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EXPLORING THE SITUATIONAL FACTORS OF
INVOLVEMENT AND CELEBRITY
INFLUENCE

by

Donna Garrett Boltz

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of the University of Maryland in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
1991

Advisory Committee:

Associate Professor Larissa Grunig, Chairwoman/Advisor
Assistant Professor Kevin L. Keenan
Assistant Professor James Roche

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ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: Motion Picture Effects on Public
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This qualitative study was conducted to determine if, through government assistance to producers of entertainment-oriented motion pictures with military themes the armed forces in general and the Army in particular are: (1) increasing public understanding of the U.S. Armed Forces and (2) enhancing U.S. Armed Forces recruiting and retention programs. It differed from past audience research in that it was framed in media effects theory and the situational theory of publics, with particular attention to the factors of involvement and celebrity influence as they may relate to reported changes in knowledge, attitude or behavior.

The author conducted a series of focus group interviews with first-term Army soldiers and high school students to evaluate the public information and recruitment or retention value of the movies. The study confirmed that

entertainment-oriented motion pictures with military themes have only a situational effect on individuals. It also proved valuable in identifying some of the situational factors that can be used for audience segmentation.

Learning seemed to be the greatest effect of motion pictures, making them more valuable for meeting the objectives of increasing public understanding and enhancing recruitment than effecting retention. This research offers the U.S. Army Recruiting Command the opportunity to compare qualitative findings to existing records of recruiting and reenlistment trends. It also suggests the focus group method as a valid formative or evaluative research method for Army Public Affairs practitioners.

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PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

My interest in the following research developed before I heard the phrase "Army Story" or understood the function of Army public affairs. My interest grew from personal frustration over the naivete of friends and family concerning my Army career.

I come from what I would consider a "typical" American family, in terms of its involvement with and knowledge of the American military. When I was selected to attend the United States Military Academy in 1978, neither I nor my parents were aware of much about the institution beyond its tough reputation. It was not a school I originally considered in my college search--an omission I defend because of the institution's recent admission of women (the first class including women entered West Point in 1976).

My family and friends still living in South Florida are interested in only the unusual aspects of my job, such as my participation in parachutist training or day-to-day survival in the field through extended training exercises. That limited knowledge neither shapes a complete picture of the Army, nor generates the familiarity and understanding important to the Army Story.

It has been thirteen years since my association with the Army began. In fairness to the reader, my understanding of the Army is very different from what it was in 1978 both in depth and in bias.

Although it is true Americans may not understand the occupations of many of their neighbors, neither are most of those neighbors "responsible for the management of a large portion of the Federal Budget and American youth [Americans] 'own' the Army and are entitled to know 'how' and 'why' it operates" (Department of the Army, undtd, p. 1).

The Army continually seeks more effective avenues to transmit better defined information to the public. Soon after assuming the role of chief of Army public affairs, Brigadier General Charles W. McClain wrote:

Obviously there's no magic solution for engendering public understanding of the need for, or the role of, America's Army.

However, business as usual isn't good enough. Therefore my goal is to help all of us develop more precisely our message and the means to transmit that message to the American people. (McClain, 1990, p. 1)

One way the Army has seen fit to tell the Army Story¹ is through government assistance to entertainment-oriented motion pictures with military themes. The terms movie and motion picture--used interchangeably in this study--are defined as means of entertainment to provide enjoyment and

relaxation (Jowett & Linton, 1989, p. 16). Films are differentiated as a form of art to enlighten the beholder.

The popular notion that movies influence behavior was portrayed in a scene from the MCA movie, "Born on the Fourth of July." In the movie Tom Cruise portrayed Ron Kovic, the real-life, Vietnam-experienced, Marine zealot-turned-activist, who authored the book "Born on the Fourth of July."

In this early scene, Cruise (as Kovic) and his high school buddies sat in a darkened theater, the screen before them casting moving shadows on their raptured young faces. Of this moment Kovic (1976) wrote:

The Marine Corps hymn was playing in the background as we sat glued to our seats, humming the hymn together and watching Stryker, played by John Wayne, charge up the hill and get killed just before he reached the top. And then they showed the men raising the flag on Iwo Jima with the Marine's hymn still playing, and Castiglia and I cried in our seats. I loved the song so much, and every time I heard it I would think of John Wayne and the brave men who raised the flag on Iwo Jima that day. I would think of them and cry. Like Micky Mantle and the fabulous New York Yankees, John Wayne in the "Sands of Iwo Jima" became one of my heroes. (pp. 54-55)

The often-repeated suggestion that Hollywood's portrayal of the American military influences the way in which citizens view the armed forces

and the decisions of young men and women to volunteer for service is reflected in the Army's regulatory guidance concerning assistance in movie-making. Department of Defense Instruction Number 5410-16 emphasized that "government assistance may be provided to an entertainment-oriented motion picture . . . when cooperation would be in the best national interest" (p. 1).

The "best national interest" is then defined as authentic portrayal, feasible interpretations of military lives and operations, and informational value to public understanding of the armed forces and Department of Defense. Beyond accurate communication of information, the production should "provide services to the general public relating to, or enhancing, the U.S. Armed Forces recruiting and retention programs" (Department of Defense, 1988, pp. 1-2).

Despite these rather grand expectations, the Army never has assessed the value of feature-length, entertainment-oriented movies in accomplishing their public relations and advertising objectives. Have motion pictures affected public opinion or military recruiting and retention goals? And if so, to what effect and why?

According to Navy Lieutenant Commander Sundin, public affairs officer for Navy recruiting, marketing research to assess the change in recruiting activity following the release of "Top Gun" was largely

inconclusive. The movie, "Top Gun," was a fictional account of Navy fighter-pilot training that received considerable technical assistance from the Navy.

One of the major points of interest gleaned from questionnaires administered to Navy recruits was that many respondents associated the movie with the Air Force rather than the Navy because of the extensive attention paid to pilot training. The findings of the report were never summarized. Informally, Sundin suggested that Navy public affairs practitioners believe that movies like "Top Gun" may promote what he referred to as an improved military image, rather than enhance recruitment activity.

The purpose of this study is to determine if, through government assistance to producers of entertainment-oriented, military-themed motion pictures, the armed forces in general and the Army in particular are (1) increasing public understanding of the U.S. Armed Forces and (2) enhancing U.S. Armed Forces recruiting and retention programs.

The Literature

This study is framed in media effects theory and the situational theory of publics, with particular attention to the roles of involvement and celebrity influence as they may relate to reported changes in knowledge, attitude or behavior. It is designed to explore the process of change and attendant variables through qualitative research.

Media Effects

Measuring media effects has a history of great interest and scrutiny among mass communication researchers. Media effects is perhaps the most researched area of communication theory and quite possibly the most widely disputed.

Before 1940, the prevailing opinion of communication theorists was that the media were all-powerful. Common paradigms were the magic bullet and hypodermic needle, which represented ideas forcefully communicated through the mass media to lodge in the mind or course through the veins of an informed (or persuaded) audience.

Political communication research marked the end of all-powerful media theory. The activities of voters were among empirical evidence showing that behavior could not be predicted accurately based on media exposure. Foremost among minimal effects researchers was Paul F. Lazarsfeld who, with his colleagues, set up the hypodermic needle model as a strawman to destroy through their survey research (Rogers, 1986, p. 152).

Lazarsfeld's Erie County study surveyed voters in Erie County, Ohio, in 1940. This study is often "cited as the basis for the two-step flow model of personal influence mediating between voters and the world of public affairs" (Chaffee & Hochheimer, 1985, p. 273).

Lazarsfeld and his associates said this study proved that people--rather than mass media--move people. However, more than half the study's respondents said newspaper or radio was their best source for decision-making information, while less than a quarter said personal influence was the most important source (Chaffee & Hochheimer, 1985, p. 273).

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Yale psychologist Carl I. Hovland moved media effects research to the laboratory. Through laboratory experiments Hovland's researchers eliminated complications of self-exposure to media, influence by opinion leaders or indiscriminate time periods between exposure and response (Martin, 1976, p. 127).

Still Hovland's research showed only limited effects. Effects, he found, occurred as a process leading from cognition to affective response to a conative effect; such as know, feel and do (McQuail, 1988, pp. 261-262).

In 1960 Klapper's "The Effects of Mass Communication" was published as a summary of the preceding media effects research. It concluded that the minimal effects findings of the last two decades were correct. Klapper (1960) wrote, "Mass communication ordinarily does not serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects, but rather functions among and through a nexus of mediating factors and influences" (p. 8).

The research of the 1960s and 1970s departed from minimal effects theory and followed a philosophy of conditional effects. During this period

researchers found that "some media had some effects under some conditions on some people" (Rogers, 1986, p. 157). Among (but not exhaustive of) the theories of this era are: uses and gratification, agenda setting, cultivation theory, reality defining and conditional media power based on situational variables.

The Gap in the Literature

Despite the preponderance of media effects research, little research appears to have focused on the effect of entertainment-oriented motion pictures. One possible explanation for this gap in the literature is that motion picture success is measured in ticket sales, and award recognition for directors, producers and movie stars, not audience effect.

Other possibilities for the gap are considered in the conceptualization of this study. Important to note at this point though, is the apparent lag in the development of motion picture effects findings in relation to contemporary media effects theory. Whereas contemporary media effects theory is limited and situational, many of the findings of recent motion picture effects studies tend toward the all-powerful theory of the early part of the 20th century. To begin to build a bridge between contemporary media effects theory and motion pictures research findings this study is conducted within the framework of a situational theory.

