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**THE WEAPONIZATION OF POVERTY:
AN INVESTIGATION INTO UNITED STATES MILITARY RECRUITMENT
PRACTICES IN HIGH SCHOOLS OF LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES IN THE
INLAND EMPIRE**

Michael Springer-Gould
(2020)

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Bachelor of Arts with Honors in
Sociology and Human Rights Analysis

Approved by: Dr. Azamat Junisbai, Professor of Sociology at Pitzer College

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ABSTRACT

Military recruitment in the United States is a highly contentious subject that has yielded a multitude of prior research across a variety of academic concentrations. To further the conversation, I narrow my focus to Southern California's Inland Empire (IE) to explore practices of military recruitment in high schools that serve students in low-income communities. I begin with a general overview of life and labor in the Inland Empire before moving into prior research on military recruitment. My empirical research consists of five in-depth interviews documenting the lived experiences of individuals hailing from and attending high school in low-income communities of the Inland Empire. Conclusions are drawn affirming the presence of targeted military recruitment in low-income high schools of the IE through participation in the Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC), as well as resulting from educational policy that has disproportionately restricted academic curriculum in low-income schools. My analysis further explores connections between labor and military recruitment in the IE before concluding with discussions as to how the military strategically utilizes the cultural structure of the IE to target recruits on a personal level.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter One: State of the Inland Empire

East of Los Angeles lies a nearly 27,000 square-mile region, extending across Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, known as the Inland Empire (IE). The IE is home to nearly one of every nine California residents and is the site of approximately 1,426,000 jobs as of 2017¹.

According to UC Riverside (2018), the region's economy originated with small-scale agriculture before displacement of Native Americans from their lands gave way to railroad construction, the rise of commercial agriculture and eventually, the construction of military facilities².

Furthermore, the region progressed to see "a spike in manufacturing and steel production, which lasted for several decades before declining in the face of military base closures and downsizing related to off-shoring and global competition. This was followed by a period of rapid expansion in the transportation and warehouse industries connected with international trade, interstate commerce, and the logistics needs of the Southern California regional economy"³.

Poverty in the Inland Empire

In terms of labor, "growing employment in health care, social assistance, and education has provided many middle-class jobs for workers and has extended vital services to the public"⁴. However, for many public sector workers, economic insecurity remains high due to low wages, possible layoffs, and erosion of employment benefits⁵. Using MIT's living wage standard based on household composition and cost of basic expenses, UCR (2018) calculated that for "an Inland Empire family of four with two working adults, each parent must earn about \$18 an hour, or \$36,000 each year, to make ends meet. Only 38% of jobs in the Inland Empire meet this standard⁶. UCR also went into depth on the racial and gender disparities in meeting this threshold stating, "Hispanic and Black workers in the IE are the least likely to earn this living wage

standard (at 28% and 39%, respectively) compared to 46% of Asian Americans and 49% of Whites. Female workers are significantly less likely than men to earn this living wage standard (32% to 43%), and these disparities are most pronounced for women of color, with just 21% of Hispanic women and 37% of Black women earning at least \$36,000 in the past year”⁷.

As reported on the official 2017 U.S. Census, total rates of impoverished individuals ran higher than average for the IE in the previous year with 15.3% in Riverside County and 17.6% in San Bernardino County, as compared to 14.4% in the entire state of California and 14% in the United States. For children age 18 and younger, more than one in five (20.9%) in Riverside County and more than one in four (25.7%) in San Bernardino County live in poverty, compared to 19.9% in California and 19.5% in the United States. Mirroring the national statistics, official poverty rates ran highest among Native Americans, African Americans, and Latinos, and were higher among women than men⁸. These trends can partially be explained by the wildly unproductive relationship between hourly income and housing costs. UCR (2018) explains, “according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development standard, affordable housing should cost no more than one-third of a family’s income. Based on that standard, researchers estimate that IE residents must earn at least \$22.23 per hour and work 40 hours per week for 52 weeks per year in order to afford a two-bedroom apartment given fair market rental costs of \$1,156 per month for the region. Yet, renters, who make up about 36% of Riverside County households and 41% of San Bernardino County households, only earn on average an hourly rate of about \$13.32 and \$14.28, respectively, and many workers do not work full-time or full-year”⁹.

Warehouse Culture

The economic disadvantage to which the Inland Empire is statistically held is in large part due to the region's history of industry taking advantage of marginalized populations to work under-paid, manual labor jobs. Of these low-wage jobs, nearly 8.3% of all IE residents worked in the warehousing industry— bringing in a shockingly low average of just over \$3,300/month per employee. Labor, in what Allen (2010) refers to as “Southern California’s retail fortress,” is both in high demand yet includes a great deal of worker uncertainty. Allen explains, “most warehouse workers do not have a regular job: they get work through temporary labor agencies. In the city of Ontario alone there are 275 registered temporary labor agencies and... temporary employment has shot up by an astounding 575 percent between 1990 and 2007. These agencies operate in a way that is familiar to California’s agricultural sector, in which labor contractors provide labor to the landowners. In fact, one could argue that the structure of employment in the Inland Empire never really changed when the region’s economy changed from agriculture to goods movement; the only difference is the workers are now indoors”¹⁰.

With this temporary mindset instilled within the industry, a culture of “disposable” labor emerges and workers run the risk of being dehumanized or solely sought after for their physical capabilities. The Inland Empire has, by far, the highest concentration of temporary employment in all of Southern California¹¹. Bonacich and De Lara (2009) stress the extent to which temporary warehouse workers are under-valued by frequently working side-by-side with direct-hire employees while being paid less, working less hours and suffering the additional economic burden of job insecurity. This structure leaves no potential for mobility within the work-force, stranding those lacking full-time permanent employment on the bottom rung of the middle-class career ladder¹².

Allen (2010) expresses dismay at the direction the industry is headed stating, “the most frightening thing about the warehouse industry is that it is a glimpse of what the economy as a whole could look like if the current trends toward outsourcing work continue. More and more employers are attracted by the idea of being able to keep their workers at arm’s length by hiring them through the intermediary of a temp agency. Thus the ultimate employer is no longer legally liable for many aspects of the employer-employee relationship, and can deny responsibility for the welfare of the worker”¹³. With no employer loyalty and an ever-changing work environment, warehouse workers are forced to exclusively prioritize doing whatever it takes to make enough money to support themselves and their dependents.

Chapter Two: State of the Military

In the nearly 245 years following its ragtag construction during the American Revolutionary War, the United States Military has stood the test of time to remain one of the most influential institutions in the modern world. According to the FY 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (signed into action in December 2019), the U.S. military was comprised of nearly 1,396,100 total enlisted personnel with a break-down of 480,000 in the Army, 340,500 in the Navy, 332,800 in the Air Force, 186,200 Marines and the remaining 56,600 in the Coast Guard¹⁴. Over the last two decades, the military has undergone a trend of diversification. According to Barroso (2019), “in 2004, 36% of active duty military were black, Hispanic, Asian or some other racial or ethnic group. Black service members made up about half of all racial and ethnic minorities at that time. By 2017, the share of active duty military who were non-Hispanic white had fallen, while racial and ethnic minorities made up 43% – and within that group, blacks dropped from 51% in 2004 to 39% in 2017 just as the share of Hispanics rose from 25% to

36%¹⁵. Furthermore, in 2017, women comprised nearly 16% of the overall active duty force—a substantial increase from the 1990s and early 2000s¹⁶.

It comes as no shock that in the United States, the military's strong numbers of participation correlate with a massive amount of funding. As of FY 2020, the military was allocated a massive \$738 billion in total spending, marking a \$22 billion increase from 2019¹⁷. Highlights from the budget include a 3.1% pay raise for all members of the armed forces as well as a 9% funding boost for the Department of Veterans Affairs— its largest increase to date¹⁸. The 2020 budget also includes funding for programs to maintain the country's global influence, such as a modernization of the nuclear weapons program and President Donald Trump's highly controversial U.S. Space Force, designed to protect the country against threats from above¹⁹. Programs like these contribute to making the United States the number one country in the world for military spending with more than double the amount spent as number two (China, at around \$237 billion)²⁰.

Military Recruitment in High Schools

Stemming from such an extensive budget, the military is naturally in continuous pursuit of expanding its numbers through the recruitment of young and promising high school students. When assembling a system as to how to best access potential high school recruits around the country, the military prioritizes important two factors: quickness and efficiency²¹. To achieve these goals, each recruiter has a geographic area or zone in which they operate. Area high schools are the determining factors in constructing these zones and recruiters receive credit for each student who enlists from the high school within their zone²². Naturally, this causes military recruiters to make high school students their top priority and concentrate the majority of their efforts towards enticing this demographic. According to the ACLU, federal laws require high

schools to “give military recruiters the same access to the campus as they provide to other persons or groups who advise students about occupational or educational options”²³. This manifests in ways such as, “if a school does not have any on-campus recruiting by employers or colleges, it is not required to have on-campus military recruiting. But if a school allows on-campus recruiting, it must allow recruiting by the military. For example, if a school has a job fair with booths for many employers, it must offer a booth to military recruiters”²⁴. Through these guidelines, high schools are essentially forced to present all post-graduate opportunities in the same social context. In other words, despite the vast differences in future paths offered, all post-graduate opportunities promoted through the school are exhibited as viable options that the administration (and by extension, public law) supports students to pursue.

However, the exact specifics of ways that promoters of post-graduate opportunities are able to get across to students are much more hazy due to subjectivity. Practices such as reaching out to students during “non-active” hours of the school day, like during lunch and before/after class, are often left up to the discretion of the individual school administrations. The ACLU states, “school districts have great leeway to decide which areas are open to nonstudents. So long as military recruiters receive the same access as other recruiters, it is up to the school to decide whether they will be allowed into the lunchroom, the commons, the career counseling office, or another designated area”²⁵. The preferential treatment of military recruiters by school administration comes into play when establishing the boundaries of a “public forum.” Public forums take place when “a school dedicates part of its property as a space for presentations by selected categories of speakers (like job recruiters)... a school operating a public forum must give all speakers within that category the same degree of access”²⁶. While the law does not dictate that high schools must prioritize the military over other recruiters in these public forums,

“a school has control over its own curriculum, and it does not automatically create a public forum merely by presenting its choice of materials or guest speakers to students. Whether a school has created a public forum for recruiters will depend on the specific facts and history at the school”²⁷.

Aside from recruiters on campus, another way the military gets across to high school students is through the Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (JROTC) program. According to the official Army website, the JROTC is one of the largest character development and citizenship programs for youth in the world that utilizes “a four part model to motivate the Cadet, allow the Cadet to learn new information, practice competency, and apply the competency to a real-life situation”²⁸. The JROTC curriculum aims to prepare high school students for a potential career in the military through lessons in “leadership, health and wellness, physical fitness, first-aid, geography, American history and government, communications, and emotional intelligence”²⁹. That being said, the mission of the JROTC is not to explicitly recruit students for military service— merely to “prepare children to become better citizens”³⁰. Courses are often taught by retired service members and students are typically instructed to adhere to military customs such as wearing a full military uniform at least once a week as well as at JROTC events out of school³¹. Furthermore, JROTC programs are usually constructed under the designations of individual ranks for the student cadets “that correlate with the hierarchy of the respective military branch affiliated with that JROTC unit. To be promoted, a cadet must gain knowledge as he or she progresses through the program and demonstrates practical skills and leadership”³².

Resistance to Military Recruitment in High Schools

In the early 21st century, the JROTC was experiencing its most rapid expansion in history. Some people attributed its success to the sentiment established by popular leaders such

General Colin Powell who, at the time, served as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

During a visit to South Central Los Angeles after the 1992 riots, Powell stated that the solution to the problems of city youth was the kind of discipline and structure offered by the U.S. military.

In the ensuing decade, the number of JROTC programs doubled, with over half-a-million students enrolled at over 3,000 schools coast-to-coast, and a Pentagon budget allocation in excess of \$250 million annually³³. However, in the two years following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, military recruiters continuously failed to meet monthly enlistment quotas despite the strong JROTC surge.

