to leave his family and friends, and even if he did, his first choice would be to attend college.

“I’m Off In My Own Little World.” Another of the White Non-Joiners is a 21-year-old high school graduate, living in a small town in the South, whose job at the time of the interview was to paste labels on pickle jars. He, too, was originally classified as a Fence-Sitter, but also seems an unlikely prospect for the military. He feels he is “on a roll right now” and won’t be going into the military for at least 3 more years, at which time he will probably “have too many wrinkles.” His father is an agronomist who consults on breeding techniques in different parts of the world and is so concerned that his son find a niche in life that he contacted a recruiter on his son’s behalf.

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This youth appears to have emotional and/or intellectual problems that would make him a poor candidate for enlistment even if he were favorably disposed toward military service.² Since graduating high school, he has held a series of short-lived menial jobs and also dropped out of technical school. “I just made up the idea of college...It isn’t the college’s fault. It was my fault I dropped out. I’m just off in my dreamy world.” This young man dislikes his label-pasting job because he gets glue on his hands and cannot keep up the expected pace; he would just as soon take back his old job stacking buckets. He could never have a job like his father’s because “he works his butt off...he has phone calls, all kinds of stuff. I couldn’t take that.” On the future: “I don’t take it very seriously...If I get up with a good attitude that will help me through the day, I don’t think about it...I’m a lazy person.”

This youth’s images of the military are at once striking and wildly contradictory. When told that the aggregated information from the interviews would be given to researchers at the Department of Defense, he said: “Oh-oh....going to give it to the anti-Christ...They’ll know where I live. They probably know more about me than you do...all those numbers.” His father made arrangements for him to meet with the recruiter, but he “made himself look like a loser” because he did not want to have to think about what to say. Interacting with the recruiter “was like talking to the dumbest kid in school...who wants to be bad and shaving his head...People at the bottom are kind of dumb.” Boot camp would be a “bunch of disrespectful punks trying to make you feel bad,” but by the same token, military life is “kind of easygoing once you do your exercises in the morning.” The idea of joining the Marines still holds occasional appeal for its alliterative effect (his first name begins with an “M”), but he does not want to be “somewhere else and not here.” All in all, were he to enter the military (which would be impossible, since he is flat-footed, with fallen arches from hiking so much) he would be “the same soul, but not as lazy.” It would “probably change my body a bit—take my second chin away and my love handles off.” As he himself admits, this young man is “off in another world” and seems unlikely to come down to earth to join the military.

Another of the White Non-Joiners, a 21-year-old construction worker initially classified as a Shifter, only considered joining the military for “maybe one day, no more” sometime in high school. He dislikes the way this country is headed and has a “habit of getting into trouble.” This youth believes he and the military would be a bad combination. As it was, he “barely got through school,” does not like to be told what to do, and is unwilling to “put his life on the line” for the country. His father, who did serve in the military, agrees that his son “would never make it...they’d end up shooting me first.” Yet, except perhaps for the particular vehemence of his feelings against authority figures, this youth strongly resembles several

² This youth’s case was so extreme, and his answers at times were so outlandish that we even considered the possibility he was “putting us on.”

of the White Joiners with similarly rebellious histories of “getting in trouble” and having a difficult time in school. Expectedly, his images of military life revolve around taking orders and being forced to cooperate with others—one thing he likes about his present job is that he can go off by himself and be left alone. Long-term plans call for purchasing a nicer car and getting a “better” girlfriend.

African American Non-Joiners Not Attending College

Unlike White Non-Joiners, the African American noncollege youth in this category are more likely to express religious or moral objections to the idea of military service and to call up images of war, killing, and death. A 17-year-old high school senior does not plan to go to college, at least not yet, because he envisions a scenario of “partying, messing it up, getting kicked out...first train home.” However, the military is not an option for him, as it might be for other youth in his position. He expresses an extreme distaste for military life and has several relatives who report having had unpleasant, racist experiences in the military. Like other African American and Hispanic youth, he is not against killing on general principles, but is opposed to killing someone who has committed no personal offense against him. Moreover, his family is united in opposition to the idea of his enlisting. When asked if his views on joining the military had ever wavered, he stated: “It was no at first, then it was no, and it’s always been that way.” The military evokes powerful images of blood, senseless murders, and hurt families. On the other hand, this young man recognizes that were he to enlist, he would be able to do more to help his whole family. This youth comes from a working class, small town, southern environment much like that of many Joiners and is also similar to them in feeling unprepared to handle college at this point in his life. However, his family context and personal beliefs exert a strong negative influence on any predisposition to enlist, making him a confirmed Non-Joiner.

One 21-year-old high school graduate, initially classified as a Shifter, is a Jehovah’s Witness for whom the strongest disadvantage of the military would be “blood on your conscience if you kill.” Although now residing in a small town in the South, he grew up in New York and Los Angeles, and finds his friends in the South “very patriotic.” Many enlist just to get away from home, only to discover they made a big mistake—like an acquaintance who purposely got hurt so he could get out of his commitment to the military. Recruiters are truly fearsome, “like brainwashed...boastful...uppity...some like tough guys.” This youth identifies military life with discipline, war, and killing, and believes he would become a harder, less merciful person if he were to join.

A 21-year-old African American Non-Joiner who wants to open his own cosmetology salon was initially classified as a Shifter because he had thought very briefly about joining the military early in high

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school. After further consideration, he decided it would be better to attend school and once enrolled in a technical school “just forgot” about the military. While the military holds certain advantages of discipline and recognition from others, the same things can be accomplished in the civilian world by other means—for example, through the special grant program that has trained him in barbering. His friends who have recently returned from the Service cannot find jobs and now regret not having gone to college. This youth’s brother is a chaplain in the Army, with whom he has discussed recent Army-related racial incidents in North Carolina. The youth is deeply concerned about this issue and thinks that if he were to enter the military, he would probably have to serve under a racist. Furthermore, experiencing racism would forever destroy the notion that the military is fair and everyone gets along and works toward a common goal.

Another 21-year-old African American Non-Joiner who started working in a chemical plant right out of high school, is only now waking up to the fact that his friends who went to college are passing him by. He needed time to “get on track,” but is now applying to his employer for tuition reimbursement to attend college at night. His friends who joined the military give it mixed reviews. His father and grandfather, both of whom served in the Army, strongly advise against his joining and would much prefer that he enroll in college. His images of the military are relatively neutral; were he to join, he believes it would make him a person with more foresight.

The remaining African American youth in this category tend to identify military life with images of war and death. They sound much like the college-going youth in that they were “never much into” the military, believe it would mean “losing years out of my life,” and basically ignore recruiters because “it just wasn’t what I wanted.” Included in this category is Antoine, who fantasizes about going to Duke and playing in the NBA; his images of the military are negative, but quite vague. Although his mother would like to see him enlist to “make a man” of him, Antoine has no interest in the military and “does not even know” in what branch his father served.

Hispanic Non-College Non-Joiners

As seen, the college-going Hispanic Non-Joiners sound very much like the White college Non-Joiners. The Hispanic Non-Joiners who are not attending or planning to attend college are rather different than either the White or African American youth in this cluster. They are somewhat less likely than the African American respondents to associate the military with images of war and killing, but more likely than either of the other two groups to cite dislike for travel and desire not to leave their families, as reasons for not favoring enlistment. A few express personal dislike for military discipline, even as they recognize that such discipline would probably change them for the better.

Included in this cluster, for example, is the New York City youth who travels from the Bronx to Queens to work. He never considered joining the military because he dislikes travel, but acknowledges that joining the military has helped several of his friends “with a lot of problems.” The military is “out of the picture” for another Hispanic youth, whose family have been Jehovah’s Witnesses for three generations. However, “except for the killing part,” his images of the military are quite positive and “civilized,” stressing respect, order, and responsibility. Another 19-year-old Hispanic youth is also a Jehovah’s Witness, but his main deterrent to joining the military is that he is the only male in the family right now, which would make it hard for him to be away. Other Hispanic Non-Joiners, initially classified as Shifters, never really gave serious thought to the idea of enlistment (one said it would “not be cool to wear a green uniform”) and may not be citizens or green card holders. These youth represent the first generation in this country, and as such, have limited family connections to the military. They also express an unwillingness to leave their families.

The Non-Joiners: A Summary

- Demographically, the Non-Joiners represent the full spectrum of socioeconomic backgrounds and a diverse range of regional as well as rural, urban, and suburban environments. They include a large complement of college-going and college-bound youth, most White or Hispanic, fewer African American. By contrast, the Non-Joiners not attending or planning to attend college are predominantly African American and Hispanic.
- Just as only a few Joiners give patriotic commitment to their country as a primary motivation for joining, surprisingly few Non-Joiners express general philosophical or religious objections to the idea of military service. African American, and to a lesser extent, Hispanic youth, are most apt to oppose military service on moral and religious grounds (several are Jehovah’s Witnesses) or express reservations about killing someone who has committed no personal offense against them.

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- 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, these Non-Joiners' interpretations of their relatives' and friends' past connections to the military are often negatively charged. A White college-goer whose mother was a nurse in Vietnam is adamant in his opposition to war. Several African American youth see that "nothing good" came of the lives of their relatives who went into the Service. Others point to examples of friends or acquaintances who "went nuts" in the military.
- College-going Non-Joiners reject the military both for its association with war, and also 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, they simply do not need the military. However, most regard it as a useful and necessary social institution and a viable choice for other youth.
- College-going Non-Joiners either never considered entering the military because it was simply not the way they were raised or lightly entertained the idea during high school and then dismissed it altogether. Their contacts with age peers in the military have dwindled over time, so, for the most part, they no longer travel in the same social circles.
- Like some of the Joiners, a few of the college-going Non-Joiners come from career military families, but reject the lifestyle for themselves. One youth has no objections to the military, but simply wants "a different kind of life." Another is bent upon not repeating a pattern in which his father "had to" join the Service to straighten out his life.
- Not surprisingly, 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"). In other cases, the differences do stem from more fundamental values, religious or moral convictions, or family culture.
- A few of the African American Non-Joiners mention racism in the military as a major concern, based on their relatives' stories as well as on several highly publicized recent events. They seem to be more concerned with moral aspects of the military and with expressing reservations about killing.
- The Hispanic youth not attending college picture military life very much like youth in the other propensity groups; they are distinguished mainly in their strongly expressed dislike for travel and uniform unwillingness to leave their families.

Summary

On the most general level, the youth's images of military as contrasted with civilian lifestyles, and even their ideas about the advantages and disadvantages of each, are not that radically different across the four propensity groups. The military evokes images of discipline, hierarchy, order, structure. By contrast, civilian life suggests greater freedom, individuality, and choice. 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.