Situational Theory of Publics

J. Grunig's (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, pp. 138-162) situational theory of publics was selected as the situational theory of communication to explore motion picture effects given an identifiable public. The theory is particularly valuable in identifying who some people are based on some conditions and predicting what some effect may be (see Rogers, 1986, p. 57).

J. Grunig's situational theory of publics (1982) both aligns neatly with the current state of media effects and uses involvement as a variable to identify potential publics in certain (conditional) situations. Interestingly, Klapper (1960) said his own limited effects "orientation . . . [was] toward an approach which might be called 'situational'" (p. 5).

J. Grunig's situational theory (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, pp. 138-162) is important to the current research because it suggests that individuals and groups respond differently to information and public relations campaigns based upon their perception of a topic or situation. As posited by J. Grunig (1982b), mass media may be the catalysts required for a particular situation but the effect may vary across situations.

According to situational theory, first an individual or group recognizes a problem and has a reason to seek information to resolve the problem. Second, at some level the individual or group feels involvement with the issue. Involvement, pivotal in the current study, is the extent to which people connect

themselves with a situation. Finally, there exists some degree of constraint recognition. This is defined as the individual's or group's feeling that it can exert control over an issue.

How and why an individual or public is affected by a particular medium may be predicted based upon these three variables. Using these three variables to identify publics fairly discounts a "general public" of media effects. For this reason, this study does not attempt to measure a change in overall public opinion toward the armed forces based on exposure to motion pictures with military themes. Instead, the focus is on a public identifiable by the variables--with particular attention to the role of involvement--the Army's recruitment and retention public.

Involvement

Among the variables ascribed to influencing media effects is involvement. Because involvement is defined differently across disciplines and studies, I devoted much attention to defining involvement as it is applied in this study. Starting with the involvement variable in J. Grunig's situational theory of publics, I defined two levels of involvement--high and low--in which people feel more or less connected with a situation.

High levels of involvement are established using Abelson's (1986) belief-associated definition of an attitude as an evaluative belief. This definition stops just short of recognizing involvement as a personality trait. At

high levels of involvement, the interaction between an individual and a stimulus focuses on the individual and how involvement effects his or her ability and motivation to think about and respond to an issue or message.

Low involvement, then, focuses on the stimulus in the interaction between an individual and a stimulus. When an individual does not possess the high involvement "connection" to evaluate the message according to his or her evaluative beliefs, the characteristics of the medium may become more important in affecting attitude change.

Low involvement is widely researched in advertising (Krugman, 1965). According to Petty and Cacioppo (1986) this involvement results in uniquely temporary attitude change that is not predictive of behavior.

One model that considers involvement as a motivating factor in the way in which individuals process messages is the Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). In this model, the power of the stimulus takes over in the absence of the motivating high-involvement factor. Involvement is a decision point that determines whether processing occurs along the central route of persuasion (high involvement) or peripheral route of persuasion (low involvement). In tests of this model, the involvement a person feels toward an issue determines the route used when processing messages and is relatively predictive of behavior and the endurance of attitude change (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981, pp. 262-263).

Levels of involvement may be key in exposing the proposed situational, rather than the suggested powerful, effects of motion pictures. I doubt that the unique characteristics of movies are so different from other mass media that they can overcome the situational effect of high-involvement factors.

From a situational perspective, high involvement is a factor in how messages are processed, as are problem and constraint recognition from the situational theory of publics. From an all-powerful perspective, situational factors can be subordinated to the overwhelming stimuli of the media, such as the big screen and "sense-surround" sound of movies or the allure of the movie stars.

Celebrity Influence

An example of how attitude change is related to involvement along the peripheral route of persuasion is receiver response to celebrity influence. The introduction of a celebrity may vary the effect of the media based on the receiver's level of involvement with the issue or the power of the influence of the celebrity. A preoccupation with a movie's star versus the movie message may indicate a low level of involvement.

Advertising literature provides some insight to the potential power of the movie star through research of celebrity endorsements (Alperstein, 1986; Atkins & Block, 1983) and source credibility studies (Berlo, Lemert & Mertz,

1970) Given this interest, the findings of this study could contribute to future advertising research in either or both of these areas.

The Method

J. Grunig suggested that "public affairs programs provide an ideal research problem to extend the [situational] theory to communication effects" (1982b, p. 165). Because such programs typically are seeking support in terms of votes, funds or community acceptance, they do seem to possess uniquely convincing results to some managers preferring "hard" results.

The task of analyzing vote tallies and contribution collections--because they are empirical--versus attitude and opinion, may appear more manageable and credible to skeptics. However, I would suggest that combining empirical data (recruiting tallies) with qualitative evidence (the self-reported effect of motion pictures on people's attitudes and behaviors), could provide a more robust argument for the effect (or lack of effect) of motion pictures on audience members.

To examine the purported value of motion pictures in achieving the earlier-described Department of Defense public relations and advertising goals of increasing public understanding and enhancing recruiting and retention programs, this study uses a qualitative method. Focus group interviews conducted with recruitment and retention publics form the research package. A series of focus group interviews with first-term Army soldiers and high

school students was used to evaluate the public information and recruitment or retention value of the movies.

This research offers the U.S. Army Recruiting Command the opportunity to compare my qualitative findings to existing records of recruiting and reenlistment trends. It also suggests the focus group method as a valid formative or evaluative research method for Army Public Affairs practitioners.

Practical Application

If the medium is truly the message as McLuhan reported (1967) and levels of involvement vary across the media, the subsequent interest of communication specialists is hardly surprising. Preston (1970) reported that consumer involvement in advertising was lower with television than with magazine advertising. In what ways and to what effect could audience involvement affect attitude change when movies are the public relations or advertising vehicle?

Another area that is beginning to emphasize "visual literacy" among practitioners is public relations. The strong desire to believe in media effects appears to be perpetuating the use of video productions designed to tell the corporate "story to employees, customers, the public and other vital audiences," (Shell, 1990, p. 28). The effect is assumed to be great.

The hope for powerful media effects in marketing may indicate that field's interest in motion picture effects research. As described by Martin (1976), there is continuing hope:

that somehow a researcher might hit on the right formula--one that would guarantee a gambler's chance to those who are willing to invest their money in mass media time and space to cajole their fellow human beings into taking a desired action. (p. 128)

This study stands to contribute to the continuing field of media effects research both practically and theoretically. The findings could prove important to the expressed areas of practical application (advertising, public relations and marketing), and to the theoretical base because of the apparent exclusion of entertainment-oriented motion pictures as an area of extensive media effects research in the past.

Because of this repeated exclusion, the historical base of motion picture and audience research is sketchy at best. As Austin (1983) points out:

Systematic analysis of the early film audience would, today, be useful insofar as it would provide baseline data upon which a multitude of future comparisons might have been made; this, as with other historically-based arguments, is abundantly clear given the lucidity of 20-20 hindsight." (p. xix)

Absent that analysis, researchers sitting before the futuristic word processor of the 21st century will be working in a void as well.

In terms of historical documentation and research, this study should serve future generations of scholars and educators as they further explore and introduce the field of media effects to students. The fields of study are likely to include communication, social science, psychology, art and literature.

Finally and full circle to the opening paragraphs of this study is the contribution this research offers to Department of Defense public affairs practitioners. By providing research to support or refute the notion that motion pictures serve the "best public interest," the practitioner may gain credibility and esteem in the eyes of his or her peers and superiors.

As Dozier (1987) pointed out, research can be the public relations practitioner's route to inclusion in the organizational decision-making process. Practitioners who are recognized as able to guide their organizations usually are able to do so because they have complete information about a situation before the call for the information comes. Observing the public relations role of managing the communication between an organization and its publics (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 8), practitioners should note that communication is best supported and understood through sound research.

CONCEPTUALIZATION

Contemporary media effects research and theory formed the theoretical framework for this study. Yet, this study diverged from contemporary media effects research for two reasons: First, it used motion pictures as a research medium. Very little effects research has used motion pictures since the popularization of television as an instrument of home entertainment in the 1950s and 60s. Second, the study applied a situational media effects perspective. The findings from previous motion picture effects studies seem reluctant to release the all-powerful notion of media effects that corresponds with the earliest days of research and theory development in the area.

This study could be said to be innovative too in its suggested approach for breaching the gap between research findings and the state of media effects theory. Instead of disparaging the impact television technology has had on motion picture research, I recommended employing the videocassette recorder as a vehicle to promote current research.

Whether on a big or small screen, testing contemporary motion picture effects required examining the process by which people generate thoughts in response to exposure to movies. If people reported any change in attitude unique to viewing a motion picture versus exposure to other media, *why?*

I designed this study to examine the effects of motion pictures against a backdrop of contemporary media effects theory. As such this chapter opens with a look at media effects theory in the 20th century before concentrating on the role (or lack thereof) of motion pictures in theory development.

Specifically, the chapter examines the methods and findings of four contemporary motion picture effects studies. None of these studies worked from a contemporary theoretical framework of media effects. In contrast, I suggest conducting current motion pictures studies within the framework of contemporary (situational) media effects theory. Following an explanation of the situational theory of publics, I concentrated on the variable I believed most important to the potential effect motion pictures possess--involvement.

Every relevant independent variable suggested by these studies could not be considered within the scope of this paper. Yet involvement--problematic in its multitude of definitions and applications--is drawn from the situational theory and analyzed for its role in information processing.

One cue in information processing that may indicate the level of involvement a receiver has for an issue or message is celebrity influence. Additionally, the influence of celebrities has been examined in television and the field of advertising. Their influence as a situational factor in motion picture effects is explored at the end of this chapter.

This study holds significant hope for the future of motion picture effects research by establishing the place of movies in relation to contemporary media effects theory. This seems almost a reminiscent "paying of respect" to a medium so rich in the history of media effects.