Cave (2005) attributed this sharp decline in enlistment to the overwhelming fear that the war had stirred amongst parents who were resistant to their children serving in such a destructive and dangerous operation³⁴. The early 21st century continued to do little towards easing parents' worries, as a Department of Defense survey from November, 2004 found that, "only 25 percent of parents would recommend military service to their children, down from 42 percent in August 2003"³⁵. Furthermore, it was around the time that the Iraq War officially began when the United Nations adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on Children in Armed Conflict ("Optional Protocol") to address the problem of the recruitment and service in the military of minors. According to the United Nations, the Optional Protocol is loosely characterized as a commitment to remove the presence of minors from all military activity, including recruiting campaigns. Provision of the protocol are as follows:

- States will not recruit children under the age of 18 to send them to the battlefield.
- States will not conscript soldiers below the age of 18.
- States should take all possible measures to prevent such recruitment– including legislation to prohibit and criminalize the recruitment of children under 18 and involve them in hostilities.
- States will demobilize anyone under 18 conscripted or used in hostilities and will provide physical, psychological recovery services and help their social reintegration.

- Armed groups distinct from the armed forces of a country should not, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities anyone under 18³⁶.

As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, the United States is naturally privy to the Optional Protocol and shortly after the protocol's ratification, the US Congress passed 10 U.S.C. 505— a bill restricting military recruitment of minors and limiting their participation in active combat³⁷. However, many critics took issue with the protocol and subsequent action, claiming that in order to meet recruiting quotas, the military must recruit on high school campuses³⁸. They made the argument that U.S. high school students ordinarily decide their career paths in the year or two prior to high school graduation and that preventing the military from recruiting during this time in a young person's life could negatively impact the number of new recruits into the military³⁹. Hollman (2007) adds some validity to this critique citing that statistics show, “despite the overall low number of active military service people age seventeen, that number is a result of extensive recruiting in the age group sixteen to eighteen”⁴⁰.

Hollman goes on to explain that the U.S. was able to manifest that argument into a system that works around the Optional Protocol and allows the military to still aggressively recruit minors and send them into active military service⁴¹. She points out that the exact language of the Optional Protocol stimulates: “Parties take all ‘feasible measures’ to prevent members of their armed forces who are under eighteen years old from participating in hostilities”⁴². Through lobbying efforts by the US, the arguably vague language has been morphed to allow state parties to set their own minimum age by submitting a binding declaration. As a result, the U.S. may continue recruiting seventeen year-olds into military service without violating the terms of the Protocol.

The binding declarations typically take the form of a “Delayed Entry Contract” (DEC) that allows high school recruits to defer their actual enlistment until after they graduate or turn

eighteen. “The DEC obligates recruits to serve in the military for a specified period of time. Minors age seventeen who voluntarily enlist with the consent of their parents or guardians create a valid contract. The contract is legally enforceable although contracts made by minors are ordinarily voidable at their option”⁴³. These contracts leave minors with the option to change their minds (ideologically in-line with the goals of the Optional Protocol), however, the door is opened to recruitment prior to one’s eighteenth birthday.

Chapter Three: Image of the Military and Targeted Recruitment

When attempting to market its “brand” to potential recruits, the military is very reliant on its associated public image. Media has often served as a positive vice for the military to display a well-known macho, stoic image of “what it takes” to be a soldier. Movies like *American Sniper*, *The Hurt Locker* and *Saving Private Ryan* have all gone on to win Academy Awards for depictions of soldiers’ bravery, strength and honor in the face of life-threatening situations. It is easy to understand how people consuming this type of media will feel a great sense of admiration for those on-screen as well as a certain desire to be like them. Stories of adventure and excitement easily entice adolescents and it is quite routine to describe the military in an overly simplistic manner that glorifies dangerous activities⁴⁴. For example, a military recruiter addressing students in San Diego hit-home on all the major adventurous selling points stating, “I mean, where else can you get paid to jump out of airplanes, shoot cool guns, blow stuff up, and travel seeing all kinds of different countries?”⁴⁵.

The military also remains up-to-date on marketing to young people by using the latest technology. Hollman (2007) explains, “the army’s website offers state-of-the-art graphics highlighting information on the benefits of military service. There is a link to a website devoted

to ‘future soldiers.’ This website details the training program, encourages future soldiers to refer others to the program”⁴⁶. The military uses its websites to fuse the personal bonds between recruiter and prospect by including the option to enter a live chat room with the recruiter as well as including a special section of the website reserved for parents of future soldiers, which addresses their potential questions about military service⁴⁷. This projects a welcoming and structured image of how the military wants prospects to perceive this institution.

However, taking a step back from the glamorous appeals of Hollywood and technology, another critical aspect of the military’s public image is the idea of what benefits individuals would receive should they choose to enlist. In previous discussions of the JROTC, the instilment of valuable skills such as leadership and a strong work ethic were touched upon as potential motivating factors for students to join the program. Additionally, “defenders of the JROTC... claim that the goal is leadership and citizen development, drop-out prevention, or simply the fun of dressing up and parading around”⁴⁸. It appears that the military is heavily reliant on recruits seeing service as an opportunity to become a “better version” of themselves while enjoying their lives in the process. Bettering oneself in the military, according to Marshall and Brown (2004), is best achieved through the benefits it pitches such as “financial rewards, social prestige [and] job training...”⁴⁹. In exchange, all the military asks is “a commitment of an extended period of time, conformity to a structured lifestyle and obedience to a formal command structure”⁵⁰. Military service is essentially presented as a low-risk and highly structured program to help one grow as a person through the acquisition of socio-economic assets to which theyⁱ may have not otherwise had the opportunity to access.

Targeted Recruitment and American Culture

ⁱ Intentional use of a gender-neutral pronoun— not a grammatical mistake. Occurs at numerous points throughout my work.

While military recruitment in high schools may seem like a series of random and covenant actions taken by recruiters to make better known the potential benefits of enlistment to young people should they choose a career in service, research suggests the process is far from coincidental. Ayers (2005) explains, “military recruiting in high schools has been a mainstay of the so-called all-volunteer armed forces from the start. High school kids are at an age when being a member of an identifiable group with a grand mission and a shared spirit— and never underestimate a distinctive uniform— is of exaggerated importance, something gang recruiters in big cities also note with interest and exploit with skill”⁵¹. He goes on to stress that, “being cool, going along with the crowd, conforming, fitting in— this, too, is a big thing. Add the matter of proving oneself to be a macho, strong, tough, capable person, combined with an unrealistic calculus of invulnerability and a constricted sense of options specifically in poor and working-class communities— all of this creates the toxic mix in a young person’s head that can be a military recruiter’s dream”⁵².

The ladder part of Ayers’ words hits home on the sentiment shared by other researchers such as Furumoto (2005) who further assesses, “students inculcated with militaristic obedience to authority and who have been socialized to accept dominant perspectives about the reasons for war and military actions are prepared to fight the ongoing imperial wars of this nation”⁵³. It is easy to see how a culture of “respecting a power greater than oneself” remains prominent in a country where, according to Newport (2016), nearly 80% of citizens identify as religious⁵⁴. However, where the military expands beyond the simple principles of religion is its capacity to boost one’s self-image and social capital through commitment to the “higher power.” For example, Marshall and Brown (2004) explain that for potential female recruits, factors such as the ability to boost social esteem and challenge a long history of gender discrimination within the

military and social life may play a role in the decision making process⁵⁵. The military appeals as somewhat of a neutral playing-field, where, regardless of their personal background, recruits can enter the community and make a name for themselves.

Targeted Recruitment in Low-Income Communities

Research shows that low-incomeⁱⁱ communities remain the central point of focus for targeted military recruitment practices with local high schools acting as a main epicenter for operations in the region. Over the years, experts have loosely characterized low-income communities based around measures such as an absolute standard of a minimum amount of income needed to sustain a healthy life of basic comfort, and/or a relative standard based on the average standard of living in a nation⁵⁶. However, there remains no precise standard definition for what constitutes a low-income community as the idea of poverty does not solely revolve around the presence of income. Baharoglu & Kessides (2002) add four more factors in addition to income (health, education, security and empowerment), with the mindset of crafting a more functional definition of poverty that takes into consideration the greater social context to one's economic condition⁵⁷. The classification of a low-income community remains strongly rooted in community members' collective lack of access to tools for socio-economic mobility. The impact of this structural withholding can be seen in a cycle of generational poverty that leaves later generations confined to the same economic standing as their parents and grandparents with little potential to alter their situation⁵⁸.

Many scholars do not shy away from addressing what they interpret to be intentional targeting of low-income communities by the military. Herbert (2005) stipulates that while

ⁱⁱ Terminology such as “low-income, economically disadvantaged and poor (impoverished)” are used interchangeably throughout to refer to the same general concept. The only noteworthy difference is that “low-income community” generally speaks to the broad socio-economic structure of an environment, whereas “economically disadvantaged” and “poor (impoverished)” solely deals with the economic side.

military recruiters may be seen in high schools all across the country, not all high schools are seen equally in the eyes of recruiters. He states, “schools with kids from wealthier families (and a high percentage of collegebound students) are not viewed as good prospects by military recruiters. It's as if those schools had posted signs at the entrances saying, ‘Don't bother.’ The kids in those schools are not the kids who fight America's wars”⁵⁹. Additional research tends to support Herbert's claims, such as Marshall and Brown (2004) whose conclusions suggested that young adults with college aspirations trend towards having significantly lower interest in military service. Young adults from higher socio-economic backgrounds and from northern urban areas may have the lowest interest levels of any high school demographic⁶⁰.

Other researchers expanded their studies to test a specific policy or piece of historical context that may have proved consequential in disproportionate recruitment statistics for low-income communities. Furumoto (2005) explores how the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB) served as part of a broader strategy by the Pentagon to recruit low-income urban youth for the military. She argued that the Bush-era education overhaul's focus on standardized tests and punitive sanctions reinforced the already limited curriculum for high schools in low-income communities, leading to the diminished capacity of students to question militarism and challenge social oppression⁶¹. High schools in low-income communities are most at-risk as, “first, because poorer schools receive a significant portion of their budgets from the federal government (Title I funds), they are much more vulnerable to threatened cuts. Secondly, local and state school boards and school administrators generally tend to respond to those constituents with the most money and political clout”⁶². As a result, students find themselves constrained from lack of resources in the classroom and more at a loss as to which potential options to pursue post-graduation.

These students are tracked into the JROTC and a future in the military in the interest of “protecting corporate capital’s interests,” whereas middle-class and wealthy students have a wide and challenging array of courses that track them to “become CEOs in business”⁶³. Instead, “joining the military is now presented as an opportunity for poor and disenfranchised African American and Latino youth to train for a job, see the world, get money for college and, of course, to fight for freedom and democracy”⁶⁴. Furumoto concludes that this structure exists in-part due to the failure of NCLB’s to productively address the structural inequalities of our society and educational system. The barriers of poor education, racism and poverty are not properly accounted for when considering what post-graduate opportunities students will have the capacity to pursue. Wealthier students do not have to enlist in order to pay for their college and, instead, military service is tacitly presented as the “best opportunity” for low-income students to get a college education and to develop “strong character and leadership skills”⁶⁵.

Additionally, a country’s concentrated efforts to recruit youth in statistically low-income areas is a provision covered in the aforementioned Optional Protocol of the United Nations. The literature of the protocol recognizes “the special needs of... children who are particularly vulnerable to recruitment or use in hostilities...owing to their economic or social status...”⁶⁶. Hollman (2007) explains that minors from low-income areas remain especially vulnerable to military recruiting tactics and, resultantly, are disproportionately represented in the military. She even goes as far as to insinuate that the disproportionate representation of low-income persons in the military suggests that the military targets these recruits in violation of the Optional Protocol’s protection of special groups⁶⁷.

Research suggests that the military knows exactly where to look when carrying out tactics of targeted recruitment. According to a 2004 Boston Globe inquiry into military

recruitment practices, researchers determined, “recruiters target certain schools and students for heavy recruitment, and then won’t give up easily: Officers call the chosen students repeatedly, tracking their responses in a computer program... eligible students are hit with a blitz of mailings and home visits”⁶⁸. Analysis of the location of JROTC units in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the second largest district in the nation, reveals that these military programs are located in schools serving predominantly low-income Latino and African American students⁶⁹. As of 2004, sixty-one percent of LAUSD high schools (30 of 49) had a JROTC unit on campus with a total enrollment of 6,000 students⁷⁰. Individual case study comparisons have been explored as well. In 2004, Whitney Young High School, a large selective magnet school in Chicago, had only seven military recruiter visits compared to 150 visits from university recruiters; Schurz High School, which is 80% Hispanic, had nine recruiter visits as compared to a measly ten visits from universities⁷¹.

