

Strategy Research Project

Connecting America's People with America's Army: Breaching the Perceptual Divide

by

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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Abstract

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As the U.S. Army attempts to connect with the American public, it must address perceptual trends that pose challenges to the Army's recruiting and retention mission. In overcoming the myriad of perceptions that hinder the Army's ability to recruit the optimal quantity and quality of citizens, the Army needs to effectively communicate and inspire two key societal audiences: influencers and the eligible pool of prospects. The Army must address perceptual barriers manifested in biases that impact the two principal audiences. Finally, the Army should identify and understand how the sources of those perceptual barriers impact influencer advocacy and prospect propensity for Army service. By developing strategies to address these issues, the Army will be perceived as a trustworthy and dynamic body better postured to execute the Army's role in the National Defense Strategy, alleviate bias, and inspire capable young candidates to serve.

Connecting America's People with America's Army: Breaching the Perceptual Divide

Consider a Vietnam Veteran's response in 2009 when asked if he would allow his seventeen year old daughter to speak to a U.S. Army Recruiter at the annual Future Farmers of America (FFA) convention in Indianapolis, Indiana. "NEVER" was his firm and somewhat agitated reply. The possibility of his daughter joining the Army in the midst of another war was unconscionable. "I never want her to suffer the pain and anguish I suffered in a substandard Army," he relayed somberly. How about the Latino grandmother who asked a young Puerto Rican Army Recruiter, "*Por que quiere poner de carne de canon a nuestros hijos*" or "why do you want to make our children cannon meat?" Or, what about the young high school junior prospect who emerged from a tour of the Army's premiere Air and Missile Defense system and asked, "Can't the Army afford color touch screens?"

As the U.S. Army attempts to connect with the American public, these vignettes exemplify broader perceptual trends that pose challenges to the Army's recruiting and retention mission. In overcoming the myriad of perceptions that hinder the Army's ability to recruit the optimal quantity and quality of citizens, the Army needs to effectively communicate and inspire two key societal audiences: influencers and the eligible pool of prospects. The Army must address perceptual barriers manifested in biases that impact the two principal audiences. Finally, the Army should identify and understand how the sources of those perceptual barriers impact influencer advocacy and prospect propensity for Army service.

The U.S. Army continues to attract incredibly innovative and smart young Americans who volunteer to serve the Army and the Nation. Despite the dangers and

potential hardships endured, young people and qualified professionals alike with diverse backgrounds and skill sets selflessly raise their right hands and swear to “Defend and Support the Constitution of the United States.” Moreover, important members of society encourage and support these remarkable Americans who choose to join the Army and live the Army Values. Given a decade of war, the presence of a fickle economy, and an unpredictable global security situation, it is crucial that the Army breach these perceptual divides to sustain a quality All-Volunteer Force (AVF). The Army must convince prospective Soldiers and influencers that it is a modern and relevant institution, represents a diverse society, and provides a tremendous path forward laden with outstanding options and opportunities. This paper addresses the key audiences – influencers and prospects, the perceptual barriers, and on-going efforts that show promise for application Army-wide.

Key Audiences and Perceptual Barriers

There are two primary audiences of concern for the Army’s recruiting efforts: influencers and the eligible pool of prospects. The Army defines key influencers as Centers of Influence (COIs), the multitude of people in society who through stature or position exert official and unofficial authority over prospects. From the Army’s standpoint, they include:

individuals who can help develop a better image of the Army, influence individuals to enlist in an Army program, or refer names of leads to Army recruiters. They can be civic or business leaders, educators, members of professional groups, groups of high school or college students identified as class leaders or influencers, news media representatives, nurses, convention officials or other influential individuals or groups.¹

COIs also include parents, grandparents, teachers, counselors, coaches, mentors, and school administrators. COIs are important because they can persuade

potential candidates to join the service ranks and bolster the Army's reputation within a community and influential groups. On the other hand, COIs can discourage those same candidates by countering an Army message or discouraging individuals and groups through disinformation, harmful press, or inaction.

The other key audience is the eligible pool of prospective Soldiers who encompass the population defined by the Army as the Qualified Military Available (QMA). QMA is the total 17-24 year old youth population, not including institutionalized and those in military service, minus unauthorized immigrants and non High School Degree Graduates (HSDG) not enrolled in high school or an equivalency program.² This population consists of the candidates who are mentally, morally, and physically eligible to serve in the Army. They are the precise audience the Army must inspire to join.