Just as social class differences importantly inform decision-making contexts, the thematic of social class also resounds powerfully through the imagery of civilian versus military lifestyles. Middle-class, college-going youth and, to a lesser extent, minority youth who expect to own their own businesses, foresee futures in which they will have a good deal of autonomy and self-direction in their work, and will be as likely to be giving as taking orders. Consequently, quite a few of these youth react negatively to a hierarchical image of the military as an organization in which one is told what to do and may be subjected to arbitrary authority. Middle-class college youth speak of "not being able to take" being "bossed around" and do not expect to be treated this way in their jobs. Interestingly, however, they generally do not reject the idea of hierarchy on general principles, but only for themselves, as persons who do not need this sort of structure and discipline to function effectively. 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 by contrast, because they are presumably more clearly defined, and thus possibly, more just. Curiously, many of these youth also see it as an advantage that in the military one cannot escape this sort of situation by quitting. The military forces these youth to "learn to take it" because sooner or later, this is a lesson they believe they have to learn.

Propensity Configurations of College-Goers

The decision-making contexts defined in Chapter 3 closely map onto the four propensity categories. Middle-class, college-oriented youth are most heavily represented among the Shifters and Non-Joiners. By contrast, only two of the youth determined to be Joiners are immediately college-bound: Both are Hispanic youth from military families who intend to join ROTC. The college-bound or potentially college-bound Fence-Sitters are mostly high school seniors still undecided about their plans. A few are

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contemplating ROTC; the rest will reluctantly enlist if this proves the only way to pay for college. For most of these Fence-Sitters, the decision will hinge on the pending results of college admissions, scholarship, or financial aid applications. In a matter of months, most of these youth will probably be Shifters; a few may be Joiners.

College-going Shifters are primarily youth who several years ago were college-bound Fence-Sitters who had briefly considered and then rejected the military option (more often enlistment than ROTC) as a way of financing a college education. Once having made that choice, these Shifters “never looked back” and pursued their college educations and future plans in much the same fashion as college-going Non-Joiners.

In their images of military and civilian life, as in most other respects, the college-going Shifters and Non-Joiners are virtually indistinguishable. Very few express general or abstract philosophical or religious objections to the military. They tend to see military life as too highly structured and restrictive of freedom, control, and independence—all attributes of a work or life situation they value highly for themselves. However, most of these college-going Shifters and Non-Joiners regard enlistment as a viable option for less self-disciplined peers, who may need military structure and discipline to “get themselves back on track” and “straighten out their lives.”

Most college-going Shifters and Non-Joiners have had some contact with people serving in the military, but tend not to have strong familial support for following a military path. Some have relatives who served but actively or subtly discouraged them from taking the military route. A few college-going Shifters and Non-Joiners hail from career military families. While these youth tend to give the military more credit as a fairer and “less back-stabbing” environment, they resemble their college-going peers in viewing the civilian work world as offering better opportunities and more challenges in their fields of interest. Having a close family connection to the military certainly does not automatically lead to positive propensity; in fact, several of these young men’s interpretations of family members’ prior military experiences have fostered just the opposite reaction. A few of these youth also worry about how a life in the military might hurt their future families.

Propensity Configurations of Non-College-Going Youth

With the exception of two college-oriented Joiners expecting to join ROTC and become future military officers, Joiners come from less privileged and more circumscribed decision-making contexts. They largely have working class and lower middle-class backgrounds and small town origins. These

Joiners present 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. Several have had negative or chastening experiences in the workplace and elsewhere that have led them to rethink an earlier reluctance to join the military. Many of these Joiners believe they are not yet ready to go to college; one youth had already dropped out, others can easily envision “partying” too much and getting kicked out of school. Other Joiners do not see college in their futures because they are not academically inclined.

Although a few of the Joiners name service to their country as a reason for joining, they are motivated primarily by desire for technical training, benefits, security, and money for further education. Their images of the military emphasize discipline and taking orders, but unlike the college-goers, these Joiners see a positive value in strong external discipline. They are not worried about physical danger, but also are not “gung-ho” about carrying a gun or engaging in combat. Boot camp, although hard and demanding, might teach valuable lessons. After basic training, military life will be a lot like a regular job; it might even be fairer, with rules more consistently enforced.

Most of the Joiners have strong familial role models and traditions of military service and possess an extensive network of contacts with others who are serving or have served in the military. Several also had positive experiences in junior ROTC in high school. Although some family members are ambivalent about their joining the military, as are some of the youth themselves. These Joiners overall receive active support and encouragement from friends and family in their decision.

Some youth originally classified as Joiners based upon survey responses did not, at the time of the in-depth interviews, seem very likely to enlist in the military. This is particularly true of African American and, to a lesser extent, Hispanic youth. Most of these originally classified Joiners are better characterized as Fence-Sitters or Shifters, categories that tend to blend into one another for minority youth from circumscribed contexts with diffuse decision-making styles.

Most of the noncollege-going, African American Fence-Sitters 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. Many of these African American Fence-Sitters associate the military with negative images of war, lack of freedom, imposition of arbitrary and demeaning discipline, and racism. In fact, their views of military life are little different than those of Shifters and only somewhat less negative than those of the Non-Joiners.

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African American, noncollege-going Shifters are like the Fence-Sitters, except that they have already changed their minds about joining the military or have attempted to enlist and been rejected. Among the African American noncollege-going respondents, these two propensity groups essentially represent different points on a somewhat arbitrary trajectory rather than distinctively different types of youth. Indeed, even the Non-Joiners—who are somewhat more inclined to voice strong moral and religious objections to war, more likely to have dismissed the military as a possibility early on, and more apt to enjoy family support in their choice not to join—are distinguished from Shifters and Fence-Sitters more in degree than in kind.

The Hispanic noncollege-goers present a distinctive picture. Like the African American youth, these Hispanic youth can be arrayed along a gradually shifting continuum from Joiners to Non-Joiners. Regardless of propensity group, these young men tend to associate military life with images of discipline, service, and respect. Rather than hinging on strong differences in beliefs, joining the military is often a matter of how specific life circumstances (e.g., having family obligations, a green card, other viable job opportunities) interact with critical factors of timing. The Hispanic Shifters are distinguished from the Hispanic Joiners largely by having taken a different turn at a certain point in their lives: They “never got around to enlisting” right out of high school, and, after that, circumstances just moved in another direction. Similarly, Fence-Sitters may have other viable career options they are following or can pursue, be strongly tied to local contexts, or just feel no particular need to make an immediate decision about their futures.

By comparison to the African American and White youth, these Hispanic youth’s families exert little pressure on their sons to leave home and strike out on their own. Virtually all the Hispanic youth are closely identified with and tied to their families, so family members’ prior experiences in the military, and level of support for their choices, also figure importantly into their decision-making configurations. In this respect, it is relevant that several of the first-generation youth have no precedent of familial involvement in the American military. A few of the Hispanic Non-Joiners—like African American Non-Joiners—are Jehovah’s Witnesses who express religious and moral objections to military service. However, most of the Hispanic Non-Joiners also cite dislike for travel and not wanting or being in a position to leave their families as their primary reasons for not enlisting.

Findings Across Propensity Groups

A few findings apply almost uniformly across all four propensity groupings. First, the 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.

The vast majority of the youth, regardless of propensity group, have had some direct personal contact with other people who have served or are serving in the military. They recognize that movies and television shows do not present a factually accurate portrayal of military life. Several youth admitted that particular movies have played into their visions of what military life is like. However, it is clear these media images were chosen selectively, to reinforce a mental picture already being built up on the basis of firsthand information from friends, relatives, and acquaintances, as well as newspapers, books, and other “more objective” media sources. Any notion that these youth are empty vessels or hapless victims of media manipulations seems fairly wide of the mark, at least for the youth in this sub-sample.

The Fluid Nature of Propensity

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 idiosyncratic. 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.

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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.

5. RESPONDENT PERCEPTIONS OF INFORMATION ABOUT MILITARY SERVICE

The 1996 YATS In-Depth Interview protocol included a set of short-response questions asked at the end of the interview designed to determine whether young people have accurate information about the nature and details of military service. Topics included military pay, college tuition benefits, and the nature of military jobs. Interview respondents were told that these questions required only a brief answer and the interviewer did not comment on the response. Many youths responded that they did not know the answer to the question; when they did, we did not probe further.

In this chapter, we present each of the questions with a short description of the responses. For each question, we provide a few “typical” responses, describe the overall pattern of responses, describe distinctions (if there are any) in responses from the four propensity groups described in Chapter 4. The questions are presented in three sections. First are questions that relate to youths’ understanding of the distinction of active duty and service in the Reserves. The second section deals with military life after basic training. Focus groups conducted in the Summer of 1995 suggested many youths’ perceptions of military service are, in fact, perceptions of basic training. The intent of these questions is to determine whether youth distinguish between basic training and subsequent military life, and whether they have any perception of post-basic training military life. The last section addresses youths’ knowledge or perception of the benefits of military service, including benefits of having been in the military (money for college and job training).

We tabulated responses to questions in this section of the interview, and provide quantitative as well as qualitative results. A word of caution about the *quantitative* results is in order. The overall sample is relatively small, and respondents were not always asked all items (the number of observations available for items ranged from a high of 99 to a low of 65)¹. Furthermore, it is not representative of the youth population—minorities and young men likely to join the military are over represented; young men not likely to join are under represented. While we present response proportions, they should read as general indicators, not precise estimates. For example, if one in five of respondents say they don’t know the difference between active and Reserve duty, it seems reasonable to conclude that a fair portion of young men—perhaps as many as a third, would say they didn’t know the difference, but that a large majority would provide an answer.

¹ Missing information came from two sources. The first source was from respondents who had time restrictions, such that interviewers may have skipped over some items. The second source was from technical difficulties, such that an audio recording of the interview was not created.

Overview

The overall impression gained from these interviews is that many youth know very little about military service. Over half of the items elicited “don’t know” responses from one-fifth or more of the respondents, suggesting that a notable portion of youth may not be very knowledgeable about the military. Other responses to questions were generally very short, and stated without confidence; they were obviously guessing. Even though some of the responses were correct, they do not indicate substantive knowledge of military service. The following sequence is typical:

Q: What’s the difference between active and Reserve Service?

A: I’m guessing that it’s Reserves, as the name implies, you’re on reserve for active service.

Q: If a person enlists in the active military, how many years would they have to serve?

A: Is it four?

Q: It might be, I’m not positive.

A: Four or six, I think.

Q: And if a person enlisted in the Reserves, how long would he or she have to serve ?

A: I think it’s only two.

Q: About how many days each year do people in the Reserves have to report to duty?

A: Either twice a month maybe. Yeah, I think it’s twice a month.

A few individuals, on the other hand, seem quite knowledgeable of military service. For example:

Q: What’s the difference between active and Reserve Service?

A: Active is full time, every day of the week. And Reserves is, like, one weekend a month, three weeks in the summer.

Q: O.K. If a person enlists in the active military, how many years would they have to serve?

A: That is how many you sign up for. You’re going to totally sign up for eight, but you might serve two active or four active or six active or eight active; but the years that you serve active, the other years of your eight year term are going to be inactive.

Q: In the active military, do people get to choose the kind of job they have?

A: In some cases.