Media Effects Theory

McQuail (1989) explained that the history of media effects research and theory developed through three phases. Motion pictures seem to have played a major role in media effects research and theory development in the first phase. In the second phase television presumably usurped the role of movies in research. And in the third--contemporary--stage, motion picture research is virtually nonexistent.

The first phase is defined by the magic bullet metaphor popularized by mass observation researchers. From the turn of the century to the late 1930s, this phase held media to be all-powerful.

This phase predated television and incorporated the then new media of film in the mass observation method of investigation. Jarvie (1970) suggested that the magic bullet fairly spun from the wartime propaganda research of the period. He wrote that the "putative sociological studies of the cinema" resulted in "obvious" findings that "all media can be effectively adapted to propaganda use" (p. 6).

McQuail (1989) described the first phase as giving way to the second phase in the late 1930s. At about the same time, the Payne Fund Studies introduced findings on the effect motion pictures had on special populations-- particularly children. Political communication studies are most strongly associated with researchers of this second phase (Chaffee & Hochheimer, 1985). The War Department also conducted a series of research studies on training and indoctrination films during World War II that reported little effect and "gave room for various hypothetical explanations" (Handel, 1950, p. 205).

Klapper's (1960) summary of this phase concluded that the media were not all-powerful, but instead had a minimal effect working within the framework of other social and cultural influences. However, just as the minimal effects theory was established, television upset the theoretical stage with its popular reception in the 1950s and 60s.²

Although I do not believe that television alone interrupted the second phase of media effects theory, it most certainly restructured the research. The attention paid to the role of motion pictures in media effects theory dwindled. The motion picture seems never to have breached the gap between McQuail's first and second phases, before it was discarded as a research medium in the shift to television.

That abandonment seems to have led to a point where motion picture effects findings lag behind media effects theory. Little research in the

intervening years can explain the place of the motion picture in contemporary media effects theory, or suggest its direction for the future. The few contemporary researchers in the field begin their studies with speculation on why the current gap in the literature exists.

Gaps in the Literature

Prevailing popular thought may be that movies do affect people's attitudes and even behavior in some imitative cases. Most of us can recall filing out of a crowded movie theater and hearing strangers around us comment on how the movie radically changed their attitude toward the portrayed individual, group or system. However, students of motion picture effects attempting to explain this attitude-change phenomenon may find scant research in support of the claim.

In the realm of media effects research, which crowds communication theory texts, there is a curious absence of research on the effects of motion pictures. The reason for this absence has been questioned by those few researchers in the field who have found themselves faced with a lack of historical or research literature from which to draw.

Turner (1988) suggested that the gap in the literature grew from an artistic desire to spurn popular culture in deference to the high culture perspective of film as art. Turner said that research on moviegoing audiences

has suffered the views of high culture film critics and academicians, and gaining research stature will take some time.

Jowett and Linton (1989) explained that their work in "Movies as Mass Communication" was "an outgrowth of [their] mutual surprise and minor annoyance that movies were almost never included when discussions of 'mass' media arise" (p. 9). They offered three reasons for this virtual exclusion of movies in mass media studies. (However, the authors do acknowledge that in the nine years between the first and second editions of their book, movies have become more often discussed and written about in the context of mass media.)

The first explanation concurred with Turner's findings of film as art. Film as art has led to what Jowett and Linton (1989) called the "conscious separation" of motion pictures from the monotony of other day-to-day mass media.

Second, because movies only recently have received what Jowett and Linton (1989, p. 14) described as "widespread, serious attention," the study has not settled into a delineated discipline. The studies that are available run the academic and methodological gamut. This fragmented approach to the study of movies has resulted in the "fragmented nature of our knowledge about the movies" (p. 14).

A third explanation for the omission of movies in mass media discussion contributed to what Jowett and Linton said entrenched movies in the

mass media mix. This detractor and abettor of movie research is television. When television first came on the scene, it displaced the attention of the new communication scholar.

However, the numerous contemporary links between television and the movies may be the key to the likely longevity of movies as mass media. Because of such activities as television "featurettes" documenting movie production, what once was viewed by the movie industry as an audience thief may now deliver the audience in a complementary fashion.

The television-theater relationship pays off when a movie shown on television draws a large audience based on its box office reputation. Even before a movie reaches network television, its life may have been extended through videotape rentals or premium cable viewing or both (Jowett & Linton, 1989, pp. 21-22).

Agreeing with Jowett and Linton on all points, Austin (1983) added to these explanations for the void in the research: the secrecy of the movie industry, lack of research funding and the non-mass nature of movies. Austin explained that this non-mass characteristic resulted from the presentation of movies as individual units, versus vehicles that are sequentially issued, such as newspapers and magazines. This last explanation--non-mass--seems particularly weak. According to McQuail's (1989) description of mass communication, mass media vehicles share typical characteristics such as:

backing by a professional, formally organized sender; transmitting a manufactured message that is multiplied in some way; and reaching a large audience, sharing the experience with others. Motion pictures, it seems, possess these characteristics.

One additional explanation for the lack of past motion picture effects studies may well be the insubstantial value of such effects when the major objective is the movie's box office appeal. I would suggest that studios are most concerned with attracting patrons. Short of demanding ticket refunds or rendering adverse reviews, audience effect is unimportant to the motion picture industry.

But audience effect has been an important consideration in the decision-making of Army public affairs officers rendering support to entertainment-oriented motion pictures. Department of Defense Instruction 5410.16 and Army Regulation 360-5 specify that "it is Department of the Army (DA) and Department of Defense (DOD) policy to provide assistance to entertainment-oriented projects when cooperation will benefit DA and DOD, or when support is in the best national interest" (AR 360-5, 1989, p. 11).

The Military and the Media

The U.S. Armed Forces, for their part in rendering assistance in movie-making, neither pay for the endorsement, nor receive payment for services. What the Army does do includes (AR 360-5, 1989):

- allow a minimal diversion of equipment, personnel and material resources--without interruption to normal training and operation--in support of movie production.

- assign a full-time project officer to support the project (as required by the Office of the Chief of Army Public Affairs).

- provide material and personnel resources when they are not available through private or commercial enterprise.

- allow military personnel to participate as movies extras when on approved leave.

A contemporary example of the working relationship between the Army and the motion picture producer is from the 1990 movie "Firebirds." The Army's technical liaison for that movie assumed responsibilities that included: reviewing the script, locating props within the Army inventory when they were not commercially available, ensuring all movie personnel and equipment were cleared for use of and in the Army helicopters, and following up on the production company's repayment of Army fuel and supplies used during production (Hasenauer, 1990).

The assumed effects of motion pictures have proved sufficient to merit the Army's technical assistance (or refusal) in the past. These assumed effects, despite the acknowledged lack of empirical support, are an integral part of the history of military involvement with Hollywood.

The most widely repeated examples of the armed forces' confidence in the power of movies to shape attitudes and boost recruitment tallies are from associations that occurred during the war years (Smith, 1975; Suid, 1978; Shindler, 1979; Willett, 1981; Austin, 1989). One particularly potent illustration is a conversation between Jack Warner of Warner Brothers and General Arnold of the U.S. Air Force, retold by Shindler (1978):

. . . in 1942 the telephone rang in Jack Warner's office and General Arnold got on the line to complain that recruitment of rear gunners in the USAF was sluggish but he was sure that a nice cheery film about rear gunners would solve the problem. "Give it some romantic interest," added the General helpfully. Sure enough, within a few months Warner Bros' production Rear Gunner, starring James Stewart, was in exhibition and recruitment soon reached acceptable levels. (p. 9)

Valuing motion pictures for their untested effects is not unique to the American military but extends to corporations such as the Aero Mayflower Transit Company, an example described by Floros (1983).

The Corporate Movie

The "Mayflower Film" has been boasted by its distributor as the most widely-seen company movie ever produced. The 25-minute motion picture

does not focus on the household moving company but on the recreation of the ship and voyage that brought the Pilgrims to America in 1620.

Floros (1983) attributed the success of the motion picture to its "soft-sell image building effect" (p. 25). Among the returns that the company has credited to the movie, now in distribution for more than 30 years, is "nationwide publicity and an incalculable amount of that precious commodity known as good will" (p. 25).

In the 1990s public relations firms report that clients are convinced that televised communications have a power superior to the printed word. To this end they are pressing public relations firms to produce high-quality corporate videos, to step up placement of stories in broadcast media and to train client spokespersons to work in a television environment (Firms raid TV newsrooms for talent, 1991, pp. 10 & 15).

The lack of research previously mentioned makes the apparent confidence that motion pictures affect audience attitude and behavior mostly speculative. In the next section I critically analyzed the limited motion picture effects studies conducted in the era of situational media effects to explore the cause for continued faith in the power of movies.

Limited Contemporary Research

Three of the four studies presented in the following section were conducted after 1960--in the era of contemporary media effects. I included the

first study, although conducted in 1948, because it adeptly illustrated points significant to the methodology and identification of variables in this study. Additionally, given the lack of research overall, I considered it important in characterizing the nature of past methods and findings. Despite the acknowledged lack of research in this area (and thus the greater value of this undertaking), the following studies most directly are associated with the tenets of this study.

"Gentleman's Agreement"

Rosen's (1948) study, "The Effect of the Motion Picture 'Gentleman's Agreement' on Attitudes Toward Jews," opens with an acknowledgement of the limited use of motion picture audiences in attitude modification studies. The point is not to belabor the aforementioned dearth of research in the area, but to use Rosen's study as a starting point for empirical studies. Rosen set out to investigate changes in people's attitudes toward Jews following their exposure to the motion picture, "Gentleman's Agreement."