The perceptual barriers of interest to the Army affect the opinions of COIs and therefore the influence they have over the QMA. These perceptual barriers include historical, generational, and environmental biases. Bias consists of thinking or possessing an outlook based on some prejudice, inclination, or tendency. Historical biases stem from an individual's background, treatment or exposure to first hand past events or experiences. Generational biases are philosophic positions that spawn from ancestral information normally gained second or third hand. Environmental biases are the aggregate of cultural and social surroundings like customs, laws, language, religion, and politics. Biases are not altogether bad as they represent ones experience and can aid in decision making. However, when biases are based on information that is outdated, incorrect, or comes from non-credible sources, a decision maker may make an uninformed inappropriate decision.

Sources of Perceptual Barriers

It is paramount that the Army understands sources of misperceptions and misunderstandings that affect influencer opinions and prospect decision making. By recognizing the roots of historical, generational, and environmental biases, the Army can help COIs and QMA members make better-informed judgments and disregard mis- or disinformation. This paper presents four current sources of perceptual barriers based on the author's experience: (1) the threat of a "Hollow Force," (2) attitudes of the so-called Millennial generation, (3) fluctuating entry standards in response to the global security and economic situation, and (4) misperceptions regarding the diversity of the Army.

Threat of a "Hollow Force"

As wars in Iraq and Afghanistan conclude and the Army downsizes its end-strength, the threat of a "Hollow Force" will challenge the Army's ability to recruit and retain quality individuals. The term "Hollow Force" carries many meanings, but they generally describe the long-term negative effects of post-war drawdown efforts where units were downsized and resources were constrained, resulting in severe unit readiness problems and a difficult work environment for Soldiers. Recently, senior military officials, in an effort to educate Congress and the public, have uniformly warned about the effects of sequestration that could result in a "Hollow Force."³ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army General Martin Dempsey, recently said, "sequestration will cause a hollow military, albeit different from the hollow forces of the past."⁴ The term has a forty-year history in the Army, as described by Feickert and Daggett (2012):

The term "hollow force" was used initially in the late 1970s and subsequently in the 1990s to characterize military forces that appear mission-ready but, upon examination, suffer from shortages of personnel,

equipment, and maintenance or from deficiencies in training. Although the size and composition of the force appeared adequate on paper, shortcomings identified when these forces were subjected to further scrutiny raised questions if these forces would be able to accomplish their assigned wartime missions.

At the end of the 1970s, the gravest concerns had to do with the quality of personnel. It was widely perceived that U.S. military conventional war fighting capabilities that had declined as the Vietnam war came to a close, did not appear to be recovering adequately, particularly as the military services struggled to adapt to the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) instituted in 1973.⁵

That “Hollow Force” did not perform well at times, suffered low morale, and endured widespread negative public confidence. Gulf War Army leader and Vietnam War Veteran General Norman Schwarzkopf (1992) described the Post-Vietnam Army thusly,

Not only had Vietnam demoralized our soldiers and wrecked our credibility with the American public, but it had soaked up a huge share of the Army’s budget. Meanwhile our fighting equipment had become obsolete, our bases and facilities had fallen into disrepair, and our ability to fight anywhere else in the world had seriously deteriorated.⁶

Similar circumstances occurred in the early 1990s after the Cold War. Feickert & Daggert (2012) reported that “U.S. military forces were regarded as highly capable, but the worry was that steep cuts in the budget might rapidly erode hard-won gains in personnel quality and also in the quality of training and operations.”⁷ Allen (2011) showed that following Desert Storm, Army Chief of Staff Gordon Sullivan, in an attempt to avert another “Hollow Force,” “evoked the lessons of the Korean conflict with the slogan ‘No More Task Force Smiths’...Task Force Smith was the first Army unit to engage in combat in the Korean War” and “was woefully unprepared for combat with its minimal levels of equipment, manning and training.”⁸ However, his efforts were marginally successful. By the mid-to-late 1990s, recruiting and retention concerns

surfaced along with major concerns about future weapon system financing being, as Feickert & Daggett (2012) reported, “sacrificed to protect the appearance of high levels of readiness in the short term.”⁹

As the Army faces another era of significant drawdown and budget constraints, COIs with personal memories of the “Hollow Force” of the 1970s or post-Cold War period may harbor historical biases and try to dissuade prospects from joining the service. The aforementioned Vietnam Veteran is an example of a COI who parentally guides his family members, but his historical bias dissuaded him from allowing his daughter to speak with an Army recruiter. He did not want his daughter to serve in a “substandard Hollow Force” similar to the one he served in 35 years earlier.