Q: Such as?

A: The Army. You can go in and have a contract signed before you go in. I know that the Marines will give you a job field. The Navy, I believe, will give you a signed contract before you go in. I don’t know about the Air Force. Sometimes you have an open contract; sometimes you have your job, you know, on paper before you go in. So I think it’s just how you do it.

Understanding Reserve Service

What is the difference between the active and Reserve Services?

“Active is full time, full time officer. Reserve is you serve a couple $\frac{3}{4}$ two weeks out of a month or something like that. You’re still in the military, you can be called upon, but you’re not full time. I think it’s something like that.”

“Reserve services I believe is one or two weekends a month for four years or something like that. And active service I believe you have an active role in the military, that’s basically your job. Versus the Reserves is just what you do on the weekends and you’re used if needed.”

Responses to this question were generally reasonable and accurate. Numerous respondents noted that active duty members are military who have chosen the military as their full-time career, whereas Reservists have a civilian career and act as “back-up” to the active Services. Respondents illustrated this difference by describing utilization of the two types of military members during war-time operations: “...in case of war, active duty members go first, and then Reservists are called if needed.” Many respondents answered this question by comparing the number of days Reservists report for duty (“one weekend a month”) as opposed to active duty personnel, who are on duty every day. About one-fifth of respondents said they “don’t know” the difference between Active and Reserve service.

Differences Among the Propensity Groups

Responses did not vary much from one propensity group to the next. The “Shifter” group was somewhat less likely to describe the Reserves as a “back-up” force than others. Conversely, they were more likely to describe the Reserves in terms of days served. Joiners gave fewer “don’t know” responses than youth from the other propensity groups.

If a person enlisted in the active military, how many years would he or she have to serve?

“I believe it’s four, I don’t know. Make it four.”

More than one-half said 4 years of service or “4 to X” years (for example, “4 or 6” years). Slightly less than one-quarter of youth believed the minimum tour of duty was 2 years. A small number of respondents reported 3- or 5-year contracts. Two respondents said that the commitment was a total of 8 years, split between active and Reserve duty.² Two respondents gave unrealistic responses: one answered 22 years, the other said “their whole life.”

A few respondents elaborated that the type of contract signed determines the number of years of service. Some added that contract choices are available to the enlistee, usually among 2-, 4-, and 6-year options, and some added that options vary among the different Services. Some youth elaborated about the process of reenlistment, until retirement if desired. About 1 out of 8 respondents responded that they did not know.

Differences Among the Propensity Groups

There were some response differences across propensity groups regarding the Active duty enlistment period. For instance, a higher proportion of Shifters (over two-fifths) responded “2 years,” whereas fewer than 1 in 10 Joiners responded this way.

If a person enlisted in the Reserves, how long would he or she have to serve?

“It might be the same amount. It’s either two or four years”

Respondents who answered this question were uncertain about their answer and often told us they were guessing. Almost one-third of youth responded that they did not know how long the term of enlistment was in the Reserves. Those who did offer an opinion gave answers ranging from 6 months to 10 years. The modal response was 2 years (about 2 out of 5 respondents), followed by 4 years (about 1 out of 8 respondents). Some respondents provided comparative responses to the active component, such as “the same [as active duty military members]” or “longer [than active duty military members].”

² This, in fact, is the correct answer since the standard service obligation is 8 years which may be a combination of active and Reserve duty. Normal tour length tends to be 4 years on active duty, although 3, 5 and 6 years are also common. The remaining balance of the 8 year obligation is served in the Reserves.

Differences Among the Propensity Groups

Among the young men we interviewed, Shifters and Fence-Sitters tended to provide lower estimates of the Reserve obligation (around 3 years on average) than either Joiners or Non-Joiners (over 4 years on average).

About how many days each year do people in the Reserves have to report for duty?

“How many days? Maybe 30, something like that.”

“Either twice a month, maybe. Yeah, I think it’s twice a month.”

“Reserve services you are just showing up one weekend a month and two weeks a year.”

Youth have more accurate information about this aspect of Reserve service than about Reservists’ enlistment commitment. The most common response was “one weekend a month.” A few respondents added that Reservists also report 2 weeks per year in addition to their weekend responsibility; an additional handful of respondents said that this annual training generally occurs during the summer. (Over one-third of all youth who were asked this question responded one weekend per month or 24 days out of the year.)

While youths seemed more certain of their response than about Reservists’ service obligation, about one-third still replied that they did not know the answer to the question. This question also elicited extreme responses, including four respondents who believed that Reservists report over 100 days out of a year (one response was 200 days). Other extreme responses were 3 to 4 months, 5 days per year, every weekend, and every day.³

Differences Among the Propensity Groups

In general, responses did not vary by propensity group.

³ While it is true that Reservists may be called up or mobilized and spend several months on duty, the standard commitment is one weekend per month and 2 weeks per year (usually served during the summer).

Daily Life in the Military

Is there a difference between boot camp and military routine?

“Probably not. Wait, you mean bootcamp and normal, every day military life? Yes, I think so. Bootcamp you’re out there running around and getting into shape. Regular military personnel do their job.”

“Well I think boot camp is where you learn what the routine is. You know you go through boot camp and then you’re given an assignment and once you get there you have a routine.”

Boot camp was often equated with the preliminary training before the Service member enters his or her primary job. (More than 3 in 7 who were asked this question responded in this way.) A small portion of respondents described boot camp as being “tough,” whereas life in the military afterward “isn’t as tough.” Also, some respondents gave simple “yes” (1 in 9) or “no” (1 in 7) responses to the question of whether there is a difference. A few youths stated that sub-par enlistees are “weeded out” during this phase of training. One out of seven respondents said they did not know how to respond to this question.

Differences Among the Propensity Groups

There were no clear-cut response differences among the groups, all Joiners were able to provide a response compared to about three-quarters of the Non-Joiners.

What kind of living arrangements do Military Service members have?

“They live on the base. I think, I’m not really sure. I guess they would have a house on the base or I guess near the base. About the same as anywhere except it’s in the base.”

“Barracks, I guess.”

Most responses to this question were quite general and non-specific. About one-third of respondents gave general responses like “barracks” or “dorms;” one-third also mentioned “on-base housing.” A few respondents knew that quarters differed for single and married members and for enlisted members and officers. Certain respondents knew that members receive extra pay if they live off-base, and others describe tax breaks for members living on-base. Finally, almost one-fifth of respondents said they didn’t know how to respond to this question.

Differences Among the Propensity Groups

In general, responses did not vary across groups, but there was a distinction in the proportions of don't know responses. Few Fence-Sitters said they didn't know, whereas almost one-third of the Non-Joiners provided this answer.

About how many hours does a member of the Military Service work every week?

"I have no clue. Full time, whatever that is."

"I have no idea. I mean, I'd just say 40."

Responses also varied widely, ranging from 8 hours to 124 hours per week. "Full-time," "40 hours," and "same as a civilian job" were the most frequent responses to this question. About 2 in 5 who were asked this question offered numerical responses which included "40 hours" in the response, either in a range, or as "40 or over." A few respondents qualified their responses, saying that it depended on the specific job. More than one-quarter of respondents also offered "don't know" responses.

Differences Among the Propensity Groups

There were no apparent differences across the propensity groups.

About how often do members of the Military Service have to participate in early morning physical training?

"Depending on the rank, probably almost every day."

The majority of respondents said "daily." Other responses varied widely, from "hardly ever," to "4 to 5 times per week," and "once or twice a month." A handful of respondents qualified their responses. A few reported that participation in physical training varied according to rank, military job, and preference of the commanding officer. Almost one-quarter of respondents said they did not know the answer to this question.

Differences Among the Propensity Groups

There were no clear differences across the propensity groups.

In the active military, do people get to choose the job they have?

“Yes.”

“In some things yeah, I think. The better you do on that test, the better you do through basic training and officer training school and so on, the likelihood of you choosing what you do is greater than a person who doesn’t do so well.”

Slightly more than one-half of the respondents said that enlistees are able to select their job in the military. Another large portion of respondents (a little more than one-third) answered that enlistees have a limited choice. Members of this group elaborated that test/ASVAB scores and basic training performance determine the jobs for which the enlistees qualified. An enlistee may have a choice from a more restricted list of jobs. Some respondents offered more vague responses, saying enlistees have selection power, but only “to some extent.”

About 1 in 10 respondents offered unqualified “no” responses, saying military members have no choice in job selection. Very few respondents (about 5 percent) gave “don’t know” responses to this question.

Differences Among the Propensity Groups

Joiners were somewhat less positive about the choice afforded to service members. A higher proportion of Joiners (than Non-Joiners or Shifters) believed job assignment choice was not up to the enlistee. Additionally, those Joiners who said they believe enlistees do have a choice, were more likely to qualify that choice than respondents from the other propensity groups. Non-Joiners were less likely to provide a “no” response and more likely to offer an unqualified “yes” response.

Benefits of Military Service

About how much does a new member of the Military Service earn in a year?

“I don’t know, I don’t know.”

“I will go [with] \$25,000.”

Over one-half of the youths gave “don’t know” responses when asked about the annual earnings of Service members. Those who did offer responses were often mistaken in their estimates. Over two-fifths of respondents who gave dollar-figure responses stated that Service members make at least \$20,000 per year (this translates to 1 out of 5 of all respondents who were asked this question). The average numerical response to this question was about \$17,500, while the actual wages for an E-1 Service member are under \$10,000 per year (base pay), not accounting for other job-related allowances or benefits. Responses varied widely: the low response was \$250 per month, which equates to only \$3,000 per year; the high response was \$40,000 per year.

Differences Among the Propensity Groups

As a group, Joiners had the most realistic view of the earnings of new Service members and were the most certain of their responses. The average response for this group was slightly less than \$14,000, and responses typically focused on monthly earnings, rather than annual. The sense is that these respondents were repeating earnings quotations from recruiters or from actual pay charts.

More than one-half of the respondents from the Shifter group reported that new Service members earn \$20,000 or more in annual earnings, while around one-third of respondents from the Joiner and Non-Joiner groups offered responses this high.

How does this compare to the pay you would get in a civilian job you would now be qualified to hold?

“I think in the military you probably wouldn’t make as much, but then you wouldn’t spend as much because you are in the military.”

“I think more for the military.”

“...with a civilian job you might make about the same or more, but maybe you might not have the benefits or the same benefits. I think with the military they maybe start you out at \$22,000 depending on what your skills are, and then the benefits might cover the other half of what you are given.”

More youth believed the military pays more than comparable civilian jobs than those who believed the opposite. Of respondents who offered quantifiable responses, about half reported that

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military pay is higher, about a third said civilian pay is higher, with the remainder replied that pay is equivalent between the two work settings. (Note that these proportions are not based on the total number of respondents, but on the number who offered codable responses. Two in five of all respondents who were asked this question said that the military offered higher pay, less than one-third said they offered lower pay, and one in seven said that pay would be equivalent in the military and civilian arenas.)

