

Pentagon Database Leaves No Child Alone

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Since 2002, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) has spent a half-million dollars a year creating a database it claims is “arguably the largest repository of 16-25 year-old youth data in the country, containing roughly 30 million records.” In Pentagonese, the database is part of the Joint Advertising, Marketing Research and Studies (JAMRS) project. Its purpose, as well as that of additional millions spent on polling and marketing research, is to give the Pentagon’s \$4 billion annual recruiting budget maximum impact. And it has lit a fire under civil libertarians, privacy advocates, and counter-recruiting activists across the nation.

Over 100 organizations recently sent a letter to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and to the DoD oversight committees of Congress, demanding the Pentagon dump the JAMRS database.

Gary Daniels, litigation coordinator for the Ohio ACLU, declared, “The ACLU’s work revolves around personal privacy, but in 2005, it’s almost like the ship has sailed. It’s clear the Pentagon’s database does not bode well for privacy rights.”

“JAMRS is a much larger issue than recruiters’ presence in the schools,” Daniels added. “Students who ‘opt out’ of having their information turned over to recruiters by their school are just shifted into another column in the JAMRS database, called the ‘suppression list.’” With students’ personal information now in the hands of the Pentagon, Daniels estimated that keeping recruiters from contacting youths directly is just about impossible.

Air Force Lt. Colonel, Ellen Krenke, a DoD spokesperson, downplayed the significance of the JAMRS database. It was initiated in 2002, but, she said, it was not a new project, simply a way to centralize information. “The individual services (Army, Navy, etc.) have been collecting this data since being authorized by Congress to do so in 1982.”

As for concerns about the sources of the information on these 30 million young people and how it will be used, Krenke said, “Most of the information in the database is collected through commercial vendors and is given by students voluntarily. If requested by law enforcement, tax authorities or Congress, JAMRS is required by law to provide the information. However JAMRS has never distributed these records outside DoD. Nor is it DoD’s intent to share the data to outside agencies.”

Lillie Coney, Associate Director of the Electronic Privacy and Information Center, said that Krenke’s reassurances are less than meet the eye.

Coney contends that by waiting until May of this year to give public notice that it was assembling the JAMRS database, the DoD was in violation of the federal Privacy Act for over two years and has kept the public in the dark as to exactly how the information will be used.

She says that the 14 “Blanket Routine Uses” the Pentagon claims as exemptions to the Privacy Act are “a catch-all loophole that allows an agency to disclose personal information to others without the individual’s consent” and objects that, to date, the Pentagon has refused to put in writing why it is not requesting information directly from the data subjects, how to correct false information in a record, or how the military intends to notify individuals that local, state, or federal agencies have requested their information.

Two of the 14 exemptions claimed by the Pentagon will allow it to give any federal law enforcement agency the records of anyone it believes has broken any federal statute, as well as disclose a person’s records for the purpose of “counterintelligence, or for the purpose of enforcing laws which protect the national security of the United States.” Coney warned that this will allow the military to begin creating criminal records on individuals for nothing more than exercising their First Amendment rights.

“Compare this to credit reports,” Coney explained. “If you didn’t know they existed and that they could affect your ability to get a job or a loan, how in the world would you know you need to check them for incorrect information? Imagine what you could do with access to a student’s name, phone, social security number, e-mail address, race, employer, grade point average, gender, extracurricular activities, driving record, degree interest, and attained skills if it is shared with any federal government agency, foreign government, as well as state and local governments. If any information in this database is wrong, who will authorities tend to believe? You or the Department of Defense?”

Others object to JAMRS because of the extensive involvement of private marketing companies, including maintenance of the database itself.

Toledoan Peggy Daly-Masternak has two teenage sons. She started the Student and Family Rights and Privacy Committee, aimed at reducing the military’s presence in the city’s public schools. She says, “There are few things these days on which people across the spectrum of viewpoints can unify. Privacy is one. If people knew the extent of the Pentagon’s data collection they would give it a resounding ‘No’ and they would shout ‘DEFINITELY NOT’ to compiling these databanks together under contract to private companies. Yet, this is exactly what JAMRS does.”

The Pentagon has contracted JAMRS work to Mullen Advertising Inc., one of over 100 subsidiaries of the Interpublic Group, a global advertising conglomerate with \$6.4 billion in annual revenues and operations in 130 countries.