To avoid becoming a “Hollow Force,” the Army must downsize in a sensible way and continue efforts to alleviate COI historical biases through an educational and informational campaign about the effects of sequestration and a “Hollow Force” that resonates with congressional leadership and the broader public. In a 2013 press release, General Martin Dempsey stressed:

that deployed and deploying service members will be exempted from the effects of a sequester. The United States will not send any service member overseas without the best preparation, equipment and supplies possible. We have a moral obligation to make sure that they are ready and the next [unit] to deploy is ready.¹⁰

General Dempsey’s sentiments were shared by other key Defense leaders. During a March 2012 Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, Army Chief of Staff, General Raymond Odierno addressed concerns about a “hollowed out force.” “Ultimately, when we have to deploy them [Soldiers] – and we’ve seen this in the Korean War and other examples – what it costs is American lives.”¹¹ Former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta called sequestration budgetary “salami slicing of the worst kind”

that “would hollow out the force, leaving our military deficient in people, training and equipment, and unable to adapt when that next security challenge comes.”¹² He offered that the military needed “to sacrifice some capabilities and curtail some commitments” and “weather these budget storms as a team” so no one Service would bear the full burden of the cuts.¹³

As the Army’s end-strength dwindles from 570,000 in FY12 to 490,000 in FY17,¹⁴ the Army is considering lessons learned from force reductions similar to post-Vietnam and the 1990s,¹⁵ such as avoiding a mass exodus without regard to retaining quality and balancing resources between personnel with training and operations. General Odierno commented, “even given a fiscally constrained environment our Army will accomplish our reductions in a responsible and controlled manner.”¹⁶ He said that the force reductions would follow a “drawdown ramp that allows us to take care of Soldiers and families, while maintain a ready and capable force to meet any requirements.”¹⁷

Regardless of the Army’s efforts to educate and inform the public, COIs may remain hesitant to recommend prospects join the Army. Countering historical biases requires the Army to go beyond rhetoric. They must produce tangible results in readiness, equipping, and professionalism. The Army must continue to promote itself as a relevant and viable career path abundant with opportunities and rewards.

Millennial Attitudes

A Pew Research Center survey explained:

Generations, like people, have personalities, and Millennials -- the American teens and twenty-somethings who are making the passage into adulthood at the start of a new millennium -- have begun to forge theirs: confident, self-expressive, liberal, upbeat and open to change. They are more ethnically and racially diverse than older adults. They’re less religious, less likely to have served in the military, and are on track to become the most educated generation in American history.¹⁸

The Millennial generation is technologically savvy and makes up a considerable amount of the QMA.¹⁹ The Army must be cognizant of Millennial generational and environmental biases produced through their perceptions about global technology, individual priorities, the economy and job market, and the security situations across the globe.

Recall the example of the young high school student whose environmental bias produced unmet expectations regarding the Army's lack of technology. His bias may impede him viewing the Army as a viable career choice. Millennials are far more comfortable with technology and social media than previous generations. "They are history's first 'always connected' generation. Steeped in digital technology and social media, they treat their multi-tasking hand-held gadgets almost like a body part – for better or worse."²⁰

Staying connected is important and represents a way to physically connect with Millennials, but understanding Millennial priorities and trends is essential in their recruitment. Millennials "are beginning to manifest a wide array of positive social habits that older Americans no longer associate with youth, including a new focus on teamwork, achievement, modesty, and good conduct."²¹ Millennials identify their top three priorities as: being a good parent (52%), having a successful marriage (30%), helping others in need (21%). In contrast, their bottom three priorities are: having a high-paying career (15%), having lots of free time (9%), and becoming famous (1%).²² These data show how the Millennials have attitudes that generally align with the Army Values of Loyalty, Duty, and Selfless Service, which would contribute to their quality as prospects.