On a national scale, Marshall and Brown (2004) found it far more common for young people from rural areas and from the southern USA to join the military than their northern, urban counterparts. Socio-economically breaking it down, Segal et al (1999) found that perceived interest in the military declined as the grade level increased. Eighth graders had a higher propensity to enlist in the military than did their tenth and twelfth grade counterparts. Furthermore, the study also found that young people from intact homes (two-parent families) are less likely to serve in the military than those in single-parent homes⁷². Young people whose parents had attained high levels of education were least likely to join the military and respondents who aspired to a college education also indicated a very low motivation to enlist⁷³.

Similar findings regarding socio-economic factors broken down by race were reported in a now somewhat dated study by Teachman and Call (1993). They report that among Caucasian

males, high mother's education level and high high-school grade-point average (GPA) were predictors of low military propensity. For African American males, father's education and GPA showed a low propensity to enter the military⁷⁴. However, among African American males, higher educational aspirations were a major predictor of higher interest in enlistment, suggesting that military service might be viewed as opening educational opportunities. As for whites, they discovered the highest tendency to enlist directly after high school graduation. White males who were working or enrolled in postsecondary school were far less likely to enlist. Finally, for African American men, work and school were insignificant predictors of propensity to enlist^{75 76}.

These findings seem to suggest a relationship between enlistment and an understanding of one's economic security down the line. Given that the quality of one's education remains a strong indicator for both economic and social security later on in life, it makes sense that parents would find comfort in the military's pitch to help educate their child. Furumoto (2005) drives-home how it is the military's exact strategy to instill this mindset in poor and working class school districts where "many parents lack knowledge about military recruitment practices and the implications for their children"⁷⁷. Military programs, such as the JROTC, are often touted as a "solution to high dropout rates and failing grades"⁷⁸. However, Furumoto finds fault in this argument stating, "the assertion that the military is the 'best opportunity' to get a college education belies the facts"⁷⁹.

Because the military must compete with the private sector for young, smart recruits, it sets up monetary and educational benefit packages to entice them into the service. As part of the Montgomery GI Bill (Servicemen's Readjustment Act, 1944), recruiters can promise up to \$50,000 for college if the person enlists. Enlisted service members who option to enroll in the program contribute roughly \$1,200 (\$100 monthly) through payroll deductions⁸⁰. According to

Lutz and Bartlett (1995), “there are significant problems with the program that have resulted in many people being ruled ineligible to receive the funds once they leave the military; refunds are not permitted under any circumstances”⁸¹. The disconnect between what is promised by recruiters versus what is actually carried out highlights a significant shared theme in military recruitment research: the element of deception.

It is not uncommon for military recruiters to stretch a potential recruit’s perception of what service would look like. According to Hollman (2007), “the military can be an easy way out for teenagers in difficult economic circumstances, but it may not be the only way. Aggressive military recruiting on high school campuses frustrates children's efforts to explore other options”⁸². In order to continuously stay relevant in the decision making process of these teenagers, recruiters often twist or do not tell the whole truth. For example, Dobie (2005) claims that one of the most common lies told by recruiters is that “it’s easy to get out of the military if you change your mind. But once they arrive at training, the recruits are told there’s no exit, period...”⁸³. Moreover, McGlynn and Monforti (2010) concluded that, on average, recruiters do a very poor job at fully disclosing the risks and requirements of service in the military. They strongly emphasize that, “considering the gravity of the decision to enlist and the relative immaturity of teenagers, the absence of complete information regarding military service can be considered unethical”⁸⁴.

The “Infiltration” of Low-Income Communities

What sets the military apart from other potential post-graduate opportunities is the sheer degree to which the institution is willing to go to entice students. Recruiters go above-and-beyond to ensure they become a major influential figure and staple of the low-income community to which they are assigned. To meet the military’s standards, a recruiter must be seen

as more than simply another talking head at career fairs. Hollman (2007) tries best to paint this picture describing, “a fifteen-year old student attends a high school located in a working-class neighborhood. The student goes to a high school dance chaperoned by a military recruiter. The same recruiter shows up at school, socializes with the children at lunch and greets students in the halls. Most of the students know his name. The recruiter grew up in the same impoverished neighborhood. Now he wears a Rolex watch and drives a BMW. He tells the students that if they join the military they can be like him too”⁸⁵.

This “infiltration” of low-income communities succeeds by not only just appealing to the tactical decision making process of a young student (listing of benefits, etc.), but also trying to manipulate their emotional sense of belonging within their own community. Herbert explains how it comes down to an exact science that is plainly laid-out in an Army publication called “School Recruiting Program Handbook.” The process of “school ownership,” as detailed in the handbook, is primarily responsible for higher numbers of enlistment and happens when recruiters carry-out actions like “contact athletic coaches and volunteer to lead calisthenics, get involved with the homecoming committee and organize a presence in the parade, donate coffee and donuts to the faculty on a regular basis, eat in the cafeteria, [and] target ‘influential students’ who, while they may not enlist, can refer others who might”^{86 87}. Recruiters seemingly take on a nurturing role in the community, giving students the illusion that the military can help solve problems that they may be facing and set them on a productive career path.

Given their positionality as both minors and in the midst of a highly transformative period in their lives, high school students are especially vulnerable to undue influence and evidence immature judgement with regard to involvement in risky behavior⁸⁸. This susceptibility amongst students mixed with the military’s proven disregard of ethical guidelines, even within

its own putative standards, make for an ideal environment for recruiters to coerce students into questionable behavior. One highly publicized case of such activity happened when a recruiter was caught on tape coaching a high school student about how to fake a mandatory drug test⁸⁹. However, policies regarding the degree of access provided to military recruiters vary from school-to-school and remain heavily reliant on the relationship that a recruiter is able to form with the school's administrative staff. For example, school guidance counselors, supportive of the military, can greatly facilitate students' orientation towards joining the military⁹⁰.

During the school day, recruiters mainly appear to stick to common sites of student congregations such as the cafeteria or in the hallways at the start/end of the day and in-between classes. Furumoto (2005) states, "students have noted military recruiters' almost daily appearance during lunch when other prospective employers and/or recruiters from postsecondary institutions are not also present"⁹¹. The military also remains a mainstay at career fairs or other post-graduate information sessions where, once again, it maintains an advantage over other career representatives due to the close relationship recruiters are able to foster with students during the school day⁹². Outside of school, students, and especially African American and Latino males, report frequent (three or more per week) contacts and phone calls from military recruiters⁹³. This constant bombardment of military recruitment leads students to believe that their postgraduate options are seriously limited and it becomes much easier to view the military as the only feasible way to support oneself given the circumstances. In the words of Joseph Mosner, a former nineteen year-old recruit who joined out of high school: "There was nothing out there... There was no good jobs so I figured this would have been a good thing"⁹⁴.

METHODS

Chapter Four: Methodology

The process of attracting potential recruits expands through many facets of society as military service has been an attractive option to many. Due to the large display of interest and eventual participation in the military, it becomes quite difficult from a research standpoint to understand where exactly the military makes its initial marketing contact with recruits. However, as I find it a safe assumption to make that for the majority of Americans, the high school years are highly formative in shaping the trajectory of one's immediate future and arguably, the rest of one's life. High school students have reached a major developmental period in their young lives and at the end of their four-years are tasked with the challenging decision of how to apply themselves to the "real world." For this reason, I chose to narrow the analytical perspective of my research down to the presence of military recruitment during this critical high school period. Through the examination of institutional influence by the military both in-and-outside of the classroom, one can ideally gain a better understanding of the extent to which recruitment has an effect on students' attitudes towards the future as well as general well-being.

Empirical Research

My empirical research consists of a handful of in-depth interviews conducted over the span of my senior year at Pitzer College. I chose interviews as my preferred method of data collection due to the innately qualitative nature of my research. Given the deeply subjective matter of the research subject, I felt it necessary to personally prioritize the storytelling (qualitative) side of the matter and while leaving the in-depth statistical analysis (quantitative) up to the plethora of previous research on the topic. In other words, my passion for this project stemmed from a desire to discern the nitty-gritty details of individuals' lived experiences in the

Inland Empire and to better understand how they think military influence may have impacted themselves and/or the IE community at large. I held the mindset that significant quantitative components of this research topic, such as collecting recruitment demographic data, have been done bigger and better by other researchers prior to my work, so it would be best to simply build off their work by adding my own qualitative spin on the topic.

Participant Selection and Confidentiality

In order to properly find interview participants whose lived experience would be both practical and interesting, I quickly realized that I would have to start big and gradually work my way in. Going into this project, I paid little mind as to how I, an out-of-state college student with minimal connections to the Inland Empire community, would somehow magically be able to put together a list of interview participants who had both grown up in the IE and had significant connections to the process of military recruitment. So, when it became time to flesh out the details, I effectively found myself stumped as to how to best get across to interview prospects. After multiple advising sessions and a great deal of soul-searching, I came to the conclusion that my best option was to simply attempt to recruitⁱⁱⁱ any individual who, at the bare-minimum, had attended high school in the Inland Empire. Additionally, I included a section stressing the preference for participants who hail from low-income communities and/or may have any prior experience interacting with military recruitment^{iv}.

By keeping the participation requirements broad, I would like to believe that people felt more inclined to reach-out. My goal was to draw in as many interviewees as possible and by expanding the list of necessary qualifications to be interviewed, I feared I would drive people away who otherwise would have been very useful to my research. Furthermore, the basic

ⁱⁱⁱ Pun intended

^{iv} See *Figure One* in APPENDIX

qualification of having attended high school in the IE got right to the heart of my research subject— military recruitment is an issue that likely impacts a whole community, not just a select group of people. All-in-all, I would deem this strategy to be an overwhelming success as a significant amount of people reached out asking to be interviewed within the first week of my active search for participants.

Another issue that I ran into when constructing a participant pool was the specifics of how to keep my research strictly confidential as to not put anyone at risk. Discussing the military can be a scary experience. For many, the military represents a pinnacle of law enforcement whose rules and regulations are not to be challenged. The social reputation surrounding the military is one of unquestioned respect and gratefulness. I think it is fair to say that in most social circles, it is deemed generally disrespectful and abnormal to speak out on the military in any manner that is not explicitly positive. For these reasons, I sought to provide the utmost confidentiality on this project in order to not only make my work ethically sound, but also to pay respect to my participants. I am truly honored to have worked with such exceptional participants who took a risk to share with me their tales of lived experience on this sensitive topic.

Throughout the course of my project, all research practices were approved by the Pitzer College Institutional Review Board. All interview participants discussed in my research are above the age of eighteen and appear under pseudonyms with all potentially identifiable information (people, places mentioned, etc.) having been redacted or also referred to under a pseudonym. Furthermore, any personal notes I took at any stage of the interview process do not include the participants name or any easily identifying information. Participants signed waivers of consent before each interview and approved the use of audio recording— which I deleted at the completion of my research. All participants had the option to decline any question that they

did not wish to answer and no attempts were made to influence a participant's personal feelings and/or opinions.

The Interviewees

Ultimately, I ended up with five individual in-depth interviews—ranging from about 20-45 minutes in-length. Three of the five participants identified as male and the remaining two female. All participants were roughly college aged and had each attended all four years of high school. My first interview participant, referred to as “Dahlia,” is female-identifying, in her early-twenties and has lived in the Inland Empire for her entire life after her grandparents immigrated from Central America. Participant #2 (“Nicky”) is male-identifying, in his late-teens and was born in Central America but immigrated to the IE at a very young age. Participant #3 (“Aiden”) is also male-identifying, in his early-twenties and moved to the IE from another state^v in his early-teenage years. Aiden participated in his school's JROTC program for nearly half of his high school experience. Participant #4 (“Heidi”) is female-identifying, in her early-twenties and has lived in the IE for her entire life. Lastly, Participant #5 (“Jackie”) is male-identifying, in his mid-thirties and lived in the IE through high school before moving away and ultimately returning years later. Jackie is an Army veteran who served in Iraq during his early-twenties.