Rosen configured experimental and control groups from college students in an introductory psychology course. Scores were tabulated from one pretest questionnaire and two posttest questionnaires (administered one and three days after the control group saw the motion picture). Additionally, the experimental group answered essay questions about what they learned from the

movie, their opinion on claims that the movie was propaganda and whether they favored more movies dealing with the treatment of minorities.

The findings of the experiment showed the experimental group expressed increased tolerance toward Jews, while scores of the control group showed no "appreciable change" (p. 533). Rosen acknowledged that some members of the experimental group chose not to attend the movie. His response to the possible taint of self-selection was to dismiss any impact because there was little variance in pretest scores across the two groups and the nature of the explained absences related to studying, working or commuting.

Among contemporary media effects theorists, uses and gratifications authors may contest the importance of the self-selection variable Rosen easily dismissed. Communication effect cannot be assumed in this study, according to uses and gratification theorists Rubin and Rubin (1989), because:

we must first understand communication motivation to interpret communication effects. To understand motivation, we must assess social and psychological antecedents, and personal and mediated functional alternatives. This investigation extends research into the interface of personal and mediated communication, and synthesizes the study of communication motivation and outcomes. (pp. 92-93)

Did subjects with favorable attitudes toward Jewish people attend the movie seeking to have those attitudes reinforced? Movie viewing is a highly selective process, such that even when subjects are given free tickets they may elect to see (or not see) the movie versus a movie. In making that selection, they may be satisfying certain desires. Then selection becomes an irrefutable antecedent to media effects findings in this (and other) motion picture studies.

Unfortunately, Rosen proposed no theoretical framework supporting this study. Any theoretical link between motion picture effects and Rosen's findings must be made by the reader. Two additional points of value to media effects research on contemporary motion picture audiences are made in his closing comments.

First, Rosen found that subjects provided essay answers less likely to parallel their questionnaire scores when stating how their own attitudes had changed versus when asked to predict how the public would respond to the movie. In general, subjects responded that other people would be more affected by the movie than they were. Rosen suggested that this was an indirect way for subjects to project their own attitude change.

Davison (1982) proposed a third person effect of communication that supports differently the view held by these participants. He said that people are likely to overestimate the effect mass communication has on others. Davison explained that people consider themselves experts on issues important

to them. These experts report that other people--not experts--are likely to be more influenced by the media.

Second, Rosen found that "subjects whose attitudes were originally more favorable toward Jews, also tended to receive the movie more favorably" (p. 536). This identified the involvement variable that will be discussed later in this chapter. The finding suggests a motivation to process information differently based on attitudes held before the motion picture was shown.

A large part of the history of motion picture effects that preceded studies like Rosen's came from a collection of studies solicited to support a motion picture censorship movement in the early 1930s. These studies, conducted through the support of a \$200,000 grant from the Payne Fund, set out to support an all-powerful theory of media effects that would lead to increased self-regulatory policies within the movie industry (Austin, 1989, p. 96).

The Payne Fund studies were not included here because they fell in the earliest phase of media effects theory. However, one contemporary study returned to the population and findings of a 1931 Payne Fund study to conduct the motion picture effect research described below.

"The Birth of a Nation"

Moore (1971) returned to the same Illinois high school that was used in one 1931 motion picture effects experiment sponsored by the Payne Fund. The original study reported pronounced negative attitude shifts toward Blacks

following exposure to the movie, "The Birth of a Nation"--a decidedly anti-black movie (Moore, 1971, pp. 24-29).

Moore (1971), questioning this finding, noted that the 1931 study was conducted without a control group. In addition, the same instrument (the Thurstone scale) was used for the pretest and the posttest with nine days between the administration of the two (Moore, 1971, p. 29).

Moore found, 40 years after the conduct of the first experiment, that the school was still all White, and the town's demographic makeup "was only slightly different" than it was described for the first study (Moore, 1971, p. 34). Moore modified his method by developing a control group, a new test instrument that included Thurstone's original 24 statements with 24 statements designed by Moore, and same day pre- and posttesting (pp. 34-36).

Specifically, Moore selected 150 students ranging from grades seven to twelve. All students were administered the pretest of 48 statements. The students were told to mark statements "agree" or "disagree." In instances where they were undecided, statements were to be marked "disagree" (Moore, 1971, p 35).

A control group of 50 students was separated after the pretest and shown a comparably long silent movie without racial content. The other 100 students watched "The Birth of a Nation." Following viewing of either the

test or control movie, the students were posttested using the same 48 statements (rearranged) as the pretest.

Moore (1971) concluded that although no statistically significant change in attitude was found, the slight shift in the student data indicated a more favorable attitude toward Blacks. This finding was different than the pronounced anti-black attitude change reported in the 1931 findings.

This study is particularly interesting for three reasons. First, Moore did not question the impact that a 76-year-old, silent movie would have on students accustomed to color "talkies." Through this omission, Moore failed to consider the effect the medium, versus just the message, could have on audience members.

Second, finding less effect than the 1931 study, Moore did mention the impact of involvement in attitude change. He subscribed to the social judgement theorists' view (see Petty and Cacioppo, 1981, pp. 107-109) that greater involvement would result in less attitude change. Specifically, "The literature appears to support the probability that those attitudes in the sample most strongly pro and most strongly anti Negro will show little, if any, significant change from pre to posttest, after seeing 'The Birth of a Nation'" (Moore, 1971, p.33).

Third, the pre- and posttest survey format did not provide Moore feedback on the amount of cognitive elaboration occurring after the students'

exposure to the movie and only measured short-term change. Using this method, he could not determine if increased elaboration resulted in increased communication behavior. Moore (1971) concluded:

One does not know why the 1971 group showed no significant change. One does not even know why the groups moved in the opposite direction: toward favorableness after seeing the film. One does know, however, that there is no conclusive evidence that the move was caused by the film. (p. 59)

Not restricted to the issue of racism, contemporary research in motion picture effects stands to examine a full range of social processes and targeted publics. Practical studies, given the wide range of content in entertainment motion pictures, could be of interest to diverse groups of race, religious affiliation and special needs. Another group likely to find interest in the potential of audience effects is the political party. Campaign managers and candidates alike have a history of confidence in the power of the media as is evident in one of the strongest arms of media effects research--political communication.

Elliot and Schenk-Hamlin (1979) acknowledged that the motion picture in the past has been regarded as "a second class medium for communication research," (p. 546). They set out to study the influence of "All the President's Men" on the audience's attitude toward politics and the press. An insightful

point made by the research team was that movies always have delivered more than entertainment through the ability to serve as some audiences' only exposure to the portrayed group or situation.

"All the President's Men"

Elliot and Schenk-Hamlin (1979) used a two-wave panel study of 115 college students from an introductory speech course. The panel was screened to include students who could be grouped as neither having seen the movie nor read the book of the same name or who had seen the movie (regardless of having read or not read the book).

Subjects first were administered the questionnaire one week before the movie's opening. The questionnaire was administered for a second time five weeks later.

The study revealed that an attitude of "political alienation is subject to . . . a direct film influence" (Elliot & Schenck-Hamlin, 1979, p. 551).

Regarding attitudes toward the press, attitude change was significant and altered along political party lines.

Not all tested attitudes changed following motion picture attendance. However, the authors concluded that "exposure to a well constructed message, such as this film, can have at least a short term influence on a particular political attitude but this influence does not generalize across political attitudes" (Elliot & Schenck-Hamlin, 1979, pp. 552-553). This conditional-

effect perspective may seem a copout, but probably it best describes the level at which current research supports the theoretical base of media effects.

An interesting comment regarding the possible criticism of the representativeness of the college student sample applies to this and the previously referenced studies. Elliot and Schenk-Hamlin (1979) explained that college students were of the age group that represented two-thirds of the movie-going population in 1976. (However, Jowett and Linton [1989, p. 89] pointed out that the dominant age category is shifting as aging baby-boomers continue to dictate population trends.)

Although none of the referenced studies examines military-oriented movies, the age differential is important. Entertainment-oriented movies with military themes must reach the enlistment-age population of 17- to 21-year-olds.

Another study from the field of psychology examined changes in college students' attitudes toward mental illness following their attendance at the motion picture "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" (Domino, 1983). Domino, like Rosen, began his research report with commentary on the lack of "attention given to cinematography either as an art form or as a social phenomenon" (p. 179). In fact, he made clear that the true purpose of his research was "not to focus on attitudes towards mental illness but to encourage psychologists to study films as a powerful influence on our lives" (p. 182).

"One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest"

Domino (1983) described his research as a field study conducted over an 11-month period. Subjects were 124 college first- and second-year students from a Western Civilization class. All were volunteers.

A pretest was administered three months before the public release of the movie, "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest." One posttest was administered after the self-selected exposure of 85 students to the movie. A second posttest was given following random assignment from 115 of the previous subjects to view either a 90-minute television documentary on mental illness or an unrelated television offering.

The end result was four groups: students who had seen both the motion picture and the related documentary, students who had seen the motion picture and the unrelated television offering, students who had not seen the motion picture but had seen the related television documentary and students who had seen neither the motion picture nor the related television offering. A 108-item attitude questionnaire was administered to all groups.

The students who saw "Cuckoo's Nest" showed significant attitude change. The additional impact of the mental illness television documentary on the group that attended the motion picture "was nil" (p. 181). Indeed, "none of the groups exhibited significant changes in scores as a result of watching the television documentary" (p. 181).

Domino did not offer an explanation of why the documentary failed to elicit attitude change. He described the documentary as designed to "present a less fictional account of life inside a mental institution. . .[by]. . .juxtaposing scenes from 'Cuckoo's Nest' with cinemaverite scenes filmed at the same hospital" (p. 180).