However, recent military operations appear to have affected the Millennials' desire to serve. "In 2009, just 38% of Millennials agreed that peace is best achieved through military strength" compared to 47% in 2003.²³ While youth support for troops being in Afghanistan remained stable in June 2011 at 49%, roughly 71% of 16-21 surveyed reported they are less likely to join the military due to the War on Terrorism. This was a slight improvement since 2010 when 79% of the same demographic indicated they were less likely to enlist due to ongoing military operations.²⁴

The Army can overcome Millennial generational and environmental biases and represent a feasible career option by appealing to the generation's psyche and reshaping the Army to maximize technology. The Army can stay true to their proud heritage of protecting the Nation through armed conflict and sacrifice, but ought to market to the Millennial generation's sense of teamwork, achievement, modesty, and good conduct. With increased world-wide natural disasters, Army defense and marketing strategy should focus more on providing support to global citizens thus capitalizing on Millennial openness and a desire to help others. The Army's "Army Strong" slogan should center on the strength of global healing and helping alongside the power to destroy and dominate. The Navy's "Global Force for Good" slogan may provide an example of a resounding message.

As the Army downsized and reshaped after Vietnam, the 1980s Army underwent one of the largest peacetime modernization efforts in its history.²⁵ The Army reevaluated its doctrine, force structure, and equipment and has a similar opportunity to do so again. The Army should acknowledge the tremendous accomplishments and service over the last ten years, but should redefine itself as a modern institution appealing to younger

generations' desire to be on the cutting edge of technology, society, and ideology. Army policy should focus on a bright future with a better equipped and better trained elite force prepared to make the world safer through a variety means beyond armed conflict. The Army must also publicize a promising family environment by capitalizing on the Millennial generation's top priorities of being a good parent, having a successful marriage, and helping others.

Fluctuating Standards in Response to Security and Economic Situation

Over the last decade the American Army, Army Reserve, Army National Guard, Marine Corps, and Marine Corps Reserve, have borne the brunt of the manpower burden associated with operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.²⁶ According to Feickert & Daggert (2012), the unanticipated need to extend operations in both theaters longer than planned created conditions from 2005 to 2007 "when the Army had difficulty meeting its recruit quantity goals and began accepting lower quality recruits."²⁷ However, as conditions improved in Iraq toward the end of the decade when there were also relatively high civilian unemployment rates, the Army benefited from a more positive recruiting and retention atmosphere.²⁸ This led to the minimum standards being once-again raised to limit accessions. The Army's tendency to adjust entry standards underscores doubt about the quality of Army personnel and their chosen career path.

These fluctuating entry standards can inflame COI generational and historical biases reminiscent of "join the Army or go to jail." One of more than a hundred COIs who attended the Army's All-American Bowl (AAB) this year exemplified this attitude.²⁹

Despite the fact that for decades the Army's been educating and training Soldiers in more than 100 viable occupations and instilling in them leadership skills highly sought after by Fortune 500 Companies, the myth remains among many that the Army is the fallback option for high school dropouts and delinquents.³⁰

“That definitely is a stigma,” said a real estate broker and director at large for the Women’s Business Opportunities Connections in New York State. “I’ve been guilty of the mentality and know many people who have that mentality.”³¹

These biases are drawn from public statistics regarding the quality of recruits who show how, during dire global security periods, the Army’s qualification standards historically slackened. For example, the number of waivers approved for Army recruits with criminal backgrounds grew 65% from 2003 to 2006.³² New York Times writer Lizette Alvarez, wrote that, “During that time, the Army has employed a variety of tactics to expand its diminishing pool of recruits. It has offered larger enlistment cash bonuses, allowed more high school dropouts and applicants with low scores on its aptitude test to join, and loosened weight and age restrictions.”³³ The increased waivers included serious misdemeanor offenses like aggravated assault, burglary, and robbery as well as some felony convictions.³⁴ These descending standards decreased Service member quality and reinforced the COI stigma that the Army was filled with undisciplined undesirables and represented a last resort career option.

The Army requires a coordinated effort that upholds and promotes consistently high standards and protects a respected and recognizable brand. The Army can leverage the military’s unparalleled public confidence. “The military continues its long-standing run as the highest-rated U.S. institution. The military has been No. 1 in Gallup’s annual Confidence in Institutions list continuously since 1998, and has ranked No. 1 or No. 2 almost every year since its initial 1975 measure.”³⁵ In July 2010, 76% of Americans said they had a “Great Deal/Quite a Lot” of confidence in the military.³⁶ While

this is 6 percentage points lower than in June 2009, it remains 10 percent higher than the next closest institute.³⁷