The Interview

The collective understanding of what constitutes a “low-income community” is still quite hazy due to the multitude of factors that all influence a community's socio-economic status^{vi}. For the purposes of the specialized topic of my research, I elected to use the demographics of one's high school as the guide to socio-economic conditions for the surrounding community. For each public high school in the United States, US News and World Report lists a “Total Economically

^v State and city name redacted to ensure confidentiality

^{vi} See p. 19 in LITERATURE REVIEW

Disadvantaged” statistic for the student body. This factor is determined as the measure of total student poverty by “the percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price lunches”⁹⁵. While this figure may leave some room for interpretation as to its direct correlation with community poverty, I found it to be a satisfactory statistic for the purposes of my research because of its direct relation to discrepancies in individuals schooling experience based on economic status. I chose to distinguish any high school with greater than fifty percent of a “Total Economically Disadvantaged” student population to be representative of a low-income community. All of my five interviewees’ high schools had greater than fifty percent and thus I classified all of them as hailing from low-income communities for the purposes of my research.

When conducting the interviews, I chose to break down my questionnaire into three major subsets: life in the Inland Empire, high school experience and militarism^{vii}. I began the interview with a general overview of what life was like for each participant growing up and any perceptions they may have of the type of community that existed in the IE. I found this less-intense introduction (as compared to heavier topics like militarism) to be an effective way of easing the participant into a place of comfortability in the interview setting. From there, we moved onto the topics such as what their support system looked like in high school and what options they felt encouraged to pursue post-graduation. The conversation gradually bridged into discussions of the structure of their school’s JROTC program, before ultimately ending in topics such as what interactions with recruitment tactics looked like and if the interviewee or any of their friends/peers ever felt strongly inclined to join the military. In the following results section, I have elected to categorize my data collection in the same general order that topics were

^{vii} See *Figure Two* in APPENDIX

presented during the interviews as I found this to be the most effective way to present a well-rounded understanding of the research subject.

RESULTS

Chapter Five: Life in the Inland Empire

For nearly all of my interview participants, life in the Inland Empire is heavily centered around a sense of social cohesion and diversity. When speaking with Heidi, she stressed the extent by which, “my town was a decently close-knit community... so you'll walk and you'll see a lot of people you know, and you'll talk to them. Almost everyone over the age of sixty knew each other, or at least around where I lived, which was a little terrifying. It was very diverse and it still is very diverse... something I really like about living in the Inland Empire is I grew up around all sorts of people”⁹⁶. These sentiments were furthered by Aiden who explained how moving to the IE in his teenage years dramatically changed his perception of what a social community looks like due to its differences from where he had previously lived. He explained, “everyone kind of kept to themselves where I lived... I think in [the IE], I actually know my neighbors. I actually talk to my neighbors so that was a different dynamic. I would say [the IE] is more community based than some other places”⁹⁷.

This sense of community is likely in-part due to overwhelming hegemony of the region. As stated by Dahlia, “I really liked [the community] because everybody had some other upbringings and my school was 87% Latinx. So I felt like I really belonged there and, like, everybody was similar—Catholic and all of these other features that I have within myself. I had a lot of family in [the IE] so it was just like a safe-zone basically”⁹⁸. She goes on to explain how fondness for each other, especially in family settings, translated to “a very collectivistic culture... my mom would take care of my grandma and, like, my uncle and my aunt lived in the same house and we would all share time together.” Nicky similarly experienced collectivism within his community stating, “people try to look out for each other. People try to help one

another and support each other. There are a lot of non-profit organizations that are doing a lot of work there and are helping each other. It does feel very collective and it does feel like everyone is working towards a common goal”⁹⁹.

Negative Perceptions of the Inland Empire

While this seemingly rosy model of community support and collectivism appeared to be the case for the majority of interviewees, Jackie (who identifies as African-American) was the only participant who remained vehemently outspoken on how the support structure in the IE may not apply equally to everyone. He explained, “I have a negative idea of the IE and it is broken down to race and culture. My experience has been that traditionally, most political or hegemonic structures are based off of whiteness. In the IE, Hispanic [and] Latinx culture has been more established and been able to push out whiteness and established brownness. And in that, establish a brownness [with] its own cultural appreciation and empowerment”¹⁰⁰. However, in that process, he says, “it pushed out a lot of the black community.”

He describes, “I haven't ever felt like there was any unity in terms of like, between the races... or systemic help. It's sort of like, you have a lot of support for one [race] or, like, it being built around a particular group and that kind of leaves out the others but you'll have more of a white population who travels or is more upper class and middle class. Or, at least, if they're not middle class, they still live in middle class areas. And then you have black people who are kind of sprawled out and disenfranchised.” He expresses dismay at the fact that, as he describes, the black communities are “pushed out” to areas where “it's just completely not safe to like, walk down the street.” He concludes that in the IE, “you have this separation of like, Hispanic/Latinx, where you have middle class Hispanic/Latinx, and then you have, like, lower class

Hispanic/Latinx but they still try to lift each other up. Like, it's easy [for other races] to be left behind in the IE.”

In addition to his feelings on racial stratification, Jackie admits that part of negative recollection of the IE is tied to traumatic instances of bullying he experienced in high school. He disclosed that it caused him to essentially give up on himself in the classroom and begin to see high school as a lost-cause: “I just pushed my way through high school, like, ‘I'm just ready to leave,’ you know— I went from like straight As to like barely passing.” For Jackie, the prospect of moving to Los Angeles was an escape route to leave the trauma he faced at school and his displeasure with the IE. He explains, “life is completely different [in Los Angeles] ... Like I want to move to LA or at least to Long Beach or somewhere. I'm completely sick and tired of the IE. Especially the more you become educated you learn [about] political science, sociology... It's like, ‘Yo! The IE is like thirty years behind!’”

Poverty in the Inland Empire

For Nicky, his fond recollection of a community support system growing up serves as both a comfort while also igniting a fire within him to give back: “I definitely want to stay in the Inland Empire and give back to my community, which is pretty much what everyone says.” He explains, “growing up [in the IE] makes me realize that because we have a lot of low-income families, like minority families... we don't have a lot of knowledge about resources that we have. I'm hoping to study research on medication. That's something that we need in the Inland Empire because our health care is not good enough.” Indeed, this issue of poverty and the lack of resources in the IE emerged as another common point of discussion through the interviews.

Speaking on his own community^{viii} in the IE, Jackie recounted, “these aren't the most prosperous areas. You know, it's high immigration, high logistics. You don't have high paying jobs over here.” He continued, “growing up in a gang ridden kind of area, [it's] like, there's a number of friends that I know that haven't made it this far in life, who aren't even alive still because they fell victim to, you know, our area's circumstances.”

Heidi took more of a backseat approach to the topic stating that in her community, “I definitely [knew] there was violence and occasional things going on. I didn't experience much of it. I'm lucky for that.” When asked about the presence of gangs and violence in his community, Nicky shifted gears a little bit to talk about how his perceptions of the area differed from others. He explained, “it's very interesting because I wasn't aware that there was something wrong with it. It was only when I moved [away] that I realized that people don't see... the Inland Empire the same way. People see poverty rates or just unemployment rates or just like violence, but that just seemed normal to me. That wasn't something out of the blue or something that I should be worried about. So I definitely was very content with my life growing up there, but now that I'm looking back, I see why people would look at it differently, but it took a change of environment [for me] to see that.”

He further elaborated that his home city is “just considered, like, ghetto for some people. I mean, it's kind of true but not really true. It has to do with the gentrification that's happening in the city. [My city] is huge, so you have a wealthier side and then a side that is just, like, not as wealthy... [the not wealthy area] tends to be mainly like Hispanic and Black families living there.” He concluded the topic by lamenting the lack of resources available to help families find

^{viii} In some cases, the names of the city where interviewees grew-up are replaced with broader terminology like “community” or “the Inland Empire” to ensure confidentiality. City names are redacted when used in direct quotes by interviewees.

economic mobility. He articulated, “a lot of the families in the IE are immigrants and a lot of them do tend to be undocumented— because of that, they don’t know what resources they have. They don’t know how to apply for insurance— the language isn’t accessible. That just makes it very difficult. I also did an internship at a pharmacy and there were a lot of people that were not aware that they could apply for insurance or that they were able to. Jobs are not well paying in the IE either so that is a difficulty. There are so many things that can be improved.”

Chapter Six: High School in the Inland Empire

As the interviews progressed, I aimed to gradually bridge the conversations into a more succinct direction. A topic that I had been highly curious about going into my research was the active role schooling played in encouraging students to challenge themselves and push their boundaries. The majority of participants brought up advancement or college readiness programs as highly influential in shaping their academic output and work ethic. The program that came up the most was called Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). As Dahlia explained, “we did a lot of things together like the AVID program... Basically, we were grouped into this class every day for one class period. You spend it with your peers so you are already forming groups with that group of people and you basically work together to take these advanced (honors) classes. That really helps you bond with individuals who are ‘as perseverant’ or ‘as determined’ as you to go to college.....You have to apply to be a part of [AVID] or be nominated and it depends on your GPA. If your GPA is too low, then you don’t get into the program. Or, if your GPA is too high, then you can’t get into it.”

AVID begins around the seventh grade and, in middle school, “you get tutored and have a teacher that teaches you about college and what you can do after.” Transitioning into high

school, “[AVID] goes more in-depth and they have guest speakers every Monday that graduated from the high school... they talk about their college experiences and, like, what they do now with life. It was kind of like a bridge program to help people understand what college is like and the struggles that you may have.” Dahlia also stressed how helpful AVID was in developing the right skills to help first-gen, low-income students (like herself) go to college. Unfortunately, for other interviewees, AVID did not serve an overtly positive purpose and even went so far as to disadvantage students in their eyes.

According to Nicky, his high school did have an AVID program that he participated in. However, during class time, “people noticed that treatment was different depending on what [colleges/universities] people were getting into.” He did agree with Dahlia that AVID was a good service for first-generation, low-income students as it was open to anyone that wanted to apply and had the reputation of helping disadvantaged students “close the gap” on their more affluent peers. Ultimately, he states, “it’s true, [students] do receive a lot of help, but then the students that do end up complaining the most about these programs are the ones that didn’t end up getting the best deal out of it or who weren’t given the same treatment.” Aiden found no personal benefit in his school’s AVID program explaining, “I hear that people find [AVID] helpful. I kind of tried it out for a little bit and I didn’t find it very helpful other than going on the field trips and helping with college applications, otherwise, for me I just didn’t see it as very helpful.”

He further elaborated, “I usually have really good study habits and I think [AVID] might be more beneficial for someone who needed help more with time management or figuring out a way to study... [AVID] ended up being more of a stressor. It was really helpful for going on field trips to go visit college. I know they would do a tour of California with like, the local

colleges... but I did see a lot of people stressing over their grade in the class because of the notes. It was a high volume of notes... and I'd rather see them looking for quality in how you take your notes and what works for you as an individual rather than cranking out seven pages of Cornell notes that are just standardized for each class." Aiden found more success in the wide-range of Advanced Placement (AP) courses that were offered. Heidi also favored resources offered aside from AVID such as the honors program that, "you normally got roped into around seventh or eighth grade. You take one honors class, and then all your friends would be in the honors classes so you just keep doing it." Be that as it may, the program remained highly exclusionary as, according to Heidi, "it's definitely very hard to get into if you hadn't been doing it for multiple years."

High School Counseling

Student exclusion was a common theme throughout the interviews when it came to the allocation of school resources. School counselors tended to favor students who came from more affluent backgrounds or showed more academic promise. Nicky recalls how he used to talk to "some of my peers that weren't doing as well [as me] academically and they talk about how it just doesn't feel right because they never got to see the counselor and they probably needed to see the counselor more than I did....now looking back, it's not fair that I was able to see my counselor so many times a week while other people weren't able to see them even once a week." Dahlia also spoke to how some of the "better" counselors at her high school chose to prioritize certain students' needs after finding out what colleges to which they were applying. Those applying to more esteemed schools received special interest whereas other students only applying to state or community colleges barely got any attention at all. Nicky added, "this form of favoritism translates in so many other aspects. When someone does show the motivation to

move forward and pursue higher education, they are kind of elevated and put on a pedestal, whereas everyone else is kind of ignored. It is very difficult to get those students back up or motivate them to want them to do something.”