Responses that were not quantifiable included a few respondents who said the pay depended on whether a person has a college degree and also on the type of civilian job. One out of 10 offered “don’t know” responses.

Differences Among the Propensity Groups

In general, responses did not vary much. However, a higher proportion of Shifters felt that the military paid less than civilian, whereas the reverse was true for the other groups.

Besides pay, what are some of the other job-related benefits of enlisting in the military?

“Health care, anything to do with health, all that is free.”

The most common response to this question was that military members receive health benefits: over 3 out of 7 respondents who were asked this question mentioned this as a benefit of military service. Housing/room and board, dental, travel and training/experience also represented substantial portions of responses (around 1 out of 10). All other benefit types were mentioned by less than 1 in 10 respondents. Some of these included education benefits, life insurance, discounts/PX privileges, vacation, and retirement benefits. Approximately one-fifth of respondents said they did not know the response to this question about military benefits.

Differences Among the Propensity Groups

It was difficult to discern response differences across the groups. There was a difference in the proportion of “don’t know” responses across the groups. No Joiners offered don’t know responses, but almost one-third of Non-Joiners said they didn’t know.

How do military benefits compare to job-related benefits you would get on a civilian job you might qualify for now?

“It’s far superior.”

A majority (about 3/5 of respondents) believed that military benefits were superior to benefits in a civilian jobs. (In an earlier question, a portion of respondents discussed military benefits as compensation for lower military wages.) No respondents reported that benefits were less in the military compared with the civilian arena, although one respondent commented that military benefits were “not too good.” About one in six believed benefits were equivalent between the two work environments, and one in ten said they didn’t know the answer to this question. The remainder provided qualified responses, such as “it depends on the civilian employer.”

Differences Among the Propensity Groups

As mentioned previously, there were no obvious differences in the types of benefits mentioned by the four propensity groups. However, there was a difference in how respondents perceived military benefits as stacking up against civilian job benefits. Almost one-third of Non-Joiners stated that civilian benefits were just as good as those offered by the military, compared with one-fifth or fewer of the other groups.

How much vacation time do members of the Military Service have?

“You get 30 days a year.”

The most common response was about 30 days or 1 month, which was mentioned by almost one in six respondents. The next most frequent response was 2 weeks, which was mentioned by approximately one in seven respondents. Quantitative responses ranged from 1 week to 4 months. Some respondents offered a range of time, such as 2 to 3 weeks.

In a few instances, it seems the respondent was speaking with authority; in many others it was unclear whether these responses were informed ones or simply good guesses. A portion of respondents offered more qualitative responses, such as it “depends on rank or time served.” Qualitative values also included attitudinal responses, such as “not much.” Finally, a notable portion of respondents (over one-third) did not know the answer to this question.

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Differences Among the Propensity Groups

The average response of Joiners (25 days) was somewhat closer to the actual vacation allotment than the average responses of the other groups. Also, fewer Joiners gave don't know responses when asked about vacation compared with other groups.

What kinds of jobs can members of the Military Service hold?

"I guess machinery, office work, I don't know. All kinds of jobs like that."

"Everything."

"Anything" was the most common type of response. Approximately half of those who were asked this question responded this way. Examples were similar to those in response to the question about military training, although there was greater variety in responses to this item. Some of the more unusual examples included lifeguard, horticulturist, and architect. Almost one-third gave "don't know" responses.

Differences Among the Propensity Groups

There were no evident differences among the groups.

How many years does it take for a new enlisted Service member to be promoted to the first level?

"One."

"A year. If you started off as a private, to get to private first-class, I'd say about a year, or maybe till after you get out of boot camp."

"I think right away. I'm going upon what my friend did."

Many respondents provided realistic descriptions of time until first promotion. Over one-third of respondents who were asked this question reported that promotions for a new enlistee were given in 1 year or less. A handful of respondents said the amount of time until first promotion depended on circumstances such as test scores and personal merit. Almost one-third of respondents said "don't know" to this question.

Differences Among the Propensity Groups

There were no obvious group differences in perceptions about the amount of time until promotion.

If a person served in the military for ten years, how many times would he or she have to move?

“Three, probably three to four.”

Most respondents were able to provide realistic answers about mobility in the military. A large portion believed military members would move between 3 and 5 times in 10 years, which is very realistic. On the other hand, a few respondents gave very extreme answers; including one who reported that a member might move 90 times in the course of ten years.

A handful of respondents said required mobility would vary, for example, by the type of job and the Service. Slightly more than one-fifth of respondents gave “don’t know” responses.

Differences Among the Propensity Groups

Shifters and Non-Joiner average estimates were considerably higher than those from Joiner and Fence-Sitter groups.

How much money can a new member of the military earn for college?

“There’s the \$30,000 in [the] GI bill.”

The most popular response was \$30,000 (one-third of the youth offered this as a response). The distribution of responses was positively skewed; that is, more respondents gave values lower than \$30,000 than they did above \$30,000. The responses ranged from a low of \$3,300 to a high of \$75,000. While most respondents gave a total amount, a few offered dollar figures per year (from \$5,000 to \$30,000). Finally, some gave more qualitative responses, such as “2 years” and “4 years” of tuition. About one-quarter of respondents gave “don’t know” responses.

Differences Among the Propensity Groups

The average responses for the four propensity groups were quite similar, although somewhat fewer Joiners gave don't know responses than others.

What kind of job training can you receive in the military? Would you be able to use this training in a civilian job?

"You can learn trades in the military. You can learn computer skills. Artillery skills."

"All kinds of things."

"I know there's a lot of technical training."

The initial reaction to this question was often "anything." Many followed this general statement with specific examples. The most common examples of training areas were mechanics, computers, engineering, and medical. Some simply mentioned "technical" training. Other answers were offered by less than 1 in 20 respondents. About one in seven gave "don't know" responses.

Almost all respondents stated that military training would be useful in future civilian employment. Only one respondent said he didn't know, and only three said military training would not be useful. Finally, some respondents reported that it would depend on the sort of training received.

Differences Among the Propensity Groups

Joiners were less likely to provide an unqualified "yes" response than other groups. That is, they were more likely to say that some of the training would transfer to the civilian realm, but not all.

Summary

This chapter has described responses to specific questions regarding various aspects of active duty and Reserve military service. Responses varied greatly in their content and detail. Some young men demonstrated very little knowledge about military service while others were more able to respond to specific questions.

Certainly, the youth with whom we spoke indicated greater knowledge of some areas than others. The majority of young men had a sense of the difference between active duty and service in the Reserves, but only a few were confident in reporting details of these differences. Most perceived the Reserves as being available to augment active duty troops in war-time operations, and were aware of “weekend a month” obligation of Reservists. A few mentioned serving an additional two weeks per year. On the other hand, a sizable fraction (perhaps one in five) seem to have no knowledge whatsoever of active vs. Reserve duty.

Most respondents provided correct responses to questions about military life, but few showed in-depth knowledge. Most answers to questions about living arrangements, length of work week, and military benefits were not incorrect. But, because of their brevity, they reflected little knowledge. Often, the answers given were what might be expected of someone who is guessing (e.g., a 40-hour work week).

The youth seemed knowledgeable of some benefits of military service, but not others. They knew about education benefits (which are emphasized in recruiting advertising); they didn’t know about earnings. They provided reasonable responses to questions about vacation time, time of first promotion, job choice, and variety of jobs available. However, many of the reasonable responses appear to be intelligent guesses.

In summary, many of the youth with whom we spoke knew very little about military service. Over half the items elicited “don’t know” responses from twenty percent or more of the young men. Many said they were uncertain of their answers, and the brevity of their answers suggested rather limited knowledge.

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APPENDIX A

STUDY METHODOLOGY

Purpose and Overview of the Study

The YATS In-Depth Follow-up Interviews were designed to gain a greater understanding of propensity for military service than that which can be derived from standard YATS results. Because the purpose of YATS is to provide measures of year-to-year changes in attitudes, it 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 gain an “in-depth” understanding of the respondent’s answers. The purpose of these interviews was to get the 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 men’s career decisions, and
- the specific consideration of military enlistment as a career choice.

Our primary interest, of course, is consideration of military service. However, we felt we could not fully appreciate a youth’s consideration of military service without understanding the context of that consideration. Thus, we sought first to understand career decision-making in a general sense.

Planning the study as a follow-up to the 1995 YATS provided unusual flexibility in the selection of participants. The 1995 YATS provided a sample of 10,000 youth for which we already had a great deal of relevant information. We limited our selection to the primary recruiting market: 17-21 year-old males 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 men from all parts of the United States representing different levels of interest in military service.

Our flexibility in selecting the sample was possible because we conducted telephone rather than in-person interviews. Interviewing a representative sample of YATS respondents, particularly given

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their geographic dispersion, would have been prohibitively expensive. Initially, we questioned whether sufficient personal rapport could be established over the telephone to yield data of the quality desired, so we planned the study in two phases. The first phase, with 20 planned interviews, was to test the viability of the telephone methodology--could we establish rapport and maintain interest for a lengthy interview--and to determine if the protocol required further modifications. Phase 1 showed rather dramatically that the telephone methodology was more than sufficient. The telephone methodology not only provided the level of information required, but the anonymity of a phone conversation also yielded unexpected benefits. Respondents also willingly completed the entire interview protocol, averaging about 45 minutes. Furthermore, results of Phase 1 indicated that the protocol did not need modifications. Consequently, Phase 2 was, from a methodological perspective, simply a continuation of Phase 1.

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
- Data analysis

Sample Selection

We selected participants who reflected the full range of interest in military service within the “prime military recruiting market,” the segment of the young male population that provides most military recruits. That is, we wanted those most likely to join as well as those unlikely to join. We also wanted to include people who had been interested in military service in the past, but whose likelihood of serving had waned. Each fall, YATS interviews are completed with approximately 10,000 16-24 year-old men and women who have no previous military experience. Thus, the 1995 YATS administration provided a list of potential participants who could be classified by propensity and other key demographic variables.

The 1995 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 questions about “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

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 of 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

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

“**Joiners**” were most likely to join the military. They provided an “unaided”¹ mention of military service among their future plans, 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.

“**Non-Joiners**” were 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.

“**Shifters**” were 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.

“**Fence-Sitters**” appeared 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 included respondents who said they will “probably” or “probably not” be on active duty, but excluded those who provided consistent responses that they will “probably not” or “definitely not” serve.

Table A1 shows more specific definitions of these groups.

Table A1. Definition of Propensity Groups	
Propensity Group	Inclusion Rule
Joiners	Q525=3 and V438JOIN=1 and CPYATS82=1 or 2
Non- Joiners	Q525=1 and V438JOIN=2 and Q503=3 and CPYATS82=4 OR 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 OR 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 OR Q525=2 and V438JOIN=2 and Q503=1 OR 2 and CPYATS82=2 or 3
<p>Q438JOIN equals 1 if the respondent mentioned military service in Q438; it equals 2 if the respondent did not mention military service.</p> <p>CPYATS82 is the minimum value of responses to questions Q510 through Q513. Thus, if a respondent said he would “probably” join the Marine Corps but “probably not” join the Army, Navy, or Air Force, CPYATS82 would equal 2.</p>	

¹Prior to any questions about military service in the YATS interview, respondents are asked about their future plans. Those who mention military service are said to have provided an “unaided” mention.