Could the medium--television instead of motion picture in a theater--have altered the audience effect? Did the absence of celebrity influence in the documentary result in "nil" effect? If the answer is yes, movies would appear to have a more powerful effect than television. This was, in fact, what Domino concluded.

Domino (1983) further concluded that cinematography could achieve the same effect on attitude change toward mental illness as actual open-hospital-type exposure is said to create--the power of face-to-face communication. While warning that his findings are "tentative and in need of replication" (Domino, 1983, p. 182), he did urge psychologists to study the influence that his research suggests movies possess.

Domino may in fact have found that motion pictures can affect attitude change sometimes in some people under some situations, but he failed to address the when, who or which of the matter. Presented without support, the claim that motion pictures are an instrument of change seems lofty and hypothetical.

Bridging the Gap with Television Technology

The juxtaposition of the television documentary presented in Domino's (1983) study introduced the idea that movies possess characteristics separate from other mass media. He suggested that not only are the characteristics separate, but they may be unique to the medium and influence potential audience effect.

Inside the theater, for example, the patron is drawn into the cool, dark, popcorn-scented hall that is common and expected only as part of the collective "movie experience." And when the show begins the audience's visual and audio sensors are overwhelmed by the magnitude of the presentation.

However, many of moviegoing characteristics are shared with television media--particularly premium cable movie channels and the videocassette recorder (VCR). Among those motion picture characteristics are self-selection--reading reviews or perhaps soliciting friends' advice on which movie to see. And once that selection is made, an investment of money and time follows for the event of moviegoing, pay-per-view or VCR movie rental.

Indeed it is naive to suggest that the only forum in which people view movies is the theater. On the contrary, people may view movies in their homes through a number of complementary motion picture-television avenues.

Although the motion picture research reviewed here focused on the showing of first-run movies (in theaters), it is impossible not to nod at the role of television technology in offering the same movies to a broader mass media audience. Some contemporary movies are released to video rental outlets within a few months of their theatrical releases (Jowett & Linton, 1989, p. 94). Gamble and Gamble (1989), including movies as a mass communication category in their introductory mass communication book, predicted that movies will survive the competition of television and videocassette recorders because of the moviegoing event (p. 266).

The notion that the media will exist in a complementary fashion over time expands motion picture research opportunities beyond theater to television and home video presentation. These shared channels may in part respond to the lack of past research by affording more research populations.

McLuhan--known for exploring the possibilities of technological determinism by assessing the consequences of audiovisual media--argued that the nature of the medium by which people communicated, and not the content of that communication, shaped societies (1967, p. 8). If it is the medium and not the message that provokes change, could the ever-increasing level of technological sophistication constantly alter the findings of media effects researchers? For example, are yesterday's minimal effects findings sprung from a grainy black and white picture with poor sound quality giving way to

cultivation or agenda setting effects given the unparalleled clarity of high-density television?

Television seems in many ways a good reference for motion picture research given the similarities of the two media. Remember that the popular acceptance of television was cited as a reason for the lack of motion picture mass communication research. Another allusion to the association between the two is the television moniker of the "small screen" (versus the big screen).

Research has suggested that movies are different from television in ways thought to enhance the former's potential audience effect (Tudor, 1969; MacLachlan, 1983; Gamble & Gamble, 1989). In particular, the darkened theater concentrates the audience focus and attention and the viewers' relaxed posture encourages emotional susceptibility (Tudor, 1969). The ritual of moviegoing was described by Gamble and Gamble (1989) as "the most intense, demanding, involving form of mass media entertainment" (p. 267).

Yet some of the characteristics of the theater may be shared or reflected in other media. One such medium is the videocassette recorder/player.

Watching Movies on the Small Screen

Esslin (1982) presented an argument that challenges Domino's "nil" finding for the television. He went so far as to suggest that the television may have a greater potential audience effect because the home setting provides a

private environment and more personal viewing proximity than the theater experience. At home, Esslin suggested, the larger-than-life, collective event of moviegoing fades away to a close approximation of face-to-face communication.

The VCR can build on the personal aspect of television while preserving a number of theater characteristics. Selectivity, mentioned as a moviegoing characteristic, is identified by Levy (1989) as a factor that might cause researchers to:

. . . expect to find at least some stronger effects from video use than from television exposure, since VCR use implies greater interest in the content, possibly higher levels of attention while viewing, and potentially greater amounts of background knowledge, which would aid in recall and comprehension.

(p.15)

Not only does VCR viewing typically require some pre-activity decision-making (versus channel scanning in television), but there is typically an investment on the part of the viewer. As with the theater patron, there is usually a temporal and monetary viewing cost included in VCR use. People either rent or purchase the movies they view, and they most often view the movie in a single sitting. Like the theater, VCR use permits motion picture viewing free of commercial interruptions.

Lindstrom (1989) reported that a large increase in VCR purchases between 1984 and 1985 signalled the viewers' desire "to watch uncut, commercial-free motion pictures at home at their convenience" (p. 46). He further reported that Nielsen surveys show a relatively constant 90 percent of VCR-homes rented prerecorded movies in the last year since 1986.

Given the shared characteristics of viewing motion pictures in a theater and viewing rented or purchased motion pictures through VCR use, one may question the media effects theory born of research in an age of technologically limited communication. The minimal effects theory, based largely on the voting behavior of test subjects from the election years 1940 and 1948, undoubtedly reflected the limiting communication technologies of the test period.

Despite its ahistorical aspirations, I would suggest that media effects theory is quite sensitive to the media technologies supporting the communication process of the test period. Whether the intent of the communication is political or entertainment, I believe Chaffee and Hochheimer (1985) correctly identified the contemporary potential for audience effect in their comment, "If the 'enlightened electorate' presumed by romantic theorists ever existed, it ought to be more likely in the United States of present day than it was in the 1940s" (p. 281).

Indeed, the assumed effect of VCR use reflects the trend of motion picture effects in that it is a medium more widely used than researched. However, use of the VCR as a vehicle for effects research may both encourage the lively research of motion pictures and support (or diminish) the hopes of campaign managers and public relations practitioners actively employing videotapes and video news releases to communicate to their publics.

As a link to other audiovisual media, the VCR may portend a situational effect for motion pictures. The theater environment, no longer a condition of movie viewing, was perhaps the greatest distinguishing characteristic of motion pictures in the past.

Media Effects Summary

Media effects research and theory have travelled through what McQuail (1989) identified as three distinct phases since the turn of the century. Motion pictures and motion picture audiences played a major role in the first phase.

Following the introduction of television as a home entertainment medium, research in the area of motion pictures nearly died. Television is but one of the explanations for the gap in the literature of motion picture effects research that parallels the third phase of media effects--the contemporary phase.

The studies reviewed in this chapter indicated that the research conducted within the last 20 years only tentatively considers alternatives to an

all-powerful philosophy of media effects. The researchers seem to "drag their heels" when compared to current theory and the effects associated with other electronically communicated visual images, such as television and videocassette tape players. The studies presented here shared a lack of theoretical basis and failure to distinguish effects attributed to the medium from effects attributed to the individual.

Despite the environmental characteristics that previously separated motion pictures from other media, parallels drawn between the videocassette recorder and motion pictures offer a path by which motion picture research may be revived. I believe this revival is mandated by the continuing belief by organizations that motion pictures carry powerful messages that affect the viewing audience.

Relying on the empirical foundation of previous research, the few contemporary motion picture effects studies suggest findings of attitude change without exploration of why change is apparent. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) wrote that situational factors influence the ability and motivation people have to process messages. How messages are processed, then, defines their effect. I believe to understand the process of change attributed (valid or not) to a subject's exposure to a motion picture, a contemporary (situational) communication theory framework is required.

A Situational Theory of Publics

The situational factors of media effects define the power and limitations of contemporary media. It would be cavalier to discount any power that the media may have to affect the knowledge, attitude or behavior of audiences. However, it would be irresponsible for a communication practitioner to assume that the media have consistent effects across publics in a domino pattern of exposure, knowledge, attitude and behavior.

The issue at hand seems clearly situational in that not every public is similarly motivated on the issues of developing an understanding of the armed forces and of enlisting in the armed forces. As such, some publics receiving a message about the military may go away better informed or maybe even feeling more or less favorably disposed toward a particular service. But knowledge and attitude are not necessarily causally linked. Even less likely is that a change in knowledge or attitude will precipitate a related change in behavior (Chaffee & Roser, 1986).

A theory that aligns with contemporary media effects theory in examining how different situations affect a public's likelihood to respond cognitively, attitudinally or behaviorally is the situational theory of publics. The theory, described as a segmentation theory (Grunig & Repper, 1990), is valuable in predicting the communication effect or effects a program may have on segments of a population.

Effects, especially in the case of public relations campaigns, may not be on behavior but on cognitions or attitudes (Grunig & Repper, 1990, p 20). But public relations managers (and military public affairs officers) "are concerned about the behavior of publics because these behaviors--such as donating money, approving appropriations, demonstrating, petitioning government, or refusing to work--interfere with or enhance the ability of the organization to achieve its goals" (Grunig & Repper, 1990, p. 19). From the onset of this study, one of the Army's goals in assisting entertainment-oriented motion pictures has been stated as enhancing recruitment and retention activities.

Restated, the purpose of this study is to determine if entertainment oriented motion pictures with military themes: (1) increase public understanding of the armed forces and (2) enhance U.S. Armed Forces recruiting and retention activities. If the expectation is to affect potential enlistment and reenlistment, the behavior of these publics is critical to the proliferation of the all-volunteer Army. Applying a situational strategy in examining the effectiveness of motion pictures in public affairs campaigns should be invaluable.