BeNow Corp., Mullen’s subcontractor to manage the database. BeNow was recently purchased by Equifax, Inc. which describes itself as “a global leader in turning information into intelligence.” Equifax generates \$1.3 billion annually by selling marketing services to businesses and credit reports to individuals.

American Student List (ASL), LLC, and Student Marketing Group (SMG) Inc., two companies that specialize in gathering information from students, sell JAMRS some of the data it uses. According to EPIC, both these companies have faced legal action for using deceptive practices in collecting information from students.

Teenage Research Unlimited (TRU) is another company from which JAMRS purchases “information on attitudes of youth . . . on a wide variety of topics.” TRU’s web site claims it is “the first marketing-research firm to specialize exclusively in teenagers,” with a vision “to

develop an unparalleled expertise in the teenage market, and to offer our clients virtually unlimited methods for researching teens” (emphasis original). The TRU’s list of clients includes such usual suspects as Abercrombie & Fitch, Calvin Klein, MTV, Microsoft, Target, Verizon Wireless, and VISA. It is noteworthy that it has also served Hill & Knowlton and Focus on the Family. The Department of Defense is coyly listed at the bottom.

As the ACLU’s Daniels said, “In a way, the Pentagon is not doing anything private industry hasn’t done for years. The military is trying to turn kids into soldiers and private industry is trying to make them bigger consumers.”

Daly-Masternak voiced an additional concern. “The sources of data in the JAMRS database include the High School Master File and the College Students File. Both are collected and manipulated by the American Student List and Student Marketing Group . . . and where do the ASL and SMG get the data they trade for cash? If it’s what the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) recommends schools collect from students, every student from kindergarten through college is in big trouble regarding their privacy. Linking JAMRS to NCES and other such data has the potential for the DoD to create lifetime profiles of everyone,” she warned.

The U.S. Dept. of Education’s National Center for Educational Statistics publishes the NCES handbook listing over 700 coded bits of information on students, such as:

Category 0674: Honors Information – 18 coded options including whether the student made the Honor Roll, Honor Society, or Honorable Mention.

- 0679: Extra curricular activities – 97 coded options
- 0689: Non-school activity – 13 coded options from full time employment to patents and inventions.
- 0710: Education planned – 14 coded options from GED to Ph.D.
- 0714: Voting status
- 0715: Other post-school accomplishments “other than employment, education and military service such as elective offices held and books published.”
- 0737: Whether or not the student has gingivitis. Options 2091 to 2094 describe normal gums to “severe gum deviation.”
- 0741: Mother’s first pre-natal visit
- 0743: Mother’s total weight gained during pregnancy
- 1070: Meal service transaction date: “The month, day and year on which the student received a particular meal or food service.”
- 1106: Meal service components. Coded options include bread, fruit, meat, milk and vegetable.

9 categories on Early Childhood Program Participation, defined as “Information about a child’s care, education, and/or services from birth to enrollment in kindergarten.”

16 categories on student employment:

In-School/Post-School Employment Status to Number of Hours Worked per Weekend and Employment Recognition.

Coney said people should also note that so much information is “floating around in cyberspace” from sites like www.myspace.com where young people can chat on thousands of topics in exchange for registering their name, email address, date of birth, gender, zip code, and country. “The free time kids have to themselves these days to role play, act out,

and just be kids is often spent in the new online 'backyard,' but we know that anything placed on the internet can be accessed if there's a data leak."

The Pentagon's JAMRS web site lists the following as sources for the information in its database:

- High School Master File: HSMF contains contact information on nearly four million students for every class year, covering about 90% of the high school population.
- Selective Service System: SSS contains a listing of all registrants with the SSS, about 2.5 million names per year.
- College File: CF contains basic information on over 3.4 million college students enrolled in a range of two- and four-year academic institutions across the country.
- Joint Lead Management System: over 70,000 yearly "influencer (parents, coaches etc.) and prospect leads" are processed on a daily basis from the individual branches of the military.
- Permanent Suppression File: this file is updated and available the first of every month.