Other interviewees, like Heidi, just had an overwhelmingly poor experience with their high school’s counseling program. When I asked if she felt supported by her assigned counselor, she immediately responded: “Absolutely not!” She elaborated that at her school, “there were a couple thousand kids [with] four counselors. The counselor would type in your name and in her notes and you would come up. My counselors were super nice to me until the notes came up. She's like: ‘Ah, this one again. She is going to ask me too many questions.’” Heidi also believed the school placed far more emphasis on practices like sports recruitment rather than academic support. Entering higher education, she felt as if she was missing some of the valuable skills students are supposed to master in high school like science and math— thus putting her at a disadvantage to her collegiate peers.

Academic Climate

The high school years are some of the most transformative in one’s life. As a result, the impression that the school instills into an individual is critical in determining how that person views themselves down the line. A number of my interviewees cited the aforementioned college-readiness or advancement programs as central to their development of academic potential and, arguably even more important, self-esteem. In Dahlia’s experience, the AVID program encouraged students to, at the bare-minimum, find enough success in high school to earn a diploma. She claims that in AVID, “it doesn’t really matter which college you go to— it’s more like college readiness so that you can go to community college, or like, [non-community] college.” In terms of other career paths, she says, “I don’t know if [AVID] helps with vocational

school or things like that. I don't think [AVID] did that much, but they wanted us to go to college.”

Heidi reflected the same sentiment stating, “[the school] mostly wanted us to graduate. That was the first goal. What you did after that, we would have meetings once a year. They're like: ‘Are you going to college? Are you going to go to trade school? Are you just going to graduate? Please graduate!’ They just really wanted to get people through and have the high graduation rate— there really wasn't much of a follow up after that.” For some students, this lack of interest post-graduation led to a great deal of confusion such as with Aiden who claimed that, “I feel like a lot of students will say, ‘I just was kind of lost when it came to college... I don't know what I'm supposed to be doing. I mean, I know I'm applying to several schools but I don't know what any of this means.’”

Nicky further elaborated, “[students at] my high school and a lot of the local high schools were just encouraged to go to community college.....sometimes when [a student] demonstrates interest in something a little more rigorous, [the student] is shut down.” It seemed as if some students (typically lower-income) fought two battles— one in the classroom and another to showcase their abilities in the eyes of the school administration. Heidi recalled, “most of the lower income kids didn't go to college unless they were, like, really into the music program or really into the health program. They were kind of funneled in that direction.” None of the interviewees spoke very highly of the potential impact teachers had on shaping students’ self-esteem or future plans. In fact, Nicky showed great dismay that, “the district that I attended is one of the most well-paying districts so you would assume that the teachers would be a little bit better but there are teachers that straight-out didn't care for their job. They were just there for the pay and they made it very obvious. They would vocalize that they didn't enjoy their job.” Heidi

added that teachers were often of limited help in her college applications with some of them refusing to write letters of recommendation. Interviewees generally lacked a strong support system at school and were often left in the dark when it came to how best to achieve academic success.

Chapter Seven: Military Recruitment in the Inland Empire

My final subset of conversation was about the participant's experience interacting with the military. Far and away, the number one most frequent interviewee response when discussing this topic was going into detail about their school's JROTC program. Having served in the JROTC for a significant portion of his high school career, Aiden was naturally my go-to source on the matter. I was fortunate enough to have him speak in-depth about his experience in the program as well as that of his peers. He began by explaining, "I wanted to go into ROTC^{ix} to get my P.E. credit. The first thing that happened was I have really thick hair and I had to put my hair up in a bun. The U.S. Marine Corps was my JROTC program so it was very strict for uniforms. [The hair requirement] was really hard, so I was like: 'Oh, I'm just going to shave my head.'... Most of the original reason that I went into [JROTC] was to get the P.E. credit and then also because some of my guy friends were going into ROTC, and they were like: 'Hey, come join it. It seems pretty cool.' I was like: 'Yeah, that seems, like, sort of badass. Let me see what happens.'"

He proceeded, "you could get a P.E. credit [through JROTC] which was a plus... There were the kids that came from military families that already knew like: 'I'm going into the military.' On top of that, there were some incentives. I think it was if you go through Marine

^{ix} "JROTC" is sometimes shortened to "ROTC" by interviewees.

Corps boot camp, you get bumped up a pay grade upon graduation. You would be a PFC (Private First Class) and then you'd be a Lance Corporal upon graduation if you did four years of ROTC. There was also another advancement for that." In terms of class structure, he explained, "JROTC was basically just that one class. So like, if you signed up for the class, you're in the program. It was another elective class that also counts for PE credit if you need it."

Outside of the classroom setting, "[JROTC] did a lot of volunteer community service work. And actually, I think we had a like an hour requirement we had to hit it or something. If you were higher up on the leadership ladder, you would run the events or coordinate students who were volunteering as well." However, Aiden does not describe the leadership roles as ultimately having a positive impact on the personalities of those who participated in the program. "I also find that ROTC kids kind of live up to their stereotypes to a certain extent in terms of being assholes," he remarked. "Like, being more conservative, and then just like being kind of ignorant and arrogant. And like, I'm sure that just comes with the authority complex. That's like the main stereotype that I find with ROTC. For people I've known for a couple years, they changed the longer they were in the program."

He did feel a sense of admiration for his peers saying, "it's great that they got more discipline, but at the same time, like there's a time and a place for certain things. They would try to carry on some of their authority into other like aspects or other realms of socialization and, like, it just doesn't work that way." This behavior, he explains, may have been the product of the circumstance his particular JROTC faced such as, "the [JROTC] leadership was pretty relaxed. I know the leadership changed like three or four times. We had bad instructors come through... usually that doesn't happen. Class structure was different every class."

In terms of what was required in the classroom, Aiden remembers, “we had a Marine Corps hand-book packet that they would hand out when you first go to ROTC. For each promotion period... there were certain things you need to know like the Marine Corps values, uniform regulations, military history...and then some prep for the military entrance exam.” Furthermore, “we would learn the ranks [of military officers] and the pay grades and stuff like that and then do drills and stuff that would prepare people for bootcamp... We would do the PFT—the physical fitness test that the Marine Corps does. It’s like the same thing but our standards were a little more modified for high school students.” The rigid structure notorious with this military was not entirely modified as Aiden describes, “[JROTC] was very meticulous in terms of attention to detail. Especially for uniform days. On Wednesdays we would wear our Marine Corps uniforms, the uniforms issued by the school. We would check for what are called ‘IPs,’ which were like little stray stings. Some people would really, like, make you take off your cover and make you look under the little folds of it, down to the nitty gritty stuff.... It was really hard to get a perfect evaluation.”

Aiden went on to talk about the role, if any, that participation in the JROTC played in shaping students’ career paths post-graduation. Visits from military recruiters were a frequent occurrence during JROTC period. Aiden recounts, “[military recruiters] kind of just visited. I mean, it was mostly just doing their whole recruiter pitches like, ‘Hey, this is what the military can do for you’ and then like, ‘Hey, you need to take [the military entrance exam] and here is how we can help you with this’ or like, you know, just the basics... It was mostly just like stuff on boot camp... like, it's more of, ‘Hey, these are some things you can explore.’ It's kind of like terms of conditions, but you don’t actually read the terms and conditions.” Additionally, the

recruiters would come to campus during lunch time to set up a booth and talk to students all the while making separate visits to the JROTC classroom.

In terms of special treatment from the school, Aiden spoke to how there was one specific college counselor that was assigned to students in the JROTC. His memory on the specifics was a bit hazy but he did recall, “[the counselor] more stressed the military career aspect rather than the college aspect. It is a bit of an assumption because I don't know for sure since I dropped out [of the JROTC] pretty early on... I think that like, if [students in JROTC] wanted to think about college rather than the military track, they would have benefited more by going to a different counselor. I feel like because they're involved in the program, even if they've been in it for four years and say they wanted to go, like, just the normal college route, but they just really like ROTC. So like: ‘Okay, let me just do this.’ I feel like they were still being lumped in with the general: ‘Oh, you're going to go into the military.’ And so, maybe [the JROTC students] didn't get that same attention just because they had the ROTC label on their transcript or something. Some of them, I think, were able to break a middle ground to consider ROTC programs with college. I think that was something that was mentioned at least a couple of times with the counselors.” At the end of the interview, Aiden asserted, “I'd say the majority [of people in the JROTC] either ended up going into the military or straight into the workforce.”

Other interviewees, while not directly involved in the JROTC, spoke to similar activity that they noticed in their own high schools. Dahlia recalls the JROTC as, “an actual class that they offered. I think a lot of people took it for four years to have that mindset that, ‘this is what I would do under these circumstances,’ or like, ‘this is what I can do after high school if I don't directly go to college.’” Similar to Aiden, Dahlia remembered the JROTC only taking up one

class period of a student's time, but, "it meant that you can't take AVID or ceramics or something like that."

Heidi concurred with Dahlia that, "[JROTC] was a pretty big club on our campus," and "was one of the only few clubs that had their own room... It was a pretty big room too." She also agreed that should a student elect to take JROTC, they would be denied the opportunity to take other specialized classes like marching band. The two women differed in their descriptions when Heidi explained how, "what would happen is a lot of kids would come early or stay late after school [and] they get in trouble because you weren't supposed to be on campus... If you're wandering around, they'd be like: 'Why are you loitering on campus?' So then [students] join ROTC so they wouldn't get in trouble for being on campus longer than they're supposed to."

Speaking to perceptions and demographics of the JROTC, Heidi felt confident in characterizing JROTC students as "majority white, I'd say... Lower income... There was one kid in one of my English classes that joined [JROTC] who wasn't white and everyone was very surprised why he joined. I think he had a friend in it." She further elaborated, "at least with the ROTC kids, a large majority of the white kids at my school were lower income and that kind of influenced where they ended up... they weren't necessarily in the more exciting programs."

Dahlia supported this sentiment, explaining that because the JROTC students were not able to take programs like AVID and find success getting into college, they were eager to find other ways to get a degree and support their families. Lastly, she brought up how both the valedictorian and the valedictorian's sister were in the JROTC, which was a big deal socially as JROTC students did not have the reputation of being particularly academically successful.

Military Recruitment in Group Settings

All of my interviewees who did not participate in the JROTC could still recall instances where they were forced by the school to interact with military recruitment in a group setting. Occasionally, recruiters would interrupt daily club or sports team meetings on campus to speak to students as a group. Nicky remembers, “one time I was on the track team and practice for that day just got canceled because we had a special guest coming in. We were all told to sit on the bleachers and [the military recruiter] would just talk to us... these [forced meetings with recruiters] were mandatory... So it was not something we signed up for, it was something that we were expected to get.” Heidi echoes that experience stating, “my senior year I took a non-honors, like, Government and Economics class... And [the military recruiters] did a presentation. I wouldn't be surprised if they did a lot of other presentations in the non-honors classes.”

Nicky was also reminded of how, “there was an event that happened in the middle of the school year where they gathered everyone for a military recruiter giving a big talk about all the benefits you can receive. He was like: ‘For a few years of service, you can get your school paid off, or loans.’ He just made it seem very promising.” Heidi recounted, “I think my junior year I started getting a lot of Facebook requests from people that were in the military. I'd be like: ‘Who is this 35 year old man? Why is he friends with all my friends on Facebook?’ I didn't accept them, but I was told if you accepted them, they would message you and ask you what your after graduation plans were.” She believes this form of digital outreach via Facebook was the product of the school providing recruiters with a list of seniors to contact.

Heidi also spoke to some of the same points that Nicky made about the certain types of benefits that recruiters were pitching to the students. She stated how recruiters would speak at school assemblies “in their uniform looking spiffy and would be like: ‘Come to the military. We'll give you free college and health care and you'll get to do fun things.’” She imagined these

talks to have great effect on some of the students saying, “I imagine that's why it worked. I know people that I definitely went to school with that are in the military now and couldn't go to college any other way. So that's what they had to choose.” Jackie took more of a dumbed-down approach to group recruitment tactics. He recalled, “they did have recruitment efforts but I wouldn't say it was super intense. We had career fairs... where the military came in [and] brought their Humvee. But then, so did the fire department [and] the police department... I definitely would say like, you knew they were going to come at least once a year.”