Exhibit A (pages A-16 to A-18) provides a flow chart tracing the sample from the 1995 YATS respondent database to the in-depth interview respondents. The first several steps applied the eligibility criteria for the in-depth sample. Several criteria (sex, age, race/ethnicity, and propensity category) were used to define the eligible sample. Of the 10,783 1995 YATS respondents, 7,060 were males, 4,106 of whom were 17-21 year-olds. After the race/ethnicity and propensity criteria were applied, the sample frame consisted of 1,328 YATS respondents. The reduction of the sample frame from 4,106 to 1,328 members was due primarily to the propensity group criterion. Because Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics make up approximately 96 percent of the YATS population, the application of this criterion caused only a slight reduction in the number of eligible members. However, only one-third of the YATS population falls into one of the four propensity groups. Thus, this criterion reduced the sample frame significantly. Table A2 shows the 1,328 sample frame members categorized by race/ethnicity and propensity group.

Race/Ethnic Group	Propensity Group				Total
	Joiners	Non-Joiners	Shifters	Fence-Sitters	
White	116	435	203	153	907
Black	33	95	32	70	230
Hispanic	36	58	36	61	191
Total	185	588	271	284	1,328

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.

The next stage of sample selection was preparation of the sample frame for Phase 1 interviewing. The sample was segmented into local and nonlocal respondents. Local respondents included residents from Washington, D.C., and suburban Virginia and Maryland. From the 20 local respondents, a target quota of 4 Whites, 4 Blacks, and 4 Hispanics was established for sampling. However, there were only 3 Hispanics in this local sample frame, and thus 11 members were sampled.

The goal of Phase 1 was to test the methodology, allowing observation by Government and project staff. Five in-person interviews were conducted (two White youth, two Black youth, and one Hispanic youth). The remainder of Phase 1 was completed with telephone interviews. The nonlocal sample frame was further refined at this time by limiting school status to high school seniors and graduates

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(including postsecondary students). High school dropouts (nonstudents who did not have a high school diploma) and students below the 12th grade were excluded. This refinement reduced the sample from 1,308 respondents to 937. Phase 1 nonlocal respondents were then sampled by race/ethnicity and propensity group. This sampling provided 32 youth for interviewing--3 Whites, 3 Blacks, and 2 Hispanics from each of the 4 propensity groups. Of the 17 youth who were located from the sample, 15 youth agreed to be interviewed, and 12 completed the interview.

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. Before we had conducted any interviews, we had no way to know how many would be enough. At the end of Phase 1, we observed some similarities across individuals in the interviews completed, and settled on a target sample size of 10 per cell. Table A3 shows the number of sample members targeted for each cell.

Table A3. Target Quota of Respondents					
Race/Ethnic Group	Propensity Group				Total
	Joiners	Non-Joiners	Shifters	Fence-Sitters	
White	10	10	10	10	40
Black	10	10	10	10	40
Hispanic	10	10	10	10	40
Total	30	30	30	30	120

Phase 2 interviewing was planned to continue until the target quota of interviews in each cell was reached. For Phase 2, 342 of the 905 remaining YATS respondents in the sample frame were randomly selected using race/ethnicity and propensity group as sampling variables. (The 32 respondents selected for Phase 1 were excluded from this sample selection.)

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, 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). Selected individuals were assigned to interviewers. Initially, all individuals assigned to an interviewer were given equal priority. However, as interviews were completed, we monitored the distribution of respondents with respect to age, educational status (high

school senior, high school graduate, postsecondary student), work status (employed; unemployed, looking for work; unemployed, not looking for work), and geographic location. If it appeared that we were completing interviews with many individuals in one category at the expense of another, we attempted to select subsequent respondents from underrepresented categories. For example, many Black youth who were residents of southern states and many Hispanic youth who were residents of California and southwest states were selected for the initial sample. During data collection, we monitored the state of residence of respondents and gave greater priority to contacting sample members in other areas of the country when the balance of respondents in one area became too great. 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, given the size of the sample, random sampling might not have yielded and, therefore, ensured the breadth of data required for analysis purposes.

Development of the Interview Protocol

Initial efforts 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 the 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. After several discussions, we established five broad research questions:

- 1. *Post-high school career decisions:*** In late adolescence, young people vary in the sophistication or “maturity” of their career planning—some may have logically explored options, and others may not have thought about, or merely fantasized about, their future. How does the career maturity of the young person influence attitudes toward and consideration of various career decisions: civilian job, military enlistment, or college enrollment?
- 2. *Sources of influence on the post-high school career decision:*** What is the process of influence on the young person concerning a career choice? For different sources of influence (parents, relatives, acquaintances), what is the nature of the influence (information, guidance, role modeling), and what is the impact on the young person’s perceptions about careers?
- 3. *Military propensity and change in propensity:*** What is the current interest of the young person in the military and the strength of this feeling? How did the young person come to his opinion about military service? What do young people mean by the reasons they provide for positive or negative military propensity? Similarly, what do they mean by the reasons they give for increased or decreased propensity while considering their career decision?

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4. ***The military image and life:*** What are young people's perceptions of military life? How do they evaluate the information they gain from various sources?
5. ***Knowledge of the military:*** What specific knowledge do young people have about the enlistment process and military service? What is the veracity of this information?

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). The aim of the protocol was to provide a format through which the respondent could reflect on, explore, and describe the story of his 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 his 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 youth's career choice, 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 his response or to focus the discussion on specific items of interest. The protocol was divided into several sections:

1. ***Post-high school career decision:*** This section began with a general discussion of the youth's current school/work/personal activities. The youth was asked whether he was making decisions about his future and how far in the future he was planning. Plans vis-à-vis work, school, or military enlistment drawn from YATS responses were revisited and explored. These plans included a specific focus on sources of information and influence, the point at which the decision was made, and the concrete steps that had been taken toward a goal.
2. ***Entering the military:*** The YATS responses to questions about intent to enlist were reviewed. We explored 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 was explored from the perspective of how the young man reached his decision, who influenced him (parents, relatives, friends), the nature of the influence

(information, guidance, role modeling), how contact with a recruiter affected the decision, and what circumstances might have changed his mind.

3. ***Images of the future with military and nonmilitary:*** The youth's image of military life was explored and compared with images of postgraduate schooling or civilian jobs. Specific views of military basic training were discussed and compared with later military service. The concept of military lifestyle and whether the youth believed the military would change him as a person, as compared with a civilian job or postgraduate schooling, was also explored. The youth was questioned about sources of images and information, including relatives and friends who were currently serving or had previously served in the military. The circumstances of any recruiter contacts were also recounted.
4. ***Accuracy of information:*** Short-answer questions were asked at the end of the interview to assess the youth'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 in several stages 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. After it was reviewed by Government personnel, cognitive laboratory interviews were conducted in-person with several youth. Subsequently, several additional interviews were conducted by telephone.

The first five interviews were conducted in-person in a relaxed environment (Westat's focus group facility), which allowed discrete observation of interviews by Government and project staff. Subsequent interviews were conducted by telephone. After the first interviews, minor adjustments were made to the protocol to improve transitions between interview sections. Some question probes were added to address specific issues.

Interviewer Training

Six senior and middle-level 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,
- a question-by-question review of the protocol, and

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- 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 audio taped. The project senior scientist reviewed the tape and provided feedback on technique, including interview flow, probing, and specific intent of questions. After several interviews were completed by each interviewer, the senior scientist also provided additional coaching on qualitative methods to be followed (see Appendix D for content).

Contact Procedures

Sample members (i.e., 1995 YATS respondents selected for this study) were initially contacted by personnel from Westat's Telephone Research Center or by the project interviewers themselves. The purpose of the interview, which was to talk again with YATS respondents about their military and career plans in more detail, was explained, and the selected youth 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 minimize initial refusals, interviewers explained the importance of the interview and, if appropriate, offered to call back at another time. However, if the interviewer believed that a refusal was firm and the youth would not agree to participate at a later date, they thanked the respondent and did not recontact him. For youth under age 18, we assumed permission if a parent or other adult did not refuse the youth's participation in the interview.

Those contacted by the Telephone Research Center were asked to participate, and a specific date and time was set for the interview. Some project interviewers, however, preferred to place the initial call themselves. They could, of course, conduct the interview immediately or schedule the interview for a later time. In scheduling, a minimum of 45 minutes was left free between interviews to provide time for the interviewers to summarize the interview.

A call record was produced for each sample member (see Exhibit B, page A-19). 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 youth was set at five.
- **Broken appointments.** The maximum number of appointments made and broken by the sampled youth was set at three.

If the maximum number of calls was reached in any category, the case was finalized as a max call.

Data Collection

Data collection began on December 15, 1995, and was completed for Black youth and White youth by March 15, 1996. Interviews with Hispanic youth continued until May 3, 1996; delays were due to the need to reschedule a number of interviews. The number of completed interviews by race/ethnic and propensity groups are shown in Table A4.

Race/Ethnic Group	Propensity Group				Total
	Joiners	Non-Joiners	Shifters	Fence-Sitters	
White	9	8	9	12	38
Black	10	13	8	9	40
Hispanic	10	10	11	11	42
Total	29	31	28	32	120

Interviewers reviewed the Respondent Profile Form for each person they were to interview to familiarize themselves with respondent characteristics prior to the interview. Furthermore, several of the in-depth interview questions used information contained on the form. For example, in introducing the topic of future plans (Question 4a in the protocol), the interviewer mentioned a few of the things the respondents said in the earlier YATS interview that he might be doing.

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Interviews were conducted at the convenience of the respondent, in a few cases in multiple sessions. For the majority of the interviews, interviewers were matched to participants by race/ethnicity. All Black participants were interviewed by a Black male; the majority of Hispanic participants were interviewed by a Hispanic woman (due to scheduling needs, some Hispanic youths were interviewed by a White, Spanish-speaking interviewer). Interviews with Hispanics 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 E) immediately after each interview. All interviews were voluntarily taped, and each interview was transcribed verbatim.

Final Disposition of Sampled Cases

Exhibit A (pages A-16 to A-18) shows the final disposition of all sampled cases for Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the project. In addition to the 120 completed interviews, cases were also finalized as no contact/max calls/nonlocatable, refusals, out of scope, and no-shows.

In Phase 1, two cases were finalized as out of scope, five were refusals, and three were no-shows. The two out-of-scope cases were youth who agreed to be interviewed in-person, but could not make logistical arrangements to attend the interviews. Additionally, 16 of the 43 cases sampled in Phase 1 were coded as no contact/max calls/nonlocatable. Of the 20 individuals who agreed to be interviewed in Phase 1, 17 completed in-depth interviews.