The Army should replace a marketing strategy that entails vast organizations with multiple individual marketing and branding strategies with a unified marketing effort that enforces Army-wide use of the simplified “Army Strong” message. For example, Army organizations like Research, Development, and Engineering Command (RDECOM), Army Test and Evaluation Command (ATEC), and Aviation and Missile Research Development and Engineering Center (AMRDEC) have their own logos, branding, messaging, and recruiting strategies. Conversely, some of America’s most respected brands rely on and promote a single unifying set of attributes core to their reputation such as Apple (cutting edge, leading), Google (precise, user friendly), FEDEX (fast and overnight), Starbucks (quality product, inviting atmosphere), and Southwest Airlines (reliable, affordable).³⁸ The Army could also pursue quality local and national partnerships that represent excellence and resound with the widest and most diverse audience possible. The Army’s recent partnership with the National Football League (NFL) sharing information on Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) in lieu of National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) is a step in the right direction.³⁹

In 2011 the Secretary of the Army created the Army Marketing and Research Group (ARMG) to consolidate marketing and market research efforts.⁴⁰ Assessing the ARMG’s effectiveness will require time, but they must wrangle the efforts of the Office of Chief Public Affairs and the other self-promoting Army organizations. Of greater significance will be the Army’s ability to enforce one “Army Strong” standard that entails consistently high entry standards tailored to recruit the best young talent and convince

COIs that the Army is a career of choice affording professional opportunities for a lifetime of service or a terrific springboard providing great skills, confidence, and experience for future employment outside the service.

Army Diversity

During President Barack Obama's Noble Peace Prize acceptance speech, he highlighted that "in many countries, there is a disconnect between the efforts of those who serve and the ambivalence of the broader public."⁴¹ "Our society is exceptional in its openness, vast diversity, resilience, and engaged citizenry."⁴² Diversity is an indicator of progress and "diversity of opinion has been the hallmark of the United States since its dramatic birth in 1776 and has continued unfettered through today where we now have developed the most innovative and effective military the world has ever known."⁴³

While the enlisted force is somewhat representative of the U.S. population as a whole, compared with their representation of O-1 through O-6 grades, racial/ethnic minorities are underrepresented at the General Officer and Senior Enlisted Ranks and underrepresented in the officer ranks compared to the general population.⁴⁴ Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan affected both minority prospect and parental perceptions about the Army.⁴⁵ "African- American and Hispanic youth are more concerned than whites about ending up in combat" and "have strong concerns relating to mistrust of the military and recruiters."⁴⁶ "African-American and Hispanic parents have less trust in the military than whites. Fully 32% of African-American parents would oppose their child joining the military."⁴⁷

The aforementioned Latino Grandmother exemplified a COI with historical and environmental biases that negatively impacted her desire to encourage her loved ones to join the Army. Her comments indicated that she envisioned an Army that lured poor

minorities into the military only to be slaughtered on the front lines so wealthy Caucasians and corrupt politicians could ascend in society's ranks. In 2011, Pauline Jelinek highlighted an independent report for Congress that identified the U.S. military as "too white and too male at the top and needs to change recruiting and promotion policies and lift its ban on women in combat."⁴⁸ She also recommended pursuing expertise in "cyber systems, languages, and cultural knowledge to be able to operate in an era of new threats and to collaborate with international partners."⁴⁹

Research suggests that "the public – young and old – thinks the younger generation is more racially tolerant than their elders. In their views about interracial dating, for example, Millennials are the most open to change of any generation."⁵⁰ "Millennials are more receptive to immigrants than are their elders. Nearly six-in-ten (58%) say immigrants strengthen the country, according to a 2009 Pew Research survey; just 43% of adults ages 30 and older agree."⁵¹ The Millennial Generation, comprising the majority of the QMA, values and operates in a diverse society so one can infer they would be more apt to join an organization that embodied progressive ideals that align with the community values it serves.

Tudor (2012), from the George Harvey Program on Redefining Diversity, Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, found that "it is values associated with values – and not social category diversity – that causes the biggest problems in team performance and morale...While teams chosen primarily for social category diversity are more likely to have relationship conflict, at least initially...they also reported increased morale, probably because their diverse teams performed better."⁵² Her study found that "diverse (social category and informational) work teams develop more

innovative solutions...[Ultimately,] they are more effective than homogeneous teams.”⁵³

Brigadier General Belinda Pinckney, Army Diversity Office Chief echoed Tudor’s findings, saying that “Diversity is an enabler...[that] enhances our abilities to operate effectively.”⁵⁴

As one of the most diverse countries with the most diverse force in the world, the nation’s diversity provides a competitive advantage that should be bolstered. Promoting the benefits of diversity is one way the Army, in particular, can overcome a myriad of historical, generational, and environmental biases that hinder recruiting the best candidates in the QMA.