Defining the Variables

This section begins with a description of each of the situational variables. The interaction of the three variables is key to J. Grunig's

situational theory. However, this study concentrates on involvement because it is a decision point in how people process information. For this reason, participants for this study were selected so that I could assume they were similar in two of the three variables--problem recognition and constraint recognition.

I examined the third variable, involvement, for its role in enabling or motivating an individual to generate thoughts on an issue. Using Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) Elaboration Likelihood Model, I examined how the way people connected themselves with an issue may influence the effect of motion pictures. Specifically, I studied the involvement variable in the model to determine if motion pictures could be an anomaly in media effects research and theory. I wanted to know if the peripheral cues inherent to the medium had a powerful effect regardless of the participant's involvement with the issue. If not, the gap in the literature and the approach of former researchers may explain why movie effects were often assumed all-powerful in an age of situational media effects.

Although this study concentrated on the involvement variable, each of the variables is critical to understanding the theory. The interaction of the three variables in the J. Grunig theory can predict the likelihood that a public will seek and process information or be affected by a public affairs program or

message (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 155). J. Grunig began his discussion of the variables with problem recognition.

Problem Recognition

Problem recognition exists when a person stops and thinks about an issue and needs information on that issue (J. Grunig, 1982a, p. 167). To measure problem recognition J. Grunig asked people how often they "stop to think about" an issue. For example, in assessing problem recognition related to business issues among groups of journalism and business students, J. Grunig asked how often they stopped to think about issues ranging from the size of corporate profits to pollution (J. Grunig, 1982b, pp. 50 & 53).

Problem recognition increases the probability that a member of a public will seek and process information on an issue (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 151). Seeking information is an active process, whereas processing is passive communication behavior (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 149). Since this study does not investigate the selection of movies as an information outlet, but the effect of exposure to movies, processing was considered the more important to this study.

Processing is a focal point of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to be discussed later in the chapter. Processing, as it is used in the ELM and this study is the generation of thoughts that enable or motivate attitude change.

For example, students seeking information on future careers may visit a recruiter of one or several military services, or write a letter to a personnel department of a potential employer. Additionally, those same students will be more likely to process information about the armed forces through television and print advertising than the high school graduate who already has started a job or enrolled in college.

Similarly, first-term soldiers nearing the end of their initial enlistment are acutely aware of a choice to be made between reenlisting or ending their time in service. The soldiers may seek information about continuing military career and training opportunities or merely process information received from career counseling outlets. In this study, problem recognition was defined as the strong recognition that participants were facing the problem of making a decision about their future careers.

Both information seeking and processing increase through problem recognition. However, motion pictures by their definition for this study are entertainment activities. Assuming that entertainment sources generally are viewed not as information sources, I doubted that audiences of entertainment-oriented movies would report attending the movies seeking information on an issue. Instead, this study concentrated on the audience's ability and, primarily, on their motivation to process the information of the movie. The

interaction between the variables continues with the receiver's perceived ability to do something about a problem--constraint recognition.

Constraint Recognition

Recognizing a problem does not mean that a person will take any action to resolve or remedy it. A factor that interacts with problem recognition is recognition of constraints. Constraint recognition is defined as "the extent to which people perceive there are constraints--or obstacles--in a situation that limits their freedom to plan their own behavior" (Grunig & Hunt, p. 151).

To measure constraint recognition among the journalism and business students considering business issues in the earlier example, J. Grunig (1982b) asked, "Could you do a great deal, something, very little or nothing personally to affect the way an issue is handled?" (p. 50).

Respondents who indicated that they could do little or nothing about an issue were less likely to seek or process information about an issue. Similarly, persons who recognize an upcoming career decision but are aware of disqualifying characteristics--high school students with a disqualifying physical handicap for enlistment or first-term soldiers barred to reenlistment--are unlikely to seek or process information about a career in the armed forces.

This variable, too, was assumed to be similar for the selected samples used in this study. It was assumed that the students and soldiers recognizing the problem of career decision making did not feel that there was any reason

that they would be unable to enlist or reenlist for military service. The careful selection of study participants described in the next chapter explains how I controlled for physical or administrative constraints to military service.

Constraint recognition was assumed to be low for the students and soldiers in this study based on their physical and administrative qualification for enlistment or reenlistment. Realistically, constraints are not limited to these easily observable characteristics. If study participants discussed other constraints, their comments were included because of the importance of the interaction of the variables in the situational theory.

In fact, the differences in problem recognition, constraint recognition and involvement toward issues--such as racism, anti-semitism, political ethics and mental illness (all issues of the motion picture studies previously described)--are key to the interaction that makes the theory so valuable for segmentation. The very notion of affecting a mass audience with a common attitude change is, within the framework of the situational theory, unrealistic.

Interaction of the Situational Variables

Despite the attempt to select publics in which problem and constraint recognition were assumed nearly identical for all members of the public, the level of involvement constantly influences the outcome of the interaction critical to the situational theory of publics. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) identified involvement, which they called personal-relevance, as a situational

factor that plays "an important role in enabling and motivating individuals to think extensively versus superficially about the merits of an appeal" (p. 101).

In turn, how extensively or superficially a person thinks about an appeal, predicts the endurance and resistance of attitude change and possibly behavior (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). If the characteristics of the motion picture medium inherently are involving so that they may dictate message processing, movies may be more powerful than other media and therefore resistant to situational effects. However, if certain characteristics unique to motion pictures do not override the situational factors, motion pictures most likely share the contemporary theoretical underpinnings of other media. Given the careful selection of participants assumed to be similar in problem and constraint recognition, the following section focuses on the important role the involvement factor plays in determining how people differently are motivated to process messages.

Involvement

Sorting through the literature of the involvement variable has become a task of epic proportion because the concept has so many definitions and applications across a number of disciplines. Presented as the third independent variable in the situational theory of publics, involvement is simply defined as "the extent to which [people] connect themselves with [a] situation" (Grunig & Hunt, p. 152). Involvement is high when an individual believes an issue or

situation will have a personal effect on him or her. Conversely, if an individual does not perceive a personal effect, the level of involvement would be below.

Using this definition with the examples from J. Grunig's 1982b study developed for problem and constraint recognition, involvement would be measured based on the connection between an individual and an issue. For example: Does a student feel a strong, moderate or weak connection between himself or herself and different business issues?

In the case of the current study a strong, moderate or weak connection with the military is explored. The task of operationalizing involvement was particularly problematic not only because involvement has been so broadly defined, but because involvement had to consider interaction with both the message content and the medium delivering the message--the motion picture. Following the discussion of how high and low levels of involvement change the way in which people process messages, I have defined each level as it is applied in this study,

Salmon (1986) took on the sizable task of reviewing involvement "to synthesize the various perspectives on involvement in order to provide an interdisciplinary common ground" (p. 244). In his review Salmon presented a typology of involvement along a continuum regarding involvement as a trait of

either an individual or a stimulus. Interaction between the individual and stimulus represent the interim points.

I have elected to review involvement both in terms of individual and stimulus traits. These typologies are developed to correspond with high or low involvement respectively and dictate the route of persuasion followed by the receiver as outlined by the Elaboration Likelihood Model.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model

The Elaboration Likelihood Model, as described by its designers Petty and Cacioppo (1986), is a "comprehensive framework for organizing, categorizing and understanding the basic processes underlying the effectiveness of persuasive communication" (p. 3). This framework also served well in this study to examine why communication may or may not be effective in increasing public understanding and enhancing the recruiting and retention objectives of the armed forces.

Petty and Cacioppo concluded that two "routes to persuasion" are apparent in the literature on attitude change. The first of those two routes is "central" and calls on a subject's "careful and thoughtful consideration of the . . . information presented" (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, p. 3).

The second route is labeled "peripheral." It is more likely to call on a "simple cue in the persuasion context (e.g., an attractive source) that induce(s)

change without necessitating scrutiny of the central merits of . . . information presented" (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, p. 3).

The central route would include any involvement where the interaction between the individual and the stimulus is individual focused. This happens when the individual is involved in the issue to a point where message content supersedes the medium in importance.

For example, an individual with a family member hospitalized for a mental illness is likely to have a high level of involvement aroused when watching "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest." For this individual, processing the movie's message is likely to occur along the central route.

Because the high-involvement person will be motivated to scrutinize the message, he or she can be expected to develop an attitude change through careful consideration. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) found that the attitude change that occurred as a result of central processing was both more enduring and predictive of behavior than that occurring along the peripheral route. However, the change could be either positive or negative based on the receiver's perceived pro- or counterattitudinal nature of the message. Attitude change occurring along the central route draws on the situational factor of involvement and reflects a situational media effect in relation to the message.

Processing occurs along the peripheral route of persuasion when the stimulus predominates in the interaction between the individual and the

stimulus. The individual in this example would have no personal involvement in the issue of mental illness. Assuming no other issues in the movie aroused involvement, processing at this level may focus on the attractiveness of the actor rather than the message of the character portrayed by the actor.

Petty and Cacioppo (1986) explained that when motivation--such as personal relevance--is low, individuals will not expend much cognitive effort on an issue. Instead, they will rely on superficial analyses and positive or negative cues of the message. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) suggested that this attitude change (or shift as they sometimes called it) occurred along the peripheral route of persuasion and was temporary and unpredictable of behavior

Among subjects that are otherwise uninvolved with an issue, peripheral processing could explain the attitude change reported when subjects are tested immediately after their exposure to a motion picture. Absent the situational involvement factor that motivates a person to process a message based on involvement with some issue, movies could appear all-powerful in their effect.