No attempt was made to call 61 of the 342 individuals selected for Phase 2. Of the 281 cases for which calls were attempted, 9 cases were out of scope, 18 were refusals, and 14 were no-shows. The out of scope cases were individuals who did not meet all of the eligibility criteria established for the project. These 9 cases included several non-U.S. citizens and one individual who had already joined the military. No-shows during Phase 2 were cases in which interviews were scheduled but not kept by the youth. Approximately 49 percent of the 281 cases (137) were coded as no contact/max calls/nonlocatable. Of the 117 youth who agreed to be interviewed, 103 completed interviews during Phase 2. Overall, 137 individuals agreed to be interviewed, and 120 completed interviews.

Data Analysis

The project senior scientist took the lead in conducting data analysis. She met with other interviewers several times during data collection to discuss themes emerging from the interviews. Following completion of the interviews, interviewers again reviewed their own transcripts and responded

to broad analytic questions prepared by the senior scientist (see Appendix F for the analytic questions). Interviewer responses were then provided in a final round-table discussion.

The major portion of the analysis was carried out by the senior scientist in two main iterative stages. First, all transcripts were reviewed to identify major themes and patterns associated with the set of research questions focusing on the youths' 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, region, urban versus rural residence, socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, and college attendance. At this point, questions about the subtle meanings and variations in military propensity were secondary, serving as a kind of "subtheme" that informed the examination of broader questions about decision-making.

The 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 there was no substitute for the actual text of the transcripts, the interviewers' summaries of individual interviews were also quite helpful in guiding the analysis, especially in identifying specific cases for closer scrutiny.

Although inductive in the sense of not following a hypothesis-testing mode, the analytic process was not theoretically "naive" insofar as the research questions were informed. For example, although we did not at first intend to critique rational decision-making theories, our data spoke very powerfully to these and related theories of late-adolescent development. Consequently, this emerged as a logical framework in which to present the decision-making data.

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The second “broad sweep” through the transcripts occurred in reexamining the transcripts more specifically for what they could reveal about the meanings and psychosocial and familial bases of propensity to join the military, as they might vary across the four propensity categories. In many instances, we revised the classification established by initial YATS interview information, based on greater depth of information revealed in the interviews, and our concepts of Joiners, Shifters, Non-Joiners, and Fence-Sitters. Thus, Joiners were those who seemed clearly headed toward a commitment to join the military. Shifters were those who had truly given serious consideration to joining the military, but had decided against it. Non-Joiners were those who seemed very unlikely to join, and had never given military service serious consideration. And Fence-Sitters were those who seemed genuinely considering the option of entering the military--even if only as an outside possibility--at some time in the foreseeable future.

This second sweep through the transcripts to examine the meanings of propensity, although importantly informed by the first round of analysis, also involved independent rereading of major portions of the transcripts, following essentially the same procedures of grounded theory-building described above. In this round, analysis focused on “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 .

In the process of analyzing the in-depth interviews, slightly more than 40 percent of respondents were reassigned to different propensity groups for analysis purposes based upon information obtained during the in-depth interview. Table A5 presents both the original classifications based on YATS survey information and the classifications made as a result of the in-depth analysis. For example, a total of 32 in-depth respondents were classified as Fence-Sitters based upon YATS interview responses. At the time of the in-depth interviews, 11 respondents remained Fence-Sitters, 1 was reclassified as a Joiner, 9 were reclassified as Non-Joiners, and 11 were reclassified as Shifters.

Table A5. YATS Survey and In-Depth Interview Classification Matrix					
YATS Survey Classification	In-Depth Classification				Total
	Joiners	Non-Joiners	Shifters	Fence-Sitters	
Joiners	13	4	2	10	29
Non-Joiners	0	28	1	2	31
Shifters	1	9	16	2	28
Fence-Sitters	1	9	11	11	32
Total	15	50	30	25	120

Responses to the knowledge questions asked at the end of the interview were analyzed separately. For each question, the responses were read, categories of responses were developed, and responses were tabulated by category. “Don’t know” responses were tabulated for all questions and responses that did not seem to fit any category were tabulated as “miscellaneous.” Descriptive statistics were used for questions, such as those concerning income, that called for a numeric answer. Responses were tabulated for each propensity group, as well as for all respondents, collectively.

1995 YATS IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

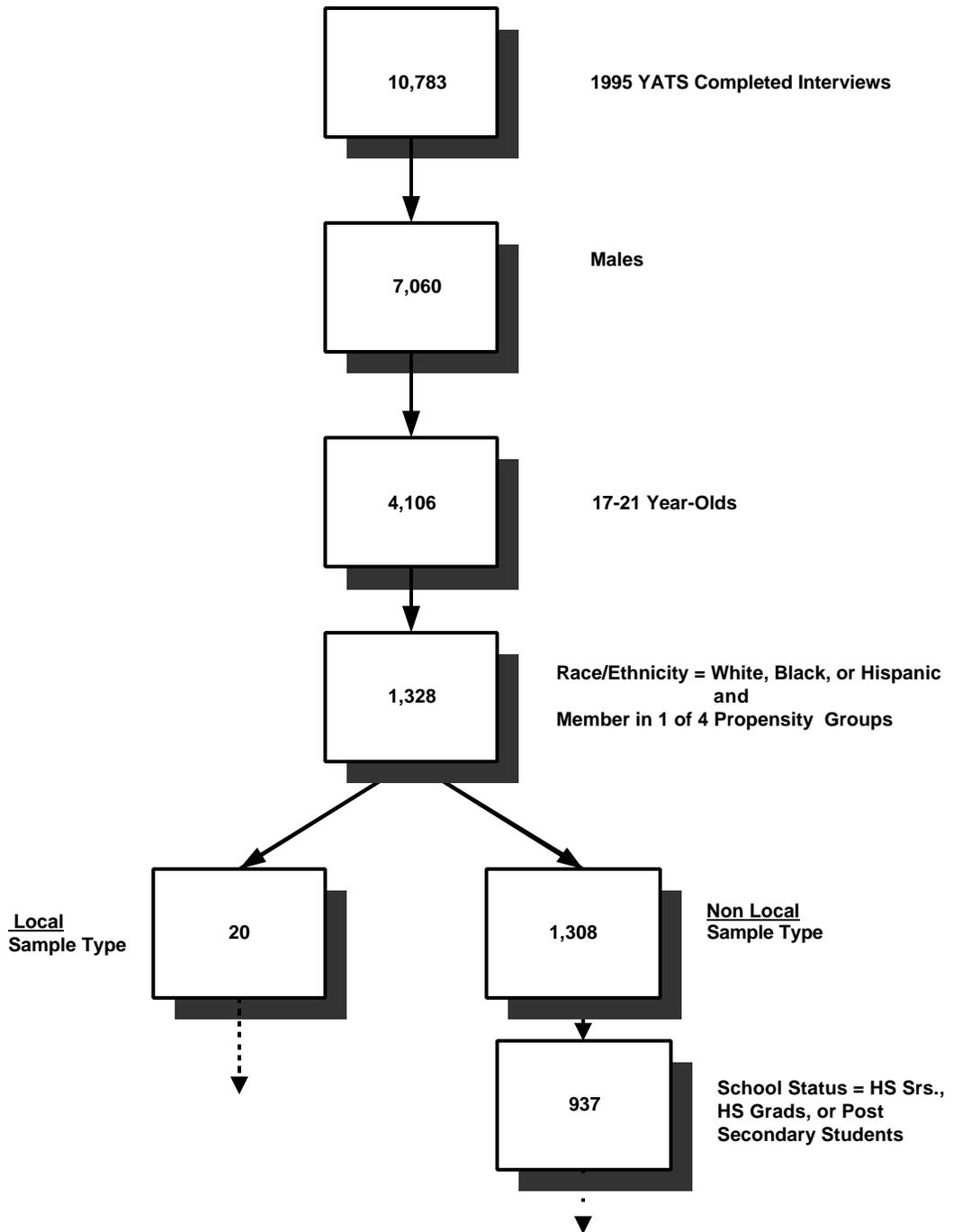


EXHIBIT A. IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS SAMPLE

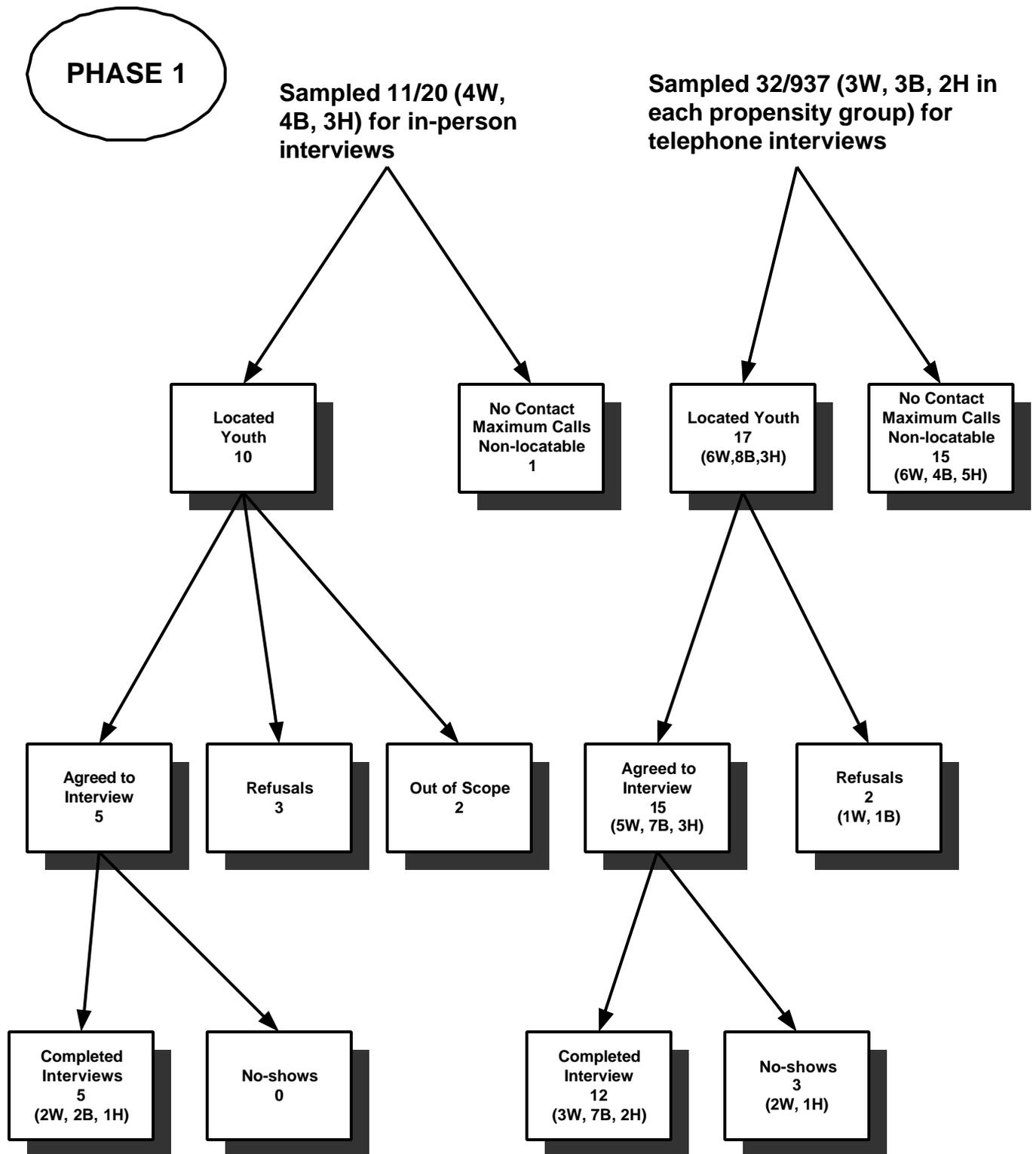


EXHIBIT A. IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS SAMPLE (CONT'D)

