

Directions:

Read the two related articles below and answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. To what extent should the government be able to gather information on students?
2. Should recruiters be given exclusive access to students in high schools? Why or why not?
3. How much should the government be spending to find new recruits?
4. How would you classify the military's actions? Are they necessary, wasteful, creative, or unethical? Are they none of these? Describe how you feel about this type of covert behavior.

The Thousand-Yard Snare

ON THE MEDIA from NPR

September 04, 2009

Overstretched and short on recruits, the U.S. military has been going to [great lengths](#) to find out everything they can about potential enlistees. The only problem is most of these prospective soldiers are under 18 and, in many cases, are disclosing personal information without their (or their parents) knowledge. *Mother Jones* columnist David Goodman explains how the U.S. military is working behind the scenes to enlist the youth of America.

BOB GARFIELD: This is On the Media. I'm Bob Garfield.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: And I'm Brooke Gladstone, with a brief update. This week we learned that the U.S. military has cancelled a 1.5-million-dollar contract with the Rendon Group. The private contractor was hired, among other things, to produce background profiles of journalists seeking to embed with the military in Afghanistan, grading their past work as positive, negative or neutral. The announcement came after a week of scoops from the newspaper Stars and Stripes, which decided to investigate after a reporter heard Army captain and erstwhile journalist Matt Mabe mention the profiling on our show.

Mabe spoke to Bob a few weeks ago from his post in Afghanistan where he witnessed the profiling. Good work, Captain Mabe, and you too, Stars and Stripes. Thanks for listening.

BOB GARFIELD: Nearly eight years into an unpopular war in Afghanistan and more than six years into an even less popular war in Iraq, the U.S. military is in need of far more than just a few good men, and so it's embarked on a campaign of market research that is sure to inspire shock and awe, compiling data on every young American man who might be convinced to sign up for a four-year stint. How might the military know if you would be willing to consider a tour, or two, or three of duty? By getting to know you in ways you didn't think possible.

DAVID GOODMAN: The Army is currently spending 24,500 dollars on recruiting each recruit. By contrast, a four-year college spends an average of about 2,000 dollars per incoming student. So that gives you an idea of the kind of firepower being directed at unwitting high school students.

BOB GARFIELD: That's David Goodman whose article, Data Minefield, is in the current issue of *Mother Jones Magazine*. He writes that one effective form of military outreach to young men is through blockbuster video games, though the player may not realize that, in a sense, he's being played.

DAVID GOODMAN: Halo 3 is one of the most popular video games released several years ago. What is unknown is that the primary underwriter has been the U.S. Army.

[VIDEO GAME SOUNDS UP AND UNDER]

The Army's presence can be seen in the use of actual U.S. Army-provided graphics throughout the game. There are also links to the U.S. Army recruiting website, GoArmy.com, which is, the Army tells me, probably its most effective recruiting tool. And the other video game that the military takes a very high profile is America's Army 3.

[VIDEO GAME SOUNDS UP AND UNDER]

America's Army 3 is one of the most popular video games among young men. It's an attempt to supposedly give players a view of the Army, although many would argue it is a very fantasy-driven view of Army life. And it also will link to Army websites.

And the issue in all of these things is that the military is, in fact, prohibited from recruiting people below the age of 18. If they recruit 17-year-olds it must be done with the consent of their parents. Well, these video games, there's no way to police who's on it. And so, what they're finding is that children down to the ages of 11 are in what is essentially part of the recruiting pipeline.

BOB GARFIELD: Now, there is an even stealthier example in your piece about a website called March2Success.com. Had nothing to do with combat or the military life -- au contraire.

DAVID GOODMAN: That's right. March2Success.com is a website that purports to be a test prep and a college or career planning website. However, it would take a pretty careful user to notice in the lower corner that March2Success links to the main Army recruiting website, once again. It turns out that March2Success is a creation of the U.S. Army. They are spending 1.2 million dollars on the website this year. And the Army hired the top test prep firms, including Peterson's, Kaplan, Princeton Review to prepare the questions.

The kind of information you'd get from March2Success would be the same kind of information you get from a test that's administered in high schools called the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery. And it matches people with jobs in the military. What this provides the military with is the Social Security number, GPA, ethnicity, career interests, all of which are logged in a huge central database maintained by the Pentagon and subcontracted to a private company.

BOB GARFIELD: Is that different from how any marketer collects data nowadays, by offering utility or entertainment as a quid pro quo? In the digital world, personal data is increasingly a commodity, is it not?