Petty and Cacioppo (1986, p. 7) defined elaboration as the "extent to which a person carefully thinks about issue-relevant information." When involvement is high, and the person is both able and motivated to elaborate, the elaboration is high. When involvement is low and the person is able but not motivated to elaborate, the elaboration would be low. The level of

involvement, the indicated route of persuasion and the predicted outcome are addressed in the following paragraphs.

Low involvement.

Low involvement is often defined in advertising literature and reflects the ideas of Krugman (1965)--the first researcher to suggest that low involvement could have a powerful effect in attitude change. Describing television as a low-involvement medium, Krugman suggested that repeated exposure to a low-involvement medium would not stimulate the same resistance to change as a high-involvement medium. Within the Elaboration Likelihood Model, Krugman would say that people are not motivated to elaborate on issues when involvement is low, and therefore do not generate counterarguments related to processing along the central route of persuasion.

Krugman (1965) explained that people then could learn with virtually no involvement because of the repetitive nature of the medium. The concept of repetition remains one of the main tenets of contemporary advertising (Dunn, Barban, Krugman & Reid, 1990). The learning that takes place could be said to occur along the peripheral route of persuasion where the motivation or ability to process the message is less important than the gradual affect aroused in the receiver.

This low-involvement effect suggests that media inherently are involving. The characteristics of different media may influence a person's

attitude change given a low level of involvement. Whereas a high-involvement individual may be unaware of the medium because of their high elaboration task associated with the message.

Attitude change attributed to low involvement has been reported as less enduring than attitude change credited to high involvement (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). However, if low involvement attitude change can be related to the characteristics of a medium--motion pictures for example--that attitude change would not challenge the closely held attitudes that differ from person to person and would be more likely to generate a similar effect among publics exposed to the medium. Some motion picture characteristics or cues that may influence attitude change along Petty and Cacioppo's peripheral route to persuasion include the "event" of moviegoing, the theater environment and the viewer's attraction to the movie star or stars in the movie.

Moviegoing, as an event, is characteristic of low involvement based on some of the peculiarities of the medium. Still, patrons pay admission and invest time in the moviegoing event or rental or purchase of a prerecorded movie for home VCR use (Gamble & Gamble, 1989, p. 266). Once this investment is made, it is possible that the level of patron involvement may exceed the involvement of watching the "small screen." Jowett and Linton (1989) reported that concession costs alone accounted for 19 percent of total theater revenue, according to U.S. Department of Commerce data collected in

the early 1980s (p. 53). The potential for spending more than \$20 per couple for less than two hours of entertainment at the motion picture is apparent. Undoubtedly the cost of movie rentals for VCR use is less. Still, somebody has to make the effort to get the tape.

It is possible, then, that these costs associated with moviegoing are situationally involving depending on a person's income or perceived investment in the moviegoing event. Although the costs are associated with the stimulus despite the message, it may change an audience member's motivation to process the movie versus the motivation to process a network television generated message.

The direction of attitude change may not be predictable given the involvement associated with an investment of time and money. But if people expect something from a movie in return for their expense, will they end up more affected by the medium or the message?

Another area that distinguishes motion pictures from other media is the viewing environment. Can low involvement be aroused in the largely distraction-free dark mystery of the movie house? McLuhan (1967) boldly argued that the medium explained the consequent message effect better than content.

Finally, the appeal of the source (in the case of movies, the star) may serve as an important cue along the peripheral route to persuasion that is

associated with low involvement. The role of the source is discussed extensively in advertising and communication research. Petty and Cacioppo also explored the role of source attractiveness in the Elaboration Likelihood Model.

Celebrity influence is discussed under a separate heading in this chapter. Here it will suffice to say that when awareness of the actor as a celebrity exceeds attention to the character portrayed by the actor, the involvement may be more stimulus focused.

To identify low involvement among the participants in this study, I listened for comments regarding an acute awareness of the moviegoing event, the theater environment or elevated attraction to celebrities. Greater attention to the message or issue with which movies dealt was associated with high involvement.

High involvement, in contrast to stimulus-defined low involvement, is the interaction between the individual and the message communicated through the medium. Involvement, as I have defined it in relation to media effects, does not include Salmon's "involvement as a personality trait" typology (1986, p. 256). This typology is replaced by the involvement resulting from a connection with personally held interests.

High involvement.

A high level of involvement coincides with J. Grunig's (1984) "connectedness" definition in that it represents an interaction between the individual and the issue or situation. In this case, the connection occurs not between the individual and the characteristics of the medium but between the individual and the message. Because it would be absurd to predict that all members of a public would experience the same connection with an issue, the situational effect resulting from high involvement is evident.

Because high levels of involvement result from an interaction between the attitudes and convictions that a person holds and the connection stirred by the medium's message, the effects may be as different as each member of the public. Involvement identified as "high level" draws from Abelson's (1988) discussion of attitudes as possessions versus personality traits.

Karlins and Abelson (1970) also discussed an individual's "susceptibility to persuasion as a personality trait" (p. 103). However, this susceptibility can be complicated by how a person feels an issue may affect his or her behavior. So no matter what a person's beliefs, the evaluation of those beliefs may be good or bad (attitudes) in a given situation. This comes as close to Salmon's involvement as a personality trait as I believe is possible.

High involvement has been credited with greater cognitive elaboration, improved recall and more enduring attitude change according to Petty and

Cacioppo (1981). This study did not test recall. But if high involvement leads to attitude change, the effect must be limited or conditional because no single issue can be expected to result in a consistent, all-powerful effect as people respond to it in terms of their personal attitudes, or evaluative beliefs.

Stamm and Bowes (1972) described personal relevance in terms that parallel a high level of involvement.³ Their study examined the decision-making of individuals and communities potentially affected by two proposed flood projects.

Relevance was of particular importance to decision-making among people who lived near the river. The proposals may have been more relevant to these "river people" because they knew of "one or more ways in which the project may affect [them] personally" (p. 49). Because of a perceived greater personal effect, they communicated about the proposals more and grew into the local voice of opposition to the project.

Petty and Cacioppo (1986, pp. 84-85) described a study with similar findings in respect to the influence of high personal relevance. In their experiment students were exposed to messages about a new coed visitation policy. To manipulate personal relevance, they were told the policy was to be implemented at either their college or a distant college.

The findings showed that under high involvement (greater personal relevance) conditions students generated more favorable thoughts and less

unfavorable thoughts toward a proposal of a more lenient visitation policy. Under low involvement conditions--the policy would be implemented at a distant college--students neither rated the policy issue as more involving nor more or less favorable.

To identify high involvement in the subjects for this study, I listened for comments that would shape their attitudes toward the military. These comments included: references to the military experiences of family or friends, pronouncements of military service as a patriotic duty, attention to the character portrayed by the actor and especially attention to the message that character may deliver about the armed forces.

High and low levels of involvement are important to a review of involvement as it is defined in advertising. They are included here to further distinguish high and low involvement before examining the role of involvement in attitude change.

Involvement in Advertising

From an advertising perspective, Andrews, Durvasula and Akhter (1990) also acknowledged that the "numerous (and sometimes conflicting) conceptual definitions and measures of involvement make it quite difficult for . . . researchers . . . to include this construct in their own research" (p. 38). In developing a framework for conceptualizing and measuring involvement,

they presented the concept as "an individual, internal state of arousal with intensity, direction and persistence" (p. 28).

The authors further broke involvement down into four major research streams. Two of these research streams are steeped in the field of advertising --attention/processing strategies and enduring/product involvement--because of their call for brand and product recognition. However, the other two streams, audience/process involvement and personal/situational involvement, align with Salmon's stimulus and individual typologies or this study's low and high levels of involvement.

Audience/process involvement examines the attention-getting capacity of the source and is medium focused. This definition is similar to the low involvement view. This area may be important to motion picture research because of the allusions to altering people's receptive state in a darkened theater (or the case of the VCR: relaxed watching in the privacy of their homes) mentioned in the media effects section of this chapter.

In reference to the predictive value of the situational theory of publics, personal/situational involvement is most useful when determining the persuasive route used when processing messages. If an individual is motivated to process a message centrally because of a personal connectedness, he or she is more likely to develop a lasting attitude that is predictive of attitude change according to Petty and Cacioppo (1986). And the focus of much of the

research done in the area of personal/situational involvement has been on the expected effect an individual perceives an issue will have on his or her behavior; such as the Petty and Cacioppo (1986) student experiment described above.

Andrews, Durvasula and Akhter (1990) said the personal/situational involvement research stream "represents a collection of involvement definitions based on the idea that issues, situations or messages can have significant consequences on, or be personally relevant to, one's own life" (p. 30). Clearly, this definition is not limited to advertising research, but reflects high levels of involvement, personal relevance and a central route to persuasion (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, Stamm & Bowes, 1972, Petty and Cacioppo, 1986).

Involvement and Effect Summary

The effect of motion pictures as expected in this study has not to this point been defined. What effect was to be measured and what was the measurement of that effect? The concepts most commonly believed measurable as a result of exposure to some communication are knowledge, attitudes and behaviors (Chaffee & Roser, 1986, p. 373).

The domino effect assumed that a "successfully" communicated message would cause each of these concepts--knowledge, attitude and behavior--to be sequentially activated. But J. Grunig's study of students'

attitudes regarding business issues did not find a link between knowledge and attitude (J. Grunig, 1982b).

Similarly, Chaffee and Roser (1986) reported that a study of people exposed to a health education campaign did not show a sequential pattern of knowledge, attitude and behavior. Accordingly the motion picture "effect" to be measured was any of the concepts with no expectation of sequencing.