This approach will succeed given the Armed Forces’ long histories being political instruments and leaders in social change. “In 1948, President Truman decisively ended racial segregation in the military by executive order. Although racial equality was achieved with the stroke of a pen, the integration of women across the roles of military service proved to be more complicated and continued to lag for several more decades.”⁵⁵ Yet today, woman and minorities continue to serve with distinction at all levels of the military. Combat roles long open to men of all races are now being filled by women and in January 2013 Defense Secretary Leon Panetta announced an initiative to expand that opportunity.⁵⁶ The recent policy repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” allowed men and women to serve regardless of sexuality, providing another example to COIs that the Army is a leading organization serious about diversity and progressing with society.

The Army leadership must transmit a clear message that highlights the benefits of a diverse force and enforce quality standards across the organization that effectively

demonstrates the Army's commitment to quality. The Army must overcome biases spurred by firsthand experience or information passed down from generations. They can adopt policies commensurate with societal norms and laws. For example, the Military Leadership Diversity Commission (2011) recommended eliminating the combat exclusion policy for women.⁵⁷ The Policy change became a reality in 2013, although not without controversy and backlash. Although this demonstrates the challenges of exercising forward thinking policies, the efforts send the right messages to the force.

Efforts to Address Perceptual Barriers

The Army and the recruiting force continually strive to understand existing perceptual barriers and improve communications efforts to better inform and connect with COI's and the QMA. However, changing attitudes that stem from personal and learned experience is challenging. Programs focused on leadership, education, and employment opportunities represent the Army's best chance to connect with the American people and overcome existing historical, generational, and environmental biases. Additionally, the Army must effectively downsize while keeping the public informed about the process. Finally, the Army will need to appeal to the Millennial generation, adopt unwavering entry standards, and continue to remove institutional barriers.

The Army should bolster quality education and employment benefit enlistment options and recruiting assistance and referral programs designed to enhance recruiting operations and appeal to a wide audience. Investments in communities and self-improvement gain influencer trust while avoiding pre-existing biases. They provide attractive options for aspiring young people to pay for their education, and embody concepts where tax payer dollars are wisely invested to develop leaders and educate

citizens. These programs also properly nest with one of the key tenets in the 2010 National Security Strategy (NSS) focused on the economy. President Barrack Obama wanted to “pursue a strategy of national renewal and global leadership... through educat[ing] our children to compete in an age where knowledge is capital, and the marketplace is global.”⁵⁸

Army educational benefits include the Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB), the Post 9/11 GI Bill, Tuition Assistance, Scholarships, and Army College loan repayment programs. These programs provide great career catalysts for future generations and make an investment in the country’s economy, but the Army’s scholarship is trending downward.⁵⁹ A superior educated workforce gains valuable skills and earns a more competitive salary which can lead to a better quality of life. As a conduit to a better life, the Army will improve its reputation among COIs dispelling historical and generational biases that the Army is a dead end for underachievers. Instead, these programs ensure the Army is properly perceived as an organization that offers a competitive advantage and is vested in the future of America.

The PaYS (Partnership for Youth Success) enlistment option offers qualifying recruits the opportunity to secure an interview following their service and receive priority consideration with American corporations like Amazon, John Deere, Union Pacific Railroad, Southwest Airlines, DELL, and other highly competitive and well known companies.⁶⁰ This program highlights Soldier quality training, valuable skills and experience in a broad spectrum of Army jobs with professional work habits and high standards of conduct that are attractive to civilian employers.⁶¹ PaYS shows examples

of competent and ambitious citizens aspiring for a promising future starting in the Army versus historical and generation biases that suggest otherwise.

Voluntary Army programs like Hometown Recruiter Assistance Program (HRAP), Active Duty Operational Support, Reserve Component (ADOS-RC), and Army Referral System – Sergeant Major of the Army Recruiting Team (ARS-SMART) are recruiting assistance and referral programs dedicated to recruiting that help connect the Army with local communities. HRAP allows recent Army basic trainee graduates to return home for up to two weeks to tell their Army Story with details about basic training and Army life.⁶² Similarly, ARS-SMART employs United States Military Academy (USMA) and Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) Cadets, Army Retirees, and Department of the Army Civilians.⁶³ Programs like HRAP and ARS-SMART help resolve environmental biases by connecting the Army to local communities and corporate America.