DAVID GOODMAN: We are certainly growing accustomed to learning that we are being data mined at every purchase that we make. Where we have agreed that we draw a line is on the issue of children. In fact, in 2002 the Senate ratified an international treaty that prohibits the United States from recruiting children under 18, as I mentioned earlier. And it's adhered to by just about every country in the world because we accept that special rules apply to kids.

And the reason for this is that the military is not just any employer and it's not just any data harvester. The consequences of joining the military can be life or death consequences.

BOB GARFIELD: The most alarming revelation in your piece, I believe, referred to a provision in the No Child Left Behind Act that is a sort of Trojan horse. Can you describe this?

DAVID GOODMAN: The No Child Left Behind Act was enacted in 2001 as the signature education law of then-President George Bush. But unbeknownst to most people, including its sponsors, because I spoke to people in the late Senator Ted Kennedy's office about this, it's a provision that requires all high schools to turn over directory information to the military on all juniors and seniors. So that's contact information ranging from phone numbers, email addresses, cell phone numbers.

So the No Child Left Behind Act has, in fact, become the most aggressive military recruitment tool since the draft itself. And there are stiff penalties for high schools that don't comply with this law. The Pentagon is now, they say themselves, the largest repository of information on 16-to-24-year-olds in the country; they have 34 million names.

BOB GARFIELD: Does the Pentagon then give this information to recruiters? Do recruiters sitting there with a dossier on me give me a call?

DAVID GOODMAN: Yes, that would certainly [LAUGHS] be the idea. They would now have your phone number. That's not something they had before. They used to have to hang out at high school football games and basketball games or just cruise the malls.

Well, now they can call you. They know, through new data mining activities, that you subscribe to Hot Rod Magazine, so they can basically cut right to the chase. Your interest in cars could translate very nicely and neatly into fixing large equipment for the Army. It's a free education. And it can make it a much more productive call and get them to the goal that they're hoping to get to as quickly as they can, which is having you sign on the dotted line.

BOB GARFIELD: David, once again, thanks very much.

DAVID GOODMAN: Thanks for having me.

BOB GARFIELD: Writer David Goodman is the author of a piece called Data Minefield in the current issue of Mother Jones.

<http://www.onthemedialia.org/transcripts/2009/09/04/03>

Mother Jones

A Few Good Kids?



—Photo: Nina Berman/Redux

By [David Goodman](#) | Mon August 31, 2009 1:59 AM PST

John Travers was striding purposefully into the Westfield mall in Wheaton, Maryland, for some back-to-school shopping before starting his junior year at Bowling Green State University. When I asked him whether he'd ever talked to a military recruiter, Travers, a 19-year-old African American with a buzz cut, a crisp white T-shirt, and a diamond stud in his left ear, smiled wryly. "To get to lunch in my high school, you had to pass recruiters," he said. "It was overwhelming." Then he added, "I thought the recruiters had too much information about me. They called me, but I never gave them my phone number."

Nor did he give the recruiters his email address, [Social Security](#) number, or details about his ethnicity, shopping habits, or college plans. Yet they probably knew all that, too. In the past few years, the military has mounted a virtual invasion into the lives of young Americans. Using data mining, stealth websites, career tests, and sophisticated marketing software, the Pentagon is harvesting and analyzing information on everything from high school students' GPAs and SAT scores to which video games they play. Before an Army recruiter even picks up the phone to call a prospect like Travers, the soldier may know more about the kid's habits than do his own parents.

The military has long struggled to find more effective ways to reach potential enlistees; for every new GI it signed up last year, the Army spent \$24,500 on recruitment. (In contrast, four-year colleges spend an average of \$2,000 per incoming student.) Recruiters hit pay dirt in 2002, when then-Rep. (now Sen.) [David Vitter](#) (R-La.) slipped a provision into the [No Child Left Behind Act](#) that requires high schools to give recruiters the names and contact details of all juniors and seniors. Schools that fail to comply risk losing their NCLB funding. This little-known regulation effectively transformed President George W. Bush's signature education bill into the most aggressive military recruitment tool since the draft. Students may sign an opt-out form—but not all school districts let them know about it.

Yet NCLB is just the tip of the data iceberg. In 2005, privacy advocates discovered that the Pentagon had spent the past two years quietly amassing records from Selective Service, state DMVs, and data brokers to create a database of tens of millions of young adults and teens, some as young as 15. The massive data-mining project is overseen by the Joint Advertising Market Research & Studies program, whose [website](#) has described the database, which now holds 34 million names, as "arguably the largest repository of 16-25-year-old youth data in the country." The JAMRS database is in turn run by Equifax, the credit reporting giant.