Military Recruitment in Individual Interactions

When I first asked Nicky if he had ever encountered a military recruiter in a one-on-one setting, he immediately appeared taken aback. It was as if I had touched upon a sensitive subject that had been running through his mind for some time. Eventually, he opened his mouth and said, “I talk to a lot of my peers [in college] and they say they've never seen a military recruiter, but that's just something that we saw every day.” He goes on, “[the recruiters] just walked around campus... They stopped whoever they wanted and they asked them questions and I did get stopped once.” Here, the conversation took a more serious turn. “It was very interesting... a funny conversation,” he recalled. “[The recruiter] asked me: ‘Do you have any plans after high school?’ I was like, ‘Yeah, I want to go to college.’ He was then like: ‘Did you already get accepted to a school?’ I was like, ‘Yeah, I got into a few and I think I'm leaning towards [college name redacted].’ He was like: ‘Oh, is that a community college?’ I told him that it is a private school... he then told me, ‘Oh, private schools are very expensive... How are you going to pay that off?’”

Nicky explained, “he tried to bring me in with the tuition. I told him, ‘Oh, it just happens that they are very good with financial aid and because of my economic status, [the college]

offered me a scholarship so it's covered.' Then, he was just trying to find whatever point he could to try to lure me in. Once he saw that I was going to school, I had a scholarship to pay for it and that I just had things planned out, he just apologized and said: 'Oh, I'm sorry for wasting your time. Thank you though. I hope to see you around.' Once he saw that all of that was lined up, he just stopped. But that's the thing, when things aren't lined up for a student, he proceeds. You just feel forced to say 'yes' to this man. I've seen it several times."

Resistance to Military Recruitment

Nicky also proved to be a valuable source when attempting to understand potential instances of resistance to military recruitment in high schools. It was a rarity to discuss the practice of military recruitment at his high school but when it did happen, it usually came from the teachers. He recalled, "a lot of the teachers were very quiet about it, but there were some teachers that were outspoken. Those teachers were usually the ones that were not very liked at the school by administration. They would talk and say: 'Oh yeah, I just don't think it's fair.' They would voice their opinions and one of them did say: '[the recruiters] can promise all of these things to you and they can promise that you won't have to go into combat but you never know.'" "

He remembered one particular instance where that teacher "shared a story of how one of her peers who couldn't pay off school did enlist. She was working in a tank and it was blown up. So, she knows that even though you are not in combat, it is a very dangerous thing. She kind of pushed us away from [the recruiters] but there are also teachers who just ignored the presence of them and didn't say anything." Nicky thought the aversion towards speaking-out likely had to do with the idea of job security and not wishing to get one's hands dirty.

Perception of Military Service

My interviewees seemed to generally hold the same shared belief that the Inland Empire, as a whole, is fairly military friendly. Speaking with Heidi, she expressed that in her own community, “there is nothing that was anti-military— I can tell you that. It was not ever thought of as a bad thing... It’s something you can do outside of high school— not a bad choice.” So when it came down to the interviewees perceptions over the potential of enlisting, I received somewhat mixed opinions. People like Dahlia were torn stating, “it really depends... there are a lot of pros [of enlisting]... for other people, they see [enlisting] as a way that they can move up in society. [Military recruiters] are there to try to recruit individuals who may want that opportunity... but I don’t really see it as detrimental.” However, she countered her own train of thought by expressing: “Who are they really trying to recruit? Are they only trying to recruit low-income people?”

Nicky explained how the demographics of enlistees from his high school helped shape his opinion on the matter. “If you look at them,” he expressed, “they are all Hispanic. They are all low-income students who either couldn’t afford college or didn’t plan on attending college.” He went on to point out, “a lot of them had very similar situations. A single mom, an alcoholic dad, or stuff like that... A lot of the time, those students are the ones getting in trouble all the time. So, it’s a big change from getting in trouble to being recognized for something.” He concluded our interview by describing, “[military service is] celebrated at my school so if someone does choose to enlist, at the senior awards night they are given a big recognition. They are given a certificate and they are celebrated. They are given all this attention like, ‘Oh yeah, these students have decided they are going to fight for our country.’”

While this may seem like a joyous occasion for all involved, Nicky keenly observed that for parents of the enlistees, the event draws mixed reactions. He explained, “it’s kind of weird

because when the ceremony does happen and [the enlistees] are called up, the parents feel a sense of joy but at the same time, if you also talk with the parents, they are also filled with a lot of fear... A lot of the parents are not even aware of what's happening. They don't know about the benefits, they don't know about what's going on." Furthermore, he recognized that most of the parents in attendance don't even speak English. He explained, "a lot of the parents are like, 'I'm going to support you in whatever you do. If that's your decision, I don't agree with it but I'm going to support it.'" Usually, he pointed out, the military recruiters will try to directly connect with the parents but most of the time the language barrier proves too much to overcome and minimal meaningful information is conveyed between the two parties.

Individuals Who Served in the Military

Stemming from conversations about individual interactions with recruiters, pretty much all of the interviewees explained that they had close connections to people either currently serving or who once were enlisted in the military. Here, I must bring Jackie to the center of the spotlight as he was the only one of my interview participants who was an active member of the military. After experiencing resounding trauma in his high school years, Jackie was faced with the daunting process of how to find a means of supporting himself post-graduation. Declaring himself properly disgusted with the Inland Empire, Jackie moved to Los Angeles in the hopes of experiencing a complete change of scenery. He described, "I left [the IE] but I wasn't doing nothing with my life... My mom was like, 'You need to get a job, you need to do something.' So I tried to go to school but it wasn't working for me at that time."

His mom remained persistent saying, "You graduated high school and you haven't been doing anything. You at least need to get a job." He explained, "[my parents] were paying for my car— they're basically paying for my room, my apartment, everything. So yeah, it was just kind

of like that period where a choice has to be made— something has to happen.” This is when the military entered the picture. “I don't know what brought me to it,” he explains, “I just was like: ‘Forget this! I'm going to join the Army.’”

From there, he first sought to join the Air Force, “and they were just like, ‘We're not interested in you’... So then, I went to the Army and talked to them. The recruiter’s name was [redacted] and I remember that dude. He lied out his ass to me like the entire time. He was like: ‘You won't go to Iraq— that's not a thing. I know you hear it but it won't happen. You can do “11 Bang Bang^x.” You would be safe and it wouldn't even matter’... He just made it sound like this glorious experience of like, ‘Oh, most soldiers don't go.’ Like, ‘You'll just probably work on the base wherever you get stationed or you'll get some out-of-country duty station, like Korea, Germany [or] Alaska.’”

He continues, “so we had me take some tests [in the recruitment office], like, pre-tests and I took those and did okay... So the conversation literally was just him convincing me that like, despite it being right after 9/11 almost... I signed up in 2005 so it wasn't too much longer after that. We were still completely in Iraq... [The conversation] was just him telling me like, what life in the military wasn't going to be like, and then the selling points of like: ‘You'll have guaranteed health care, a guaranteed paycheck and a purpose.’ He was just basically a total salesman. Then I went off to boot camp. I [finished] my training and within four months I was in Iraq.”

Socio-Economic Factors of Military Recruitment and Service

After telling his story, Jackie took a step back and analyzed how his recruitment journey had ties to other conditions of his upbringing. He emphasized, “to tell somebody who comes

^x Slang name for the 11th Bravo Infantry

from poverty [that] you'll have a guaranteed paycheck [and] you'll have guaranteed health care. Those are two things they have never experienced in their life. You know, I think on my side, I was a little bit different because I had but it was like getting cut-off [by my parents] and it was just a reality check of like: 'I'm not going anywhere. What the hell am I going to do?'"

He further reflected, "we're lower income and anything can lead us to change our minds. It was sort of like a recruiting tactic. Like, once you get them, get them. Send them away. It was like no development, no nothing, which was interesting because once I got through the military, I heard all these different stories of recruiters working with [enlistees] to help get their scores better— to get better jobs, and whatnot. Showing them these officer programs and none of that was offered to me. Like, I don't know if I would have taken it, but I didn't know nothing about it." However, he explained that none of that mattered to him at the time because, "basically, just sort of like those life situations and sort of adversities that I faced, led me to join the military and just kind of run-away."

I then posed questions related to whether or not many of the people he served with were recruited directly out of high school or, similar to his own situation, chose to join on their own volition. Jackie paused for a little while before responding, "it was a mix. I think when it comes to the military, their recruitment objective is to grab young people who are dumb, don't understand what's going on, don't understand life and social issues. Like, get them young and convert them into soldiers. So most people were young but there were also ones that had a little bit more knowledge and had probably better recruiters or recruiters felt more positive about certain people who they helped coach for long periods of time." He continued, "I had friends who shut me off within two weeks after signing. I have friends who didn't get shipped off for six months to a year. [Friends] who recruiters are like: 'Okay, we're going to help you work out so

that you can prepare. We're going to help you take the practice test and we're going to have you go do a certain amount of credits in college so that you can join at a higher rank or, like, have the opportunity to move to an officer program.”

Race and Military Service

Jackie progressed to explain that some of these discrepancies in recruiter behavior (prioritizing certain candidates, providing additional resources and support, etc.) fell along racial lines. He lamented that, “I don't know if it was other people's experience, but in my experiences for sure, race was a huge factor in the military... Now in reflection, there was a complete difference in race when it came down to that like, the white soldiers and the [Asian-identifying] soldiers... were encouraged to go to college and were encouraged to boost up their scores. But like most of the black friends that I had, we were all young, low ranking and just like were thrown in [to active service] as fast as we could.”

Furthermore, he detailed how, “all the officers I had were white. I didn't have any officers that we're like anything other than the white... I noticed my white friends from Georgia were still low ranking— just like the black soldiers”. However, this trend was only noticed for white soldiers hailing from communities where they were the racial minority. Jackie described, “if you were white or something that came from a dominated black area, you were still categorized in [less desirable] treatment.”

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Chapter Eight: Recruitment Entrapment Through the JROTC

In my examination of prior research on recruiting, I found a consensus on how the military's public image plays a significant role in enticing potential recruits. Scholars like Ayers spoke to the importance of the military instilling an image of an individual being able to prove themselves in the eyes of one's peers as, among other things, a "strong, tough, capable person..."¹⁰¹. Additionally, a consensus was drawn as to how the potentially dangerous side of service is presented in an overly simplistic manner that glorifies the prospect of recruits living a life full of adventure^{xi}. The public image the military exudes creates a rosy image of heroism and thrill in the minds of young people. For many, however, the prospect of danger remains very real and concern for their well-being, should they pursue a career in military service, runs heavy not only in their own minds, but also throughout their inner-circle.

According to Nicky, parents of young recruits are heavily fearful of what potential dangers their child may face down the road in the military, often stemming from a lack of information provided from the military itself^{xii}. Cave (2005) echoes this sentiment^{xiii} and I find it fair to assert that most people would agree that this fear is highly valid as history has shown military service to be one of the most dangerous career paths. However, in contrast to this dark picture of the potential dangers of direct enlistment into the military, the JROTC is presented in a far softer light. The JROTC is pitched as a structured environment to teach students valuable and applicable skills in "leadership, health and wellness, physical fitness, first-aid, geography,

^{xi} "I mean, where else can you get paid to jump out of airplanes, shoot cool guns, blow stuff up, and travel seeing all kinds of different countries?" (Hollman, 2007).

^{xii} "... if you also talk with the parents, they are also filled with a lot of fear... A lot of the parents are not even aware of what's happening."

^{xiii} See p. 14 in LITERATURE REVIEW

American history and government, communications, and emotional intelligence”¹⁰². The stated goal is not to explicitly rope students into the military, but merely to promote student “leadership and citizen development, drop-out prevention, or simply the fun of dressing up and parading around”¹⁰³. This was highlighted in the light-hearted attitude Aiden took into choosing to sign up for JROTC. The idea of completing a P.E. credit on his transcript was his main appeal (“you could get a P.E. credit which was a plus”) and in terms of how the course translated to greater academic structure, he stressed, “it was like another elective class....” The JROTC was essentially presented as a non-binding way to learn skills from the military, boost your self-image and ideally, have fun in the process.