The Army must avert the threat of a “Hollow Force” which spurs so many COI historical and generational biases. As the Army reevaluates its doctrine, force structure, and equipment needs in an increasingly fiscally constrained environment, it must draw down, as General Odierno suggested, in a “responsible and controlled manner” that accounts for Soldier and family welfare while remaining a ready and capable force.⁶⁴ The Army will have to forgo some capabilities and curb commitments and continue an information campaign that educates politicians and the general public about the harmful effects of a “Hollow Force” potentially caused by sequestration. However, the leadership should avoid a fatalist attitude that might fuel COI concerns. Sergeant Major of the Army Chandler correctly explained to a group of NCOs that during fiscally uncertain times, leadership and initiative will be paramount. “Even in tough times you can be creative,

adaptive and agile as leaders and inspire your Soldiers to want to stay as part of the team. Leadership is the key ingredient.”⁶⁵

The Army should also remain mindful Millennial priorities and promote the Army as a modern institution in step with technology and society. As the global security situation evolves and Millennials remain concerned about the use of military strength, the Army will need to advance agendas beyond combat operations and promote humanitarian assistance and natural disasters relief. Army policy should focus on the opportunity for prosperous future in a better equipped and better trained Army prepared to respond to a variety of missions. The Army must also continue to emphasize and broadcast its commitment to families further aligning with Millennial priorities.

The Army must avoid fluctuating entry standards in response the global economy and security situations that accentuate concerns about the quality of the force. Enforcing unwavering high entry standards coupled with enduring community engagement will produce a better quality future force and encourage positive COI perceptions about the Army. Additionally, a coordinated marketing effort that promotes one “Army Strong” message will result in a viable and protected brand that resounds with COIs and the QMA alike. Finally, the Army should promote a diverse culture by continuing to eliminate institutional barriers while actively transmitting a clear message about the benefits of a diverse force. Expanding opportunities to all groups and primarily focusing on performance demonstrates the Army’s commitment to quality.

Alternative Views

As discussed in the example of lifting combat exclusion policies for women, there are controversial aspects and alternative perspectives that must be considered. Though the Armed Forces have a long history of leading social change, not everyone agrees

that such change is necessarily beneficial to the Army, and that there may be other misperceptions or negative perceptions that would arise. This section offers some of these other perspectives and explains how the Army might mitigate the risks raised by critics.

Diversity is a particularly controversial issue. President William Clinton's aspiration to admit homosexuals into the military met resistance and spurred social debates. Ronald Roy believed "the opening of the military to homosexuals as the undermining of a moral principle" and Charles Moskos argued that "the military is a bad laboratory for a social experiment."⁶⁶

The number of factors to be considered for diversity sake is an open question. Philip Perlmutter asked the provocative question, "If it's wrong to discriminate against people because of their race, religion, ethnicity, or sex, why isn't wrong to favor them because of their group identity?"⁶⁷ He argued that since the Civil Rights Acts of the 1960's spurred thinking that "Because America was 'diverse' and 'multicultural,' all major institutions in it should be so."⁶⁸ "At times, the value of diversity conflicts with the value of talent, wherein in the name of diversity, group quotas and proportional representation are unofficially imposed, and people with lesser records of achievement are included in a school, project, or enterprise."⁶⁹

Consistency in the Army approach and the evolving changes in societal values will render these criticisms moot. As the Pew Research survey suggested, the Millennial generation are more tolerant and comfortable operating in an environment embodying a variety of societal groups. By embracing quality regardless of race, ethnicity, or sexuality, the Army sends an appealing message to both COIs and the QMA. Moreover,

diversity gains the Army a collection of skills, experience, and perspectives that will enhance the Army's ability to operate in the range of multicultural locations against an array of threats.

President Barrack Obama identified the divide between service members and society. In spite of fighting two wars over the past decade, the Army remains unfamiliar to many people who were not directly involved or affected by military operations. This paper aims to bridge that gap in part by engaging society through coordinated marketing efforts, informational and educational campaigns, educational and employment benefit programs, as well as, recruiting assistance and referral programs like HRAP. However, local community exposure to Soldiers risk tarnishing America's long standing confidence in the military. Inappropriate Soldier behavior could evoke negative views about the quality of the force, but isolated incidents will pail compared to the benefits gained through education and positive engagement with COIs and the QMA.