Some of the research projects JAMRS commissions include:

- Ad Tracking Study: conducted quarterly to monitor "advertising awareness and imagery" for all military branches.
- Adult/Youth Influencer Polls: track "attitudes, impressions, and behavioral intentions as they relate to and affect military enlistment." The Youth Poll "measures youth's favorability of the military, perceived knowledge of the military, perceptions of current economic conditions, and reactions to current events." The Parent Poll is targeted at parents of children who've completed the Youth Poll, to see what has an effect on "a parent's likelihood to recommend as well as indirectly influence youth propensity (to enlist)."
- College Drop Outs Study: conducted to understand "how the Services can capitalize on this group of individuals (ages 18-24)." It was performed by University of Texas MBA students who volunteered their time as part of a market research course.
- Educator Study: 90 high school teachers and guidance counselors were polled to "uncover their attitudes toward military service" and to "develop better understandings of the relationship between educators — a key youth influencer group — and military representatives engaged in recruiting efforts on high school campuses. . . ."
- Knowledge Study: "Knowledge about the military and attitudes toward it have a strong impact on youth's propensity to join and adults' likelihood to recommend the military . . . [T]he JAMRS program began a study in August of 2004 on the types of knowledge that may affect these attitudes: subjective knowledge (how much one believes he/she knows about the military), declarative knowledge (knowledge of military facts) and structural knowledge (how one associates military concepts) are three types of knowledge thought to affect attitudes toward the military. This study will be especially beneficial to military recruiters and advertisers in determining what youth and influencers need to know about the military, what they need to believe they know about the military, and how they relate military concepts, in order to be propensed for military service or recommend it."
- Media Allocation Project: using services such as Nielson and Arbitron, "JAMRS can project how many young people (15-24 & 18-24) saw a branded message and forecast costs by state and by month. These data have been, and will be, used by the RAND Corporation, a nonprofit institution that helps improve policy and decision making through research and analysis, to evaluate the effectiveness of marketing communications and to assess advertising mix tests (given a certain budget, what is the most efficient mix of TV, radio, print, etc.). Clemson University has also used these data to link advertising effectiveness with military applications and enlistments."

- Mothers' Attitude Survey: gauges attitudes towards the military of 270 mothers of 10th- and 11th-graders. The purpose is to validate JAMRS' "influencer communications" strategies that allow recruiters to a) refine approaches towards friends of mothers who may be strong supporters of the military, b) help motivate friends of mothers who are undecided about advocating the military, and c) help avoid alienating mothers who are strongly opposed to the military.
- National Quorum™ Poll: conducted by Wirthlin Worldwide/Harris Interactive Co., is a twice-monthly omnibus survey that serves as a trend analysis tool. "The National Quorum . . . provides JAMRS the means to get a 'pulse' on public opinion immediately after a significant event" and to capture the attitudes and opinions of American adults on various aspects of the military, including the impact of the war in Iraq.
- Studies conducted by the National Academy of Sciences: The JAMRS site describes an extensive involvement between the Department of Defense and the NAS, dating from 1999, through the Academy's National Research Council. The Council's Committee on Youth Population and Military Recruitment has completed two phases of work.

1 "In the first phase, the committee examined long-term trends in the youth population and evaluated policy options that could improve youth propensity for and enlistment in the military." Their research was published in a 2003 report, *Attitudes, Aptitudes, and Aspirations of American Youth: Implications for Military Recruitment*.

2 "In the second phase, the committee reviewed military research on advertising and recruiting and found it often lacked long-term objectives and coordination across relevant research topics and methodologies. The committee developed an evaluation framework to assist the DoD in making informed decisions on the effectiveness of various recruiting policies and mixes of recruiting resources." This research was published in a 2004 report, *Evaluating Military Advertising and Recruiting, Theory and Methodology*. The book is helping the DoD to improve its research on advertising and recruiting policies and has been sent to each of the Services' Market Research Directors and Recruiting Commanders.

Donald Rumsfeld's top adviser on recruitment, pay, and benefits for some 3.4 million people who are on active duty, in the Guard and Reserve, and DoD civilian employees is David Chu. He recently told reporters, "If you don't want conscription, you have to give the Department of Defense an avenue to contact people."

The Pentagon's JAMRS database is designed to do just that — on a larger scale than ever before, without leaving any child out of its sight.

Mike Ferner is a freelance writer from Ohio. He served as a Navy corpsman during Vietnam and as a member of Toledo City Council. He is a member of Veterans for Peace.

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