Career Plans and Military Propensity of Young Men:
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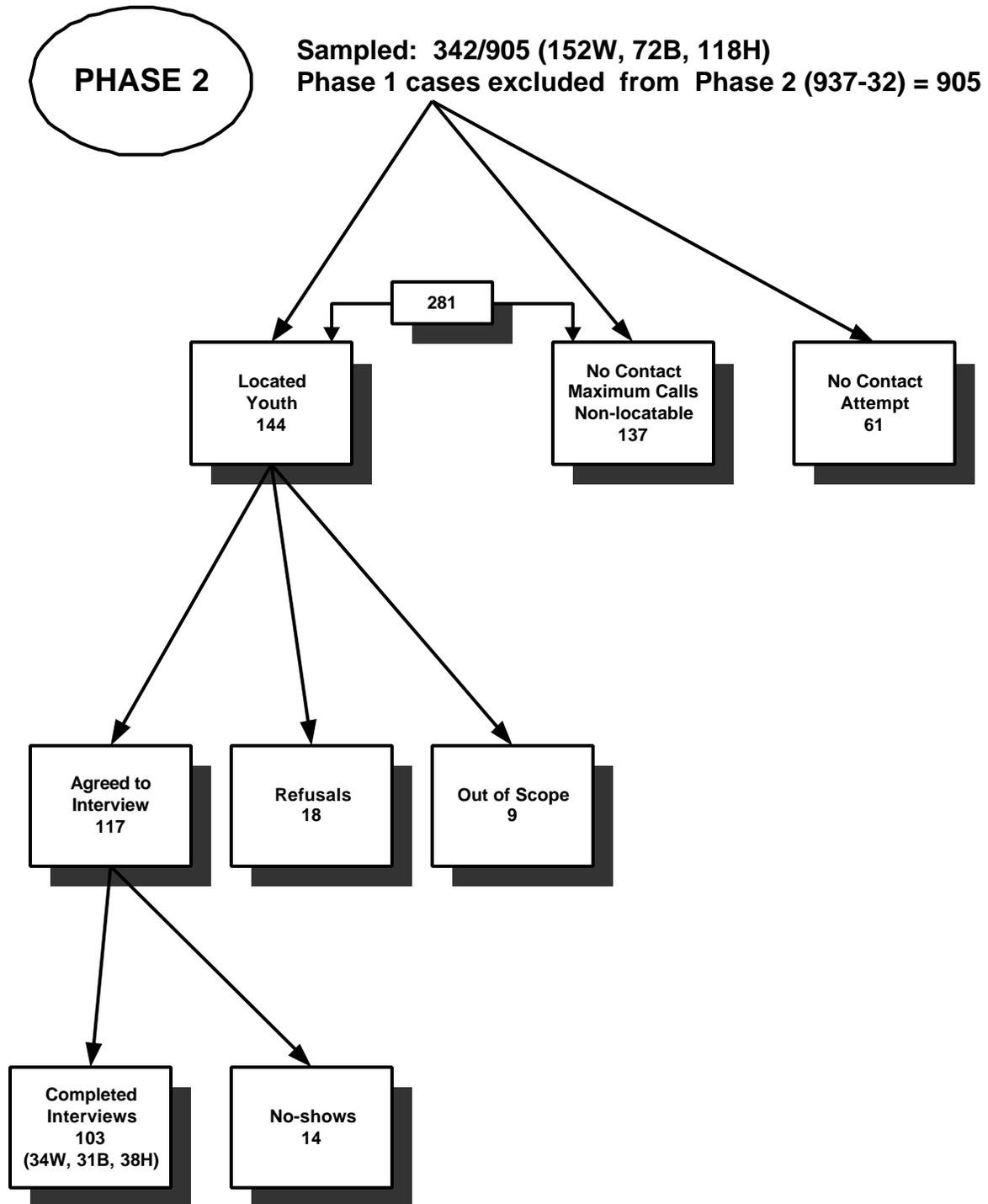


EXHIBIT A. IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS SAMPLE (CONT'D)

APPENDIX B

RESPONDENT PROFILE FORM

Subject: Caseid:
 Propensity Group: 2
 Age: 18 07/19/77 Race: BLACK Gender: MALE School Status: HS SENIOR
 Employment Status: UNEMPL/LOOKING

Plans after HS/next few years:
 GOING TO SCHOOL UNKNOWN UNKNOWN
 Type of work:

Kind of School/College: 2-year college
 Expected level of education: 4TH YEAR COLLEGE

General Military Propensity: DEFINITELY NOT

Active Service Propensity:
 Army - DEFINITELY NOT
 Navy - DEFINITELY NOT
 Marine Corps - DEFINITELY NOT
 Air Force - DEFINITELY NOT

Previous consideration given to joining: NEVER THOUGHT

Main reasons for joining:

/ /
 Main reasons for not joining:

/ /
 Increased/Decreased Interest? REMAINED SAME

Reasons for Increased Interest:

/ /
 Reasons for Decreased Interest:

/ /
 Talked to Military Recruiter in past year?

Which Service? /
 In past year, talked with anyone other than recruiter
 About military? NO

Father:	Veteran?	Feelings about you serving:
Mother:	Veteran?	Feelings about you serving:
Brother:	Veteran?	Feelings about you serving:
Sister:	Veteran?	Feelings about you serving:
Friend-same generation:		
	Veteran?	Feelings about you serving:

Sources of Impressions about Military Life:
 MOVIES/TELEVISION NO MENTION NO MENTION
 NO MENTION NO MENTION

Impressions from TV or Movies:
 MASH NO MENTION
 NO MENTION NO MENTION

APPENDIX C

YATS QUALITATIVE FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW GUIDE

*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 responding to set questions, you will have the chance to do most of the talking and express your thoughts and opinions. 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 30-40 minutes, and will be tape recorded to help us take better notes. Is this a good time to talk? (**If another time is better, arrange and confirm the day and time of the call back.**)*

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 YATS survey concerning school, whether holds part-time job.**) Could you tell me a little bit more about yourself? (**Warm-up question; Probe on specifics such as where they are in school, whether have a part-time job, hobbies, etc.**).

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2. Do you feel you are now at a point in your life where you can make good decisions about what you will be doing in the next few years? Why or why not?

If you believe you are not now at a good point, what more would you need to know or do before you would feel more confident about making these kinds of choices?

3. How far in the future are you looking as you make choices about what you will be doing? **(Probe on whether short-term/long-term, etc.).**

4a. (List up to three activities indicated in answer to FP1, Q438 YATS survey.)

#1 _____
#2 _____
#3 _____

When we talked to you before, you said in the next few years you might be doing...
(Enter names of activities.) Do you still plan to be doing these things?

(Adapt for activities of "Doing Nothing, Undecided, Staying at Home, Don't Know.")

[Go to 4b if answered Yes to 4a.
Go to 4c if it has changed his/her mind since survey.]

4b. Would you tell me more about these things you think you might be doing in the next few years? Let's talk (more) about (Activity #1):

(Probe on):

- who youth talked to about doing this, what person said, what was most important in deciding, other information (if any) sought/used;
- when decided to do it/whether wavered/changed mind at all in course of making up his mind;
- concrete steps (if any) taken to follow-up on decision (writing for catalogues, requesting more information, applications, etc.);
- how likely will actually be doing this, factors that might affect whether does it;
- whether prefers this to other activities, anticipates doing other things concurrently.

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- What about (Activity # 2)? **(Probe on same factors as above, if not already discussed-- also, what would decide youth on doing activity 2 instead of activity 1 (if mutually exclusive)).**

- **(If hasn't yet been raised) May we now talk a little about (Activity # 3)? (Probe on same issues as above, to extent not already covered, but in somewhat less depth).**

[Skip to 5]

- 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?

- May we talk a bit (more) about (Activity #1?)

(Probe on:)

- **who youth talked to about doing this, what person(s) said, what was most important in deciding, other information (if any) sought/used;**
- **when decided to do it/whether changed mind/wavered in course of making decision;**
- **concrete steps taken to follow-up on decision (e.g., writing for catalogues, applications, requesting/obtaining information);**
- **how likely thinks will actually be doing this, factors that might affect whether does it;**
- **whether would prefer this to other activities/anticipates doing other things concurrently.**

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. (If respondent gave joining military as one of three activities, use what you learned above in asking this next set of questions.)

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. (**Underline response from EN 1, Q503**). Would you respond in the same way today?

[Go to 5a if changed.

Go to 6a-c if same.

- 6a. Answered definitely or definitely not and had not previously considered enlisting (EN12, Q525) on YATS survey.**
6b. Answered probably or probably not on YATS survey.]
6c. Answered definitely not and had previously considered enlisting (EN12, Q525) on YATS survey.

- 5a. How have your views on joining the military changed? Why?

- 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?

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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? (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? (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.)**

- 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?

III Images of the Future--Military and Non-Military

In this section of the interview, I want to explore how you view different lifestyles and work situations you could have in the future.

**[Go to 8, then 9, if answered definitely or probably join.
Go to 9, then 8, if answered definitely not or probably not join the military.]**

8. What are the very first things that come to mind when you think about what it would be like to be in the military? **(If necessary, probe on such issues as regimentation, discipline, pay, adventure, whether youth is talking specifically for self or more generally.)**
Anything else?

Do you think this would change over time, or would it stay pretty much the same for the whole time?

(If not already addressed). For example, what do you think it would be like to be in boot camp? after boot camp?)

9. What are the first things that come to mind when you think about what it would be like to **insert according to answers in Section I: be in school and/or work at a job?**
(Probe on whether is talking specifically for self or more generally.)

Do you think this would change over time, or would it stay pretty much the same for the whole time?

- 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 realism of image.)** How would you say they have influenced your views?

What about your ideas about what it is like to be going to school, working? **(Probe on realism of image.)**

- **(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?

**Career Plans and Military Propensity of Young Men:
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- **(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?

- **(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.)**

11. In your opinion, what are the two most important ways being in the military would be different than holding a civilian job or going to school?