Limitations of Study and Areas of Further Research

While this paper recommends strategies to address several perceptual barriers between America and its Army, other barriers and potential sources exist beyond those presented, as well as additional audiences meriting consideration. Also, conditions and related assumptions about the size of the force and available resources used in this study will continually change. Therefore, the recommendations were limited in scope and present opportunities for further investigation.

Some possible barriers not addressed are "out of sight, out of mind", "fundamental attribution error," and "regression to the mean."⁷⁰ As wars dwindle, press coverage wanes, and the Army's manpower decreases, the public's exposure to the

Army could diminish. Base Realignment and Closures (BRAC) along with reduced federal and state budgets have resulted in fewer local Armories and a growing number of Army mega-posts that further isolate Soldiers from society. This isolation could result in greater numbers of citizens being uninformed or disinterested about military affairs. The Army would be “out of sight, out of mind.”

“The fundamental attribution error describes a phenomenon in which people tend to have a default assumption that what a person does is based more on what ‘type’ of person he is, rather than the social and environmental forces at work in that situation.”⁷¹ If COIs and those in the QMA see media stories depicting Soldiers fighting or committing atrocities in war, they might wrongly view Soldiers as bad people opposed to attributing shortcomings to environmental conditions. Regression to the mean bias is “based on the fact that extreme high or low scores tend to be followed by more average scores.”⁷² Observers may incorrectly associate all Soldiers with the lowest entry standards or assume that low scores equal low performers who will stay poor and strong performers will stay strong.⁷³

This research paper considered COIs and the QMA as key audiences, but the recruitment of Prior Service Soldiers into the Reserves represents a rising challenge for the Army. The imminent drawdown of active duty forces means renewed emphasis on the reserve force’s contribution. The Army may struggle to meet its Prior Service recruiting mission in the future and requires strategies to attract quality separating Active Duty Soldiers to volunteer to serve in the U.S. Army Reserves. Additionally, the sources used for this research indicated the Army drawing down to 490K Soldiers, but added fiscal constraints, new strategic direction, and political pressure could result in

extra cuts. Additionally, the debate over the potential for sequestration continues and its effects may remain unknown for years. Additional biases and audiences coupled with potential further resource decrements warrant more research to determine their effects and a prudent way ahead.

Conclusion

An Army career can be a great path to the future for many people interested in serving the United States of America. With education benefits and world-class training today's young Soldier may improve his or her quality of life with every experience. Not only do young people earn a competitive salary with benefits such as health, education, and housing, Soldiers also derive the intangible benefits of increasing responsibility on the job, leadership development, and working as part of a team. The U.S. 2010 NSS emphasized "the most valuable component of our national defense is the men and women who make up America's All-Volunteer force. We must set the force on a path to sustainable deployment cycles and preserve and enhance the long-term viability of our force through successful recruitment, retention, and recognition of those who serve."⁷⁴

Although facing immense challenges, the Army will surmount perceptual barriers by overcoming biases that encumber COIs and the QMA from choosing the Army as a career of choice for young Americans. The Army should increase resources for programs focused on leadership, education, and employment opportunities, downsize in a controlled and responsible manner, gear recruiting strategies toward the Millennial generation, adopt unwavering entry standards, and continue to remove institutional barriers. Meanwhile, the Army can capitalize on the military's long standing run as the highest-rated U.S. Institution and preserve the Army's brand, reputation, and legacy. The Army will be perceived as a trustworthy and dynamic body better postured to

execute the Army's role in the National Defense Strategy, alleviate bias, and inspire capable young candidates to serve.

Endnotes

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¹⁴ C. Todd Lopez, "Odierno: Force reductions will be responsible, controlled," January 27, 2012, <http://www.army.mil/article/72692/> (accessed 1 February 2012).

¹⁵ At the end of the 1970s, the gravest concerns had to do with the quality of personnel. In the early 1990s, in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War, U.S military forces were regarded as highly capable, but the worry was that steep cuts in the budget might rapidly erode hard-won gains in personnel quality and also in the quality of training and operations. Feickert and Daggett, *A Historical Perspective on "Hollow Forces"*, 2.

¹⁶ Lopez, "Odierno: Force reductions will be responsible, controlled."

¹⁷ Ibid.

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