However, deeper examination suggests that this projected image is no more than a simple facade put on by the military to help recruit students into the service during their high school years. Aiden spoke to the individual subjects that students would be evaluated on such as “the Marine Corps values, uniform regulations, military history...and then some prep for the military entrance exam.” He also brought up how, “we would learn the ranks [of military officers] and the pay grades and stuff like that and then do drill and stuff that would prepare people for bootcamp....” The argument can be made that this specialized information serves high school students no other purpose than to directly prepare them for a career in the military. What started out for students like Aiden as a P.E. credit, quickly turned into a year-long information session in highly specialized military career knowledge. Furthermore, the program makes its recruitment goals overtly clear by directly preparing students for required military tasks like the entrance exam and boot camp.

The strategically crafted curriculum, mixed with frequent in-class visits from recruiters whom Aiden described as presenting the “terms and conditions” for recruitment, exhibits direct

influence on how the military exploits a seemingly harmless decision made by students (join the JROTC to get your P.E. credit) into a strategic tool for getting around the Optional Protocol and actively persuading minors to join the military. Furthermore, the school aides in this process by providing career-planning resources to directly benefit military recruitment. The allocation of one specific guidance counselor, specialized to serve the entirety of the JROTC (a non-academic, elective course), is a striking occurrence that should not go overlooked. In line with Savage (2004)^{xiv}, Aiden's statements that having a counselor "[stress] the military career aspect rather than the college aspect [of students' futures]," effectively created an future-planning mindset so narrow-minded that led him to believe, "I think that like, if [students in JROTC] wanted to think about college rather than the military track, they would have benefited more by going to a different counselor."

To lump a group of public school students, each likely taking a full-course schedule of state-mandated academic requirements, under the umbrella of one specific elective course they all happen to be enrolled in, and then collectively disregarding the other courses they are taking for future-planning purposes, is highly abnormal. That would be like if all high school students who happened to be enrolled in an elective ceramics course were all assigned the same counselor who actively encouraged each of them to pursue a career in ceramics, rather than explore future-plans in any of the other state-mandated academic subjects. It is simply illogical that public schools, which I would argue are theoretically based around preparing students for all facets of post-graduate life, would pigeon-hole students into certain career paths without it being an established institutional objective.

The Effect of JROTC Entrapment on Low-Income Students

^{xiv} See p. 26 in LITERATURE REVIEW

Prior scholars have touched upon how the military regularly employs the use of targeted recruiting tactics aimed at low-income individuals and communities. My research has shown to be no exception to this process, especially when it comes to targeted recruitment of low-income students through the aforementioned entrapment in JROTC programs. Furumoto (2004) directly explored the correlation between the stratification of JROTC units and low-income communities¹⁰⁴. Furthermore, Heidi felt confident in characterizing her school's JROTC students as "lower income" and specifically honed in on how, "... a large majority of the white kids at my school were lower income and that kind of influenced where they ended up...."

While it may be sheer coincidence that throughout my research, the majority of students participating in the JROTC tended to hail from low-income backgrounds, there is a great deal of basis for implying that institutional action had something to do with this condition. Heidi's explanation^{xv} of students joining the JROTC to avoid getting in trouble for being on campus either before or after school is a direct example of the school manufacturing an environment where students feel pressure to join the JROTC. Taking it a step further, I was left to consider what types of students would find themselves in the predicament of having to be at school early or stay late. In my own personal high school experience, those students often came from low-income families where the parents were forced to work jobs with long hours, extending from the early hours of morning into the late evening. Child-care or paid programming before or after school while the parents were still working was not a realistic option for these families and thus the students were placed in the situation of being left at school during non-operational hours of the day. While I am not implying that my own personal lived observations should be the basis for

^{xv} See p. 46 of RESULTS

all agreement on the subject, while I was listening to Heidi give her response, I felt a great sense of familiarity with the situation she was describing.

Additionally, my research suggests that JROTC serves as a means to force low-income students away from advancement or college-readiness programs offered through the school. Both Dahlia and Heidi expressed that should a student be enrolled in the JROTC, they would be denied the opportunity to take other electives such as AVID. Nicky expressed the importance of programs like AVID being a good service for first-generation, low-income students, as it was open to anyone that wanted to apply and had the reputation of helping disadvantaged students “close the gap” on their more affluent peers. I would suggest it is safe to argue that by stifling resources like participation in the AVID program, schools are doing these JROTC students a disservice and causing more socio-economic related stress down the line. My research tends to support Dahlia’s assessment that, “because the JROTC students were not able to take programs like AVID and find success getting into college, they were eager to find other ways to get a degree and support their families.”

Aiden’s later statements struck home for me such as his feelings that JROTC students were simply assumed to be eventually joining the military and thus were not given as much support in other areas of future planning^{xvi}. Having to essentially strike a deal with one’s high school counselor as to how best to accommodate the military into a college experience is a tell-tale sign that a student is not being presented with a wide-range of options for what is feasible post-graduation, outside of direct enlistment to the military. Combined with the touched-upon conditions surrounding most JROTC students coming from low-income backgrounds, it was no

^{xvi} “I feel like they were still being lumped in with the general like: ‘Oh, you’re going to go into the military.’ And so, maybe [the JROTC students] didn’t get that same attention just because they had the ROTC label on their transcript or something.”

surprise to me when Aiden concluded, “the majority [of people in the JROTC] either ended up going into the military or straight into the workforce.”

Chapter Nine: No Child Left Behind and Academic Structure

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the U.S. military underwent a re-evaluation of its recruiting process to address the decline in enlistment statistics despite an increase in nationwide JROTC participation¹⁰⁵. It was also during this time that No Child Left Behind (NCLB) began to go into effect, leading to a rethinking of education practices and curriculum rebuilding in schools all across the country. Schools saw their academic curriculum choked to execute NCLB’s primary focus on standardized testing. Furumoto (2004) made the argument that with this sweeping overhaul, low-income communities were disproportionately affected due to how “poorer schools receive a significant portion of their budgets from the federal government (Title I funds) [and] they are much more vulnerable to threatened cuts”¹⁰⁶. These punitive sanctions, she indicated, reinforced the already limited curriculum for schools in low-income communities, leading to the diminished capacity of students to question militarism and challenge social oppression¹⁰⁷.

In analyzing Furumoto’s argument, I was especially drawn to her assertion that stemming from NCLB, students find themselves constrained from lack of resources in the classroom and more at a loss as to which potential options to pursue post-graduation. I was taken back to my discussion with Aiden regarding his displeasure at the way his school’s AVID program “ended up being more of a stressor.” I drew parallels to Furumoto’s argument as Aiden spoke of how the class format of AVID appealed to a more standardized educational structure that did not

particularly cater to what worked best for each individual student's learning process^{xvii}.

Attending school in a low-income community, it is vital to understand how themes from Aiden's experience were likely shared amongst his peers and the school community as a whole.

The construction of class curriculum to appeal towards a standardized style of learning is exactly the idea to which Furumoto is referring. Aiden felt as if he was being denied the opportunity to practice and perform more specialized academic skills that he later addressed as thankfully being able to experience in his Advanced Placement (AP) courses. However, the problem that arises is that to take an AP course, a student must demonstrate a higher-than-average academic skill set including not only just intelligence, but also the abilities to time manage, use analytical reasoning, etc. Coincidentally, all these skills are what programs like AVID are designed to help students develop and apply to their learning. Heidi's similar experience to that of Aiden, favored resources offered aside from AVID, such as the honors program. However, as implied by its name, honors courses are a heavily gate-kept ordeal that, as Heidi described, "you normally got roped into around seventh or eighth grade... [and] it's definitely very hard to get into if you hadn't been doing it for multiple years." Even getting into AVID itself, as explained by Dahlia, is somewhat of an exclusionary process where students must apply and meet GPA requirements^{xviii}.

The exclusion of certain students at schools in low-income communities from being tracked into higher-level courses leaves them alone to suffer the harsh academic conditions left by NCLB. While some found success in alternative advancement programs like AVID, the disconnect was, as Nicky describes, "the students that do end up complaining the most about these programs are the ones that didn't end up getting the best deal out of it or who weren't given

^{xvii} See p. 38-39 of RESULTS

^{xviii} See p. 37 of RESULTS

the same treatment.” Furumoto explains that the failure of NCLB’s education overhaul to productively address the structural inequalities of our society and educational system results in students being tracked instead into programs like the JROTC and a future in the military. It seems only logical to subsequently agree with her contrasting depiction of students from wealthier communities not having to undergo the same process. Wealthier students are far more likely to rely on financial safety nets from their family and, assumedly, spend less effort worrying about how to provide for oneself down the road. A career in the military would likely emerge out of that wealthy student’s own personal passion for service and would not be instead forced upon them as a product of circumstance.

Chapter Ten: Labor and Military Recruitment in the Inland Empire

One prevailing theme throughout my research was the idea of low-income individuals in the Inland Empire having their physical labor or potential for labor purposely targeted and exploited by the area’s institutions. The concept of “warehouse culture” that formed out of long working hours and continuous job insecurity in the warehouse industry was brought to the forefront of attention as a major socio-economic construct for low-income individuals in the area. Allen (2010) even went so far as to express that one of his main concerns about the warehouse industry is that, “it is a glimpse of what the economy as a whole could look like if the current trends toward outsourcing work continue”¹⁰⁸. This whole mindset particularly stood out to me as both a frightening prediction for the future of labor as a whole, but also as symbolic of the type of structure used throughout targeted military recruitment in schools that I observed.

First and foremost, military and labor recruitment in the IE mirror each other in that the respective institutions know exactly where to look. For labor, statistics show that it is no secret

that warehouse workers in the IE struggle to stay above the poverty line. In comparison, the military understands which schools exist in economically disadvantaged areas by likely analyzing the same statistics utilized for labor. Here, I find it productive to use a “parent/child” generational analogy. In the eyes of the military, if the warehouse workers (parent generation) live and work out of a statistically economically disadvantaged area, it would only make sense that the students in that area (their children’s generation) attend schools where the socio-economic conditions stemming from being in a low-income community would make the ideal environment for attracting recruits.

From there, the respective institutions force their ways into individuals lives, regardless of if the people wished to be contacted or not. For warehouse workers, this process usually involves being contacted by temporary labor agencies who pitch benefits (albeit quite limited due to the high quantity and low organization of workers) of certain jobs and attempt to lure the worker into accepting the job^{xix}. With military recruiting, the presence of recruitment at schools in both large group settings and one-on-one environments takes place. Nicky and Heidi were quite outspoken on how, in group settings, recruiters paid little mind to the event that they were interrupting to force students to hear their recruiting pitch. In particular, I am reminded of Nicky’s experience when, “one time I was on the track team and practice for that day just got canceled because we had a special guest coming in. We were all told to sit on the bleachers and [the military recruiter] would just talk to us... these [forced meetings with recruiters] were mandatory... So it was not something we signed up for, it was something that we were expected to get.”

^{xix} See p. 9 of LITERATURE REVIEW

In this case, similar to temp agencies, the forced pitch is made to individuals under a general setting of essentially, “here are benefits that we can provide should you choose us.” However, my research suggests that the military took this strategy a great deal further with students than was the case for warehouse workers. In one-on-one interactions with students, military recruiters pried deep into a student’s personal backstory, homelife and plans for the future, in the hopes of somehow instilling its message within the individual. All my interviewees had some form of knowledge of one-on-one recruitment attempts made by recruiters— with Nicky going so far as to even share his own experience being confronted^{xx}. This leads me back to the “parent/child” analogy, however, this time it is more effective to reframe it as “old school/new age.”

In the Inland Empire, the military is clearly privy to the “old school” ways of recruiting labor that can be summed up by understanding that the lack of economic opportunity in the area will eventually lead low-income individuals to focus their immediate future planning on how to best support themselves and their families— ultimately leading them to a career in the warehouse industry. Essentially, “if you build it, they will come.” However, as time has progressed, some of those “old school” workers have been able to save up enough capital to provide their children with the chance to pursue a more “ambitious” career. Their parents’ hard work and dedication, likely coupled with some form of outside financial support (scholarships, loans, etc.), provides the “new-age” students with the opportunity not to be simply forced into defaulting to a career in the warehouse industry as a means of supporting oneself and the family. The military is aware that it has to put in a more concerted effort with this “new-age” generation who now have the

^{xx} See p. 48-49 in RESULTS

capacity to pursue broader horizons after high school. Hence the persistent, and in many cases, ethically questionable recruiting efforts made throughout one's schooling experience.