What do you think would be the main advantages of a military lifestyle?

The main disadvantages? **(If issue of danger has not yet been raised, probe on whether and how respondent sees danger as an issue.)**

(Probe on any differences in short run versus long run.)

12. Do you think being in the military in the next few years would change you as a person?
How?

How do you think this would compare to how you would change if you went to school/worked in a civilian job?

IV Accuracy of Information

Now, to wind things up, I have a few short questions that will help us figure out how well information about the military is being communicated to young people. These questions will be shorter than the other questions we have been discussing.

13. What is the difference between the active and Reserve services?
14. If a person enlisted in the active military, how many years would he or she have to serve?
- 14b. If a person enlisted in the Reserves, how long would he or she have to serve?
- 14c. About how many days each year do people in the Reserves have to report for duty?
15. In the active military, do people get to choose the job they have?
16. What kind of living arrangements do Military Service members have?
17. Is there a difference between boot camp and military routine?
18. About how many hours does a member of the Military Service work every week?
19. About how often do members of the Military Service have to participate in early morning physical training?
- 20a. About how much does a new member of the Military Service earn in a year?
- 20b. How does this compare to the pay you would get in a civilian job you would now be qualified to hold?
- 21a. Besides pay, what are some of the other job-related benefits of enlisting in the military?
- 21b. How do military benefits compare to job-related benefits you would get on a civilian job you might qualify for now?
22. How much vacation time do members of the Military Service have?
23. How much money can a new member of the military earn for college?

24. What kind of job training can you receive in the military? Would you be able to use this training in a civilian job?
25. What kinds of jobs can members of the Military Service hold?
26. How many years does it take for a new enlisted Service member to be promoted to the first level?
27. If a person served in the military for ten years, how many times would he or she have to move?

In closing, I would like to ask one last question.

28. In your opinion, what (if anything) could the military do to make enlisting more attractive to young people like yourself?

Thanks so much for talking with me today. You have been a big help!

APPENDIX D

INSTRUCTIONS TO INTERVIEWERS ON QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

Interviewers were coached in method by the senior interviewer. The following information was provided to interviewers.

1. In introducing the interview, you may want to emphasize even more strongly than the script that this will be a different type of interview that will give the respondent a chance to think about and give his opinions about a range of subjects relevant to his decisions about the future. **Although it is fine to vary the script as given, be careful not to introduce the interview as though it focuses only on issues related to the military.** This may be a turn off for some respondents. Try to frame it more generally as focusing on decisionmaking and plans for the future.
2. **Familiarize yourself thoroughly with the structure of the instrument and the intent and function behind each of the questions.** It is fine to change the exact wording of the questions as they appear on the guide. However, **in rephrasing you should be careful not to lose the basic intent of the question.** Ask yourself: what is this question trying to get at? If you are not sure, ask me. I plan to do a question-by-question annotation of the interview guide so you will know the aim/goal of each question. The annotations should be ready soon. If you are uncertain of the question's intent, you cannot expect the respondent to guess at what you are after by being vague and diffuse. Once you get comfortable with the interview guide, you can minimize needless repetition because you will know whether you have gotten the "right stuff."
3. In formulating questions, try to use what respondents said in previous answers where relevant and appropriate. However, avoid using this information solely as a way of reconfirming a previous response. Instead, try to incorporate the material as a way of making the question more personal and meaningful, and as a probing device. Not "You said before that.....Is that correct?", but "If I understand correctly, you said that one of your uncles had discouraged you from serving in the military. Could you say some more about just how he discouraged you?"
4. **Probing is a delicate business.** In this interview, probing serves a number of functions. **First, it is a way of making sure certain topic areas are covered if they are not volunteered spontaneously by the respondent in an open-ended response.** An example would be the areas for probing shown in Q4b or asking about danger in Q11. The idea behind this is that the respondent is first given a chance to respond in his/her own terms; to ensure that all relevant areas are covered, we then ask about areas he may have neglected to mention. Some respondents are more suggestible than others. **You should avoid leading the respondent by implying that he should have thought about these issues (if he hasn't) or should consider danger an issue (even if he does not).**

**Career Plans and Military Propensity of Young Men:
Instructions to Interviewers on Qualitative Methodology**

5. **Probing is a way of getting at what the respondent means by an answer.** The same statement might mean different things to different people. If your respondent says he is too "free-spirited" to fit a military lifestyle, you might probe what he means by this, and in what specific way(s) he perceives this "free-spiritedness" would conflict with a military lifestyle. Since our objective is to get below the surface of the standard YATS responses, it is important not to assume we already know what the respondent means.
6. **Probing can also be used to help you put together a picture of how the respondent views certain issues in relationship to one another.** This is especially useful if there are apparent (though perhaps unrecognized) contradictions in what the respondent says. For example, the respondent says he dislikes discipline and regimentation, but plans to enlist. Probing can get at how (if at all) the respondent reconciles these two things. This type of probing is basically an extension of probing the meaning an individual gives to a statement or set of statements.
7. **There is no absolute rule on when to probe.** In general, you should probe to clarify an answer or establish a connection with previous responses, or to explore the meaning of an answer **that is particularly relevant to the primary purpose/intent of the interview.** A respondent may make comments that are interesting but not central to the goals/intent of this study. You should concentrate on probing key areas, such as those related to the respondent's perceptions of a military lifestyle and how he views enlistment relative to other life choices.
8. **Pacing is important.** Keep an eye on the time and, if necessary, adjust your questioning accordingly. Again, there is nothing wrong with not following the exact order of the guide. **The point is to make sure that all the critical topic areas have been covered in sufficient depth.** However, if you recognize that you are becoming sidetracked or are getting a lot of detail without learning anything essential, you should move the process along. Of course, you should try to do this subtly, without being rude or too abrupt.
9. Don't be discouraged if everything does not go perfectly right from the start. In this kind of interviewing, you learn through practice. You will keep improving by incorporating what you learned from doing the last interview into the next one. It is an ongoing process! **GOOD LUCK.**

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW SUMMARY GUIDE

Each interview was summarized immediately after completion by the interviewer using the following form.

**SUMMARY FORM
YATS QUALITATIVE FOLLOW-UP 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 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.

APPENDIX F**ANALYTIC QUESTIONS****General Analytic Trends:**

1. Whether you detect any recurrent differences between: Joiners, Non-Joiners, Shifters, and/or Fence-Sitters (or any "cluster" of these groups);
2. Whether there are systematic differences in the "stories" of those considering entering the military as enlisted persons versus those considering entering as officers; and
3. How your respondents may differ according to any or all of the following:
 - age;
 - region of the country;
 - rural/urban residence;
 - socioeconomic status/educational level; and
 - immigration status, # of generations in this country, language spoken at home.

I Overall Career Decision-Making Styles

1. How does/did these youth approach making decisions about their future? (This includes "career maturity," how realistic and "goal-oriented" the plans are/were, how far in the future he was/is looking, etc.) How do older youth (the 20-and 21-year-olds) look back on the earlier period of decisionmaking (senior year in high school)?
2. Does the "rational" decision-making model appear to fit the youth you interviewed? How/how not?
3. What has been the path or "trajectory" the youth has taken in his schooling/career thus far? What kinds of factors have constrained the youth's ability to do what he says he most wants to do?
4. What importance do the youth place on establishing independence from parents/family/local context? To what extent/how do they express conflicts or ambivalence toward leaving family, friends, neighborhood, local area, even while recognizing that local options/opportunities may be limited?

Career Plans and Military Propensity of Young Men:
Analytic Questions

5. How does timing appear to influence the career decision-making process? decisions about entering the military, in particular?

II Images of the Military/Propensity

6. In general, how accurately do the YATS propensity categories (Joiner, Non-Joiner, Shifter and Fence-Sitter) reflect your assessment of the youths' current stance toward joining the military?
7. Have many youths changed their minds about the military since the YATS survey? Does the change tend to be in one direction more than another? What kinds of factors emerge as having stimulated the change?
8. What were the main reasons given for joining or not joining the military? Does there seem to be a consistent pattern (e.g., the Joiners mostly said one thing, the Non-Joiners something else)?
9. Who/what were the "central" influences on the youth's decision as to whether to join the military? Is this different for Joiners and Non-Joiners? Is there any relationship between these central influences and what the youth says is his main source of information on what military life is like?
10. Is there any indication that YATS influenced the youths' subsequent thinking or behavior with respect to joining the military?
11. How do images of military life compare to images of work and school (both in content and in sharpness or clarity of the image)? Do the images of military life seem as realistic as (or more realistic than?) images of work and school? What are the main sources of both types of images?
12. To what extent have the youth had direct, personal contact with relatives and friends who are now in the military, or were in the military in the past? What has been the nature of that contact, and how has it affected an individual youth's decision to join or not join the military/a particular branch of the service?
13. What has been the extent and type of contact with recruiters? What kinds of impressions do the youth have of recruiters? Do views of recruiters vary by the branch of the service (e.g., Navy versus Marines)? Do Joiners have very different impressions of recruiters than Non-Joiners?

**Career Plans and Military Propensity of Young Men:
*Analytic Questions***

14. What key contrasts emerge in the youths' perceptions of differences between a military and a civilian lifestyle? What are seen as the main advantages and disadvantages of each? Are Joiners and Non-Joiners clearly different in their perceptions on this?
15. How do the youth see themselves as becoming changed by a future in the military versus a future working or going to school?
16. On the whole (to the best of your ability to tell), how accurate was the factual information these youth had about the military? Does there seem to be any relationship between the extent of/accuracy of the youth's knowledge of the military (as reflected in the answers to the factual questions) and his attitudes toward the military and/or his expressed intent to join?
17. What kinds of advice do these youth have on how the military could do a better job of recruiting other young people like themselves?

III The Big Picture

18. Can you identify any overall "types" among your respondents--e.g., ones whose response patterns/voices/ or "story lines" seem very similar across a variety of dimensions? If so, what are these "types"? (Here you might also include considerations related to the "tone" or "feeling" of the interview--do the youth seem hopeful, resigned, naive, wistful?)
19. Overall, what jumps out as most surprising/interesting/noteworthy in the interviews, and why?

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

*Form Approved
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13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT
This report presents findings from 120 in-depth qualitative interviews conducted in 1996 with young males as part of the Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS). The interviews were designed to explore youth career plans and enlistment propensity in more detail than permitted in the annual YATS survey. Through the administration of a 45-minute telephone interview, interviewers were able to probe into reasons and circumstances shaping youth career plans, enlistment propensity, and images of military life.

The interviews identified a significant number of respondents who formed their career decisions in a very different manner. Many of the youth have life contexts that limit career options and decision-making. For these youth, family obligations, reluctance to leave current locale, or other external factors so severely limit career options as to reduce decision-making to an acceptance of fate.

15. SUBJECT TERMS
Youth attitudes, future plans, career plans, influencers, enlistment propensity, decision-making, perceptions, impressions, sources of information

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