Marc Rotenberg, head of the [Electronic Privacy Information Center](#), says the Pentagon's initial failure to disclose the collection of the information likely violated the [Privacy Act](#). In 2007, the Pentagon settled a lawsuit (filed by the New York Civil Liberties Union) by agreeing to stop collecting the names and Social Security numbers of anyone younger than 17 and promising not to share its database records with other government agencies. Students may opt out of having their JAMRS database information sent to recruiters, but only 8,700 have invoked this obscure safeguard.

The Pentagon also spends about \$600,000 a year on commercial data brokers, notably the Student Marketing Group and the American Student List, which boasts that it has records for 8 million high school students. Both companies have been accused of using deceptive practices to gather information: In 2002, New York's attorney general sued SMG for telling high schools it was surveying students for scholarship and financial aid opportunities yet selling the info to telemarketers; the Federal Trade Commission charged ASL with similar tactics. Both companies eventually settled.

The Pentagon is also gathering data from unsuspecting Web surfers. This year, the Army spent \$1.2 million on the website March2Success.com, which provides free standardized test-taking tips devised by prep firms such as Peterson's, Kaplan, and Princeton Review. The only indications that the Army runs the site, which registers an average of 17,000 new users each month, are a tiny tagline and a small logo that links to the main recruitment website, GoArmy.com. Yet visitors' contact information can be sent to recruiters unless they opt out, and students also have the option of having a recruiter monitor their practice test scores. Terry Backstrom, who runs March2Success.com for the US Army Recruiting Command at Fort Knox, insists that it is about "good will," not recruiting. "We are providing a great service to schools that normally would cost them."

Recruiters are also data mining the classroom. More than 12,000 high schools administer the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery, a three-hour multiple-choice test originally created in 1968 to match conscripts with military assignments. Rebranded in the mid-1990s as the "ASVAB Career Exploration Program," the test has a cheerful home page that makes no reference to its military applications, instead declaring that it "is designed to help students learn more about themselves and the world of work." A student who takes the test is asked to divulge his or her Social Security number, GPA, ethnicity, and career interests—all of which is then logged into the JAMRS database. In 2008, more than 641,000 high school students took the ASVAB; 90 percent had their scores sent to recruiters. Tony Castillo of the Army's Houston Recruiting Battalion says that ASVAB is "much more than a test to join the military. It is really a gift to public education."

Concerns about the ASVAB's links to recruiting have led to a nearly 20 percent decline in the number of test takers between 2003 and 2008. But the test is mandatory at approximately 1,000 high schools. Last February, three North Carolina students were sent to detention for refusing to take it. One, a junior named Dakota Ling, told the local paper, "I just really don't want the military to have all the info it can on me." Last year, the California Legislature barred schools from sending ASVAB results to military recruiters, though Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger vetoed the bill. The Los Angeles and Washington, DC, school districts have tried to protect students' information by releasing their scores only on request.

To put all its data to use, the military has enlisted the help of Nielsen Claritas, a research and marketing firm whose clients include BMW, AOL, and Starbucks. Last year, it rolled out a "custom segmentation" program that allows a recruiter armed with the address, age, race, and gender of a potential "lead" to call up a wealth of information about young people in the immediate area, including recreation and consumption patterns. The program even suggests pitches that might work while cold-calling teenagers. "It's just a foot in the door for a recruiter to start a relevant conversation with a young person," says Donna Dorminey of the US Army Center for Accessions Research.

Still, no amount of data slicing can fix the challenge of recruiting during wartime. Last year, a JAMRS survey identified recruiters' single biggest obstacle: Only 5 percent of parents would recommend military service to their kids, a situation blamed on "a constant barrage of negative media coverage on the War in Iraq." Not surprisingly, more and more kids are opting out of having their information shared with recruiters under No Child Left Behind; in New York City, the number of students opting out has doubled in the past five years, to 45,000 in 2008. At some schools, 90 percent of students have opted out. In 2007, JAMRS awarded a \$50 million contract to Mullen Advertising to continue its marketing campaign to target "influencers" such as parents, coaches, and guidance counselors. The result: print ads that declare, "Your son wants to join the military. The question isn't whether he's prepared enough, but whether you are."

Not far from the mall in Maryland, I asked 21-year-old Marcelo Salazar, who'd been a cadet in his high school's Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps, why he'd decided not to enlist after graduating from John F. Kennedy High School in Silver Spring, Maryland, in 2005. Now a community college student, he replied that his mother was firmly against it.

Then, as if on cue, his cell phone chirped: It was a recruiter who called him constantly. He ignored it. "War is cool," he said, flipping on his aviator sunglasses. "But if you're dying, it's not."

<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2009/09/few-good-kids>