One of the most personally devastating moments I had conducting this project came while interviewing Jackie about his path towards military enlistment. When discussing what eventually drove him to join the military, he explained, "to tell somebody who comes from poverty [that] you'll have a guaranteed paycheck [and] you'll have guaranteed health care. Those are two things they have never experienced in their life." In this quote, I felt somewhat of a pained tone beneath his voice— almost as if he was embarrassed to be discussing the matter. He moved on to explain, "we're lower income and anything can lead us to change our minds. It was sort of like a recruiting tactic. Like, once you get them, get them. Send them away."

I find that Jackie's words almost represent a full-scale regression of sorts back to the conditions of the "old school" generation. Despite attending all four years of high school and seeing the prospect of an ambitious future ahead of him, Jackie chose to enlist on his own volition, almost as if he felt himself, like the old-schoolers, succumbing to the mindset of being a product of his environment and circumstance. The idea that "anything" can lead low-income people to change their minds, highlights the mentality that both the labor and military recruitment industries have fought to capitalize on in the Inland Empire. In their eyes, economically disadvantaged people are no more than easily manipulated puzzle pieces that can be used to fill the undesirable yet essential functions of maintaining the American machine. Drawn from the overlooked conditions of their socio-economically disadvantaged upbringing, low-income students like Jackie have to fight the battle against being sucked into institutions that actively hunt down their labor and, as research suggests, do not ultimately have their best interests in mind.

Chapter Eleven: Life in the Inland Empire and Personalized Recruitment

The majority of my interviewees spoke to the structure of collectivism and community support being central to the positive recollection they have of growing up in the Inland Empire. People like Dahlia highlighted to how the hegemony of the area gave her a sense of comfortability and Nicky explained the communal drive to give back and do right by the community^{xxi}. While the day-in and day-out struggles of living in an economically disadvantaged area did have an effect on how the interviewees said their community is perceived, the overwhelming sentiment I received was that people generally felt a sense of belonging and even pride with their community. With such a strong sense of communal support in the Inland Empire, it is easy to see why military recruiting efforts would prioritize the need to “infiltrate” the community in order to best get across to potential recruits.

Hollman (2007) painted a broad picture of what community infiltration by the military looks like citing how the process of “role-modeling,” or highlighting a member of the community who found success through the military, effectively helps shape the mindset of potential recruits^{xxii}. While none of my interviewees spoke directly of a specific role-model figure in their community, Nicky brought up that he observed, “a lot of the families in the IE are immigrants and a lot of them do tend to be undocumented— because of that, they don’t know what resources they have....” Consequently, the idea of a person efficiently knowing how to maneuver within the system to both take advantage of, and in some cases, even create one’s own resources for survival and self-betterment, was highly romanticized. For those held at a socio-economic disadvantage, the ability to continuously push forward and finesse the world in one’s

^{xxi} See p. 33 and 35 of RESULTS

^{xxii} See p. 25 of LITERATURE REVIEW

favor helps instill hope of being able to get rid of some of the less-favorable parts of one's condition.

My research differs from the observations drawn from Hollman's "role-modeling" process as I found that amongst my interviewees, the military tried less to make potential recruits strive to be like someone else, but instead, it wanted to make students believe that they themselves could become that model of self-actualization in the community. Nicky's story of recruitment spoke volumes as to how recruiters paint this image in a student's mind. While the recruiter's tactics were ultimately unsuccessful with Nicky due to his already planned out post-graduation path, the points the recruiter tried to emphasize tell the real story. The recruiter's continuous attempts to pry into Nicky's financial situation, even after Nicky had explained his plans to pursue higher education, can be seen as emblematic of how the military wants students to really focus on the type of structure the institution can bring to one's life. Coupled with the regular instances of recruiters stressing financial and career building benefits, the military aims to produce an image of the type of structured and future-oriented person a student could become should they enlist.

This image the military is trying to project onto students perfectly fits the mold for the makings of an ideal citizen within a collectivistic society. In the eyes of my interviewees, who all more-or-less shared the same collectivistic view of community in the Inland Empire, one can see the ways in which a person perceived to have taken advantage of the opportunities provided to them would ultimately be hailed as a role-model in their economically disadvantaged community. This type of person saw a way to not only improve their own condition, but the condition of the collectivistically rooted culture that they grew up in. By seizing these opportunities for socio-economic mobility, that person opens the door to one-day sharing their

good fortune with the community that raised them. Even for my interviewees who shared a lesser degree of the collectivistic vision of the IE^{xxiii}, the military still makes a pitch towards socio-economic mobility which would hypothetically improve the quality of one's life and their family. This directly hits home at the sense of a lack of personal anatomy that Jackie discussed as being the result of coming from a low-income community. The military aims to "infiltrate" an individual's personal mindset with regard to the socio-economic conditions of their environment.

^{xxiii} Here, I was reminded not only of Jackie's perspective, but also how Nicky said, "... I wasn't aware that there was something wrong with [the IE]. It was only when I moved [away] that I realized that people don't see... the Inland Empire the same way."

FINAL THOUGHTS

Chapter Twelve: Research Limitations Due to COVID-19

When starting the research process, I had originally planned on making this project a two-part operation examining not only the presence of military recruitment in schools, but also at recruitment centers in low-income communities of the Inland Empire. With the help of my academic advisors and the Pitzer College Institutional Review Board, I devised a research process that would allow me to travel to numerous military recruitment centers and pose as if I was a young man searching for further information on how to enlist in the military. I would then aim to create a dialog with the recruiter on-duty as to a wide-range of topics about what would be the next steps in my military journey, such as where I would be sent, what sort of benefits the military could provide me, etc. The whole time, I would be taking mental field notes on my experience and then physically document and organize my thoughts following the visit. All information I provided to the recruiter would be true to my own personal background and I would not seek to intentionally deceive the military in any way other than my ultimate decision to not follow through with the enlistment process.

As a member of the now infamous Class of 2020, I had my senior year of college brutally fast-tracked to an end due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. In the week leading up to Pitzer's decision to kick students off campus and move all classes online, I made the decision to put my research process on hold as to tend to personal matters and ensure that I was properly equipped to deal with the uncertainty of the future. Unfortunately, it was during this exact week that I originally scheduled to conduct my visits to recruiting centers across the IE. In the chaos of pandemic and ensuing lockdown, I found it unwise to reopen this chapter of my prior plans and sadly, this led to my decision to remove the section as a whole.

The purpose of this section of my research was to become more personally familiar with the one-on-one recruiting process instead of always hearing about it from a second-hand source. I wanted to get a feel for any tension that may have existed in the recruiting environment and make observations as to how the interpersonal side of recruiting truly has an effect on a person coming face-to-face with a recruiter. Additionally, I would have included a section in my literature review detailing the history of military recruitment centers in the Inland Empire and how recruiting practices at these centers differ from that of high schools. Ideally, this would have allowed me to broaden the scope of my research while also taking a more active role as a researcher to directly engage in the subject matter. As a sociology major, I am taught to value the importance of understanding the “big picture” as all facets of society are intricately intertwined with one another. Resultantly, it was a major disappointment when I had to remove this portion of my research and narrow the scope of my investigation.

While COVID-19 may have limited the physical capacity of what I was able to observe in this project, I feel extraordinarily lucky for that to have been the extent of my worries. As a researcher, I always hold the mindset that it is a privilege to be able to do the work I do—especially when that means asking vulnerable populations to confide and trust in my abilities. At the beginning of the COVID-19 nation-wide lockdown, I strongly considered scrapping this entire project to match the dismal and unproductive state of the world. However, I eventually came to the conclusion that it would be a gross misapplication of the privilege that I had come to take for granted to not carry forth with my work and do justice to stories of lived experience my interviewees had so selflessly shared. In conclusion, I leave you, the reader, to please consider my final goal: In this age of dissatisfaction, if my work brings the slimmest peak of excitement to your tired brain, the tiniest fire to go do right by others or even the slightest inkling that reading

this was in some way a worthy expenditure of your time— then I deem my project a massive success.

Chapter Thirteen: My Work and Prospects for Future Research

I initially took on this project due to the gaping hole in the lack of research applying the study of targeted military recruitment to an actual specified location or community. In this project, I went beyond simply pulling interesting bits of information related to the broad U.S. military recruitment industry and scraping together basic conclusions on an already established phenomenon. Instead, what sets my work apart is how I pin-pointed a specific community and took an “outside-in” approach where I first examined the culture and structure of the community before ultimately, understanding how the military fits into the bigger institutional picture. I expanded the conversation by not only explaining how military recruitment takes place in the Inland Empire, but moreover, how and why these recruitment practices were strategically crafted to best appeal to a target demographic. Throughout the process, I almost felt as if I was being forced to carve my own path in uncharted waters. Having to rely on my own intuition to loosely guide what I wanted my conclusions to address, I undertook a somewhat unconventional research process and I think it paid-off in an intriguing fashion.

In furthering the conversation on this fascinating subject, I find it would be beneficial to expand the examination of targeted military recruitment beyond the relatively restrained limitation of solely low-income communities. When constructing my literature review, I observed how many researchers made correlations between military recruitment and disparities amongst demographics such as race, gender, etc. Limited by time restraints, I chose to singularly focus on the general socio-economic condition of a potential enlistee’s environment, and mostly

glossed over other demographics. I would be highly interested to see future research explore these additional demographics with regard to military recruiting in the Inland Empire. Stemming from Jackie's proclaimed dissatisfaction with racial disparities in the IE community, future research could detail how this culture translates to crafting one's high school environment and subsequent involvement with military recruitment practices.

As a sociologist, I often find myself constrained to simply examining the interpersonal dynamics within a society, yet I rarely get to explore how individuals construct their own brain processes based on societal interactions. Using a psychological approach, I would be fascinated to further explore factors discussed in my research such as how and why high school serves as some of the prime developmental years in one's life. For me, it was only logical (based in-part off my own personal experience), that high school students are a young, curious and easily coerced demographic^{xxiv}. Future research, however, could point to why exactly the developing brain of a high school student remains susceptible and in what ways the military tries to psychologically target individuals for that reason. Expanding this topic across other academic concentrations would add intricate perspectives and introduce key points that have yet to be addressed.

^{xxiv} As supported by Hollman (2007). See p. 25-26 of the LITERATURE REVIEW

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APPENDIX

Figure One: Interview Recruitment Script

“Hi! I am currently recruiting interview participants to help with my senior thesis research project focusing on practices of targeted U.S. Military recruitment in the Inland Empire. If you, or anyone that you may know, attended high school in the IE, I would love the chance to chat. Participants hailing from statistically low-income communities and/or have had any experience interacting with the U.S. Military are preferred.”

Figure Two: Interview Questionnaire

Life in the Inland Empire

- How long have you lived in the Inland Empire? Did your parents grow up here? Grandparents? Great-grandparents?
- Did you enjoy growing up in the IE? Would you raise a family here? Did you ever think about moving away?
- What was your community like growing up? Did you feel very connected to your community? Did you feel supported? Were you very involved in the community?

High School Experience

- What was your schooling experience like growing up? Did you enjoy going to school? Did you feel supported in the classroom?
- Did you feel pressure from school to strive for post-graduate opportunities? Did people encourage you to try to go to college, get a job, etc.?
- Did your friends or peers aim to go to college? Was college a reasonable post-graduate possibility?
- What career paths were you encouraged to pursue? Were there organizations that would try to recruit students from your school? Were any of these organizations more/less favorable for you or your peers?
- Was there anyone that helped guide you during high school? Both in-and-outside of the classroom? What about your guidance counselor?

Militarism

- Was there a strong JROTC presence at your high school?
- Were many people interested in joining the military? Was it a lot of peoples' first choice coming out of high school? Maybe second or third choice?
- Did you ever interact with military recruiters? Either direct (one-on-one meetings, speaking to the class, etc.) or indirect (promotional materials, etc.)?
- Did you ever seriously consider joining the military? Was it seen as an appealing option for people?
- Did the military have any events at your school? Did the military sponsor any on-campus activities? Did you ever see military people walking around in uniform?
- Did you ever notice any military activity in your local community? What was the cultural perception towards the military in your community?
- Do you feel like there is a strong military presence in the Inland Empire in general?

IN-TEXT CITATIONS

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