Involvement was explored when measuring the situational change--be it of knowledge, attitude or belief. If low involvement was indicated and information processing occurred along a peripheral route for motion picture audience members, the effect of the medium may in fact have been all-powerful. However, if individual audience members (members of the moviegoing public) held belief-based attitudes that heightened their involvement for the issue, then the effect may have varied situationally based on the pro- or counterattitudinal position of the message.

In this way, the situational model, with emphasis on the involvement variable, may be a framework from which to investigate the effects entertainment-oriented motion pictures with military themes have on a particular public. The remaining factor that may play a role in motion picture effects is celebrity influence. The following section examines celebrity influence as an identification variable, according to its ability to increase a

movie's validity based on a match-up hypothesis and as a peripheral cue of low-involvement message processing.

Celebrity Influence

Berger (1989, p. 99) described the television image as a "pseudo-companion." He suggested this artificial relationship gives viewers a feeling of familiarity and trust in the celebrities they recognize as their screen friends.

Schickel's (1985) book about the celebrity is titled "Intimate Celebrities," referring to what he described as the power of the media "to create an illusion of intimacy" (p. 9). He suggested that taken outside of the movie event, it is more difficult for viewers to recognize the barriers between the known (celebrity image) and the unknown (actor as a person). I would venture to say most of us share the experience of recalling an actor or actress from a popular motion picture and finding that we can only remember the character's name. The comment goes something like this: "You know, that guy who plays Rambo." Chances are that the conversation will flow smoothly as the other people immediately identify the character.

Another common celebrity-relationship experience is using familiar references for people unknown but made familiar through the media. Although none of my friends claims to have met Oprah Winfrey, they all refer to her as "Oprah"--never as Miss Winfrey. The power of celebrity familiarity

may further support a powerful media effects finding unique in motion picture research.

These scenarios, purposively described from both television and movies suggest that the phenomena occur in both media--again suggesting that movies and television technology are not so far apart and different. Explaining America's love for celebrity, Schickel (1985) wrote of the election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency:

In short, we now have, at last, a president who truly operates outside of history, who seems to understand that immortality is nowadays best obtained not through dreary political achievement but through the attainment of a celebrity so large that it dissipates only very slowly, in the process turning into beloved legend. (p. 195)

Tapping into why America has grown to love the celebrity figure and how to manipulate that attraction to enhance communication effectiveness or commercial gain could be of great interest to both public relations practitioners and advertisers.

Austin (1983), Turner (1988), and Jowett and Linton (1989), lamenting the dearth of research on motion picture audiences, could have described as accurately the absence of research on the role of the celebrity in movies. Source credibility studies are related to media effects research of mass media

other than motion pictures (Jacobsen, 1969; Berlo, Lemert, & Mertz, 1970).

And advertiser researchers have considered the effect of the celebrity on product and service endorsement (Atkins & Block, 1983; Kamins, 1990).

However, research on the role of the movie star in the effect (or lack of effect) that motion pictures have on their audiences seems merely to reflect the overall lack of movie-audience research.

It does not suggest that movies have a different effect. In fact research from other disciplines emphasizes the likely situational effect of celebrities. Still, if celebrity influence is important to the peripheral processing associated with low involvement, it could indicate that even when celebrity influence indicators are present the power is questionable.

Two concepts from studies of other mass media and advertising that may relate to the role of motion picture celebrity are attraction and identification and product/celebrity "match-up." Questions related to these two areas are: Does the viewer feel an identification with the actor or actress that would lead to imitation or agreement based on attraction? And, does the actor or actress portraying the movie character transmit the motion picture message more or less effectively because he or she "looks the part"?

Celebrity Attraction and Identification

The perceived power of celebrities in advertising is evident through observation of their continued and increasing use as spokespersons for products from computers to cola and from cold cereal to hot, trendy athletic shoes. Atkins and Block (1983) conducted an experiment that found celebrities were preferred over noncelebrities in three versions of nearly identical print advertisements. They explained that not only do celebrity spokespersons stand out among the advertising clutter, but they are viewed as dynamic figures that are both likeable and attractive. They said, "Ads featuring a celebrity [were] rated more positively than the almost-identical versions with a noncelebrity, particularly for the adjectives strong, interesting, effective and important" (Atkins & Block, 1983, p. 60).

Atkins and Block (1983) found celebrities were perceived by subjects, particularly adolescents, as more competent and trustworthy than noncelebrities. The authors suggested that the heightened perception by adolescents may be because the teenagers are at a "more impressionable stage of development where the endorsement of a celebrity is regarded as a meaningful factor in evaluating ads and products" (p. 61).

This point seems particularly important to the study at hand because teenagers compose the bulk of the recruiting age group that the military hopes to target. And despite strong competition from the baby-boomers, teenagers

(ages 12-17) still composed nearly 50 percent of the frequent (at least once a month) moviegoing public in the last decade (Jowett & Linton, 1989, p. 90).

Berlo, Lemert and Mertz (1970) conducted a study of how receivers perceived source images and what factors developed the most powerful source image. Although the study was not tied to celebrity endorsement of a product, the statements presented to the subjects (students and their spouses at Michigan State University) could fairly be superimposed on the Atkins and Block study.

Specifically, subjects were asked to think of adjectives describing sources they found highly acceptable or unacceptable by way of the following statements:

Think of a person (or organization) about whom you are likely to say, "If it's good enough for him, it's good enough for me."

Think of a person (or organization) about whom you would be likely to say, "If he says something is so, or says it's good, I would tend to doubt the statement." (p. 565)

One interesting factor that emerged as useful in describing perceived source image was dynamism. Not only was dynamism a factor, it also was suggested as an intensifier for other factors that distinguished sources as highly acceptable or unacceptable (pp. 575-576).

Adjectives loading on dynamism included "frank, fast, energetic, extroverted, bold, active, aggressive, decisive, colorful, and confident" (p.

567). The authors explained that their dynamism factor seemed to "tap an evaluative dimension that could be referred to as 'disposable energy'; i.e. the energy available to the source which can be used to emphasize, augment, and implement his suggestions" (p. 575).

Celebrity status may in fact be thought of as that extra energy.

Schickel (1985, pp. 286-299) forecast a purely visual communication future that will be "peopled with characters we understand as quickly and as fully as we understand the full meaning of a nice frosty bottle of Coke, and can drain to the dregs as sweetly and as refreshingly as we can suck up eight ounces of empty calories" (pp. 289-290). In this future, the recognition and associated power of celebrity become the body of communication. This suggests powerful peripheral cues can eliminate the need to cognitively process a message.

So it seems that audiences may report that celebrities are more interesting, dynamic and effective than noncelebrities. And those same adjectives may translate to the acceptability of a message. Does that mean that audience members will change their attitude or behavior to be like the celebrity figure?

No. Alperstein (1986) found that strong identification with a celebrity does not guarantee positive evaluation or consequent use of a celebrity-endorsed product (p. 145). Instead, audience members may resolve the

dissonance resulting from a poor celebrity-product match by "forgiving, [or] actively seeking a rationale as to why the celebrity might have appeared in the [inconsistent] commercial" (p. 144).

Although this process indicates the power of the loyalty of fans, it does not suggest that loyalty can be bridled indiscriminately for endorsements. As Kamins (1990, p. 6) reminded us, the suspicion that most audiences feel toward advertising allows most audience members to discount the inconsistency to the monetary compensation the celebrity receives for the "plug."

Celebrity Match-Up

Kamins, Brand, Hoeke and Moe (1989) discussed two ways in which celebrities may be associated with the media's effect on audiences-- identification and internalization. Identification seems to be the stuff of celebrities: "an individual adopts the behavior of another person (or group). Because the individual aspires to be like that person or group, adoption of the behavior enhances the individual's self-image" (p. 5).

However, Alperstein's (1986) findings suggested that audience members are more discriminating than the children of Hamelin when following celebrity lead. Accepting that inconsistent "match-ups" may not result in a positive endorsement, can the disposable energy of celebrity intensify endorsement value when a valid "match-up" occurs?

Extending the research to motion pictures leads to the question of whether movie stars are more effective in roles when they "look the part." Certainly there are celebrities known as character actors. An example is the actor who always portrays the "bad guy." Would that same actor be convincing or easily identified in the "good guy" role? Consider for a moment the issue of bald men selling cars.

Kamins (1990) described the "match-up" hypothesis as follows: the image of the celebrity and the image of the endorsed products must converge on an attractiveness base to result in effective advertising (p. 5). To test this hypothesis he selected actors Tom Selleck and Telly Savalas as celebrities identified as attractive and "arguably less attractive," (p. 5) respectively. Pretest subjects, not Kamins, identified the celebrities as either attractive or unattractive.

Kamins then selected products that were either attractiveness-unrelated (neither enhancing nor detracting from the user's physical attractiveness) or attractiveness-related (may enhance the user's perceived physical attractiveness). Using a luxury car (attractiveness-related) and a home computer (attractiveness-unrelated), Kamins paired the celebrities with either product in turn.

The findings of the study indicated that in the case of attractiveness-related products, the physically attractive celebrity significantly enhanced

measures of both the spokesperson's credibility and the receiver's attitude toward the ad. In the case of the attractiveness-unrelated product, celebrity attractiveness had no effect on the spokesperson or the ad.

Thus some product categories seem attractiveness-related. Examples could include beauty care products, fashionable attire or status indicators (such as the luxury car of the study). Just as surely, I would hypothesize that there are some movie characters who are either attractiveness-related or unrelated in their roles.

The tendency to identify with a character may be enhanced when the audience member feels there is a celebrity "match-up" in casting. Same sex (as audience member), lead character roles may be considered attractiveness related. Conversely, characters of lesser importance to the motion picture plot may be considered attractiveness unrelated. This research examined celebrity match-up, as it applies to the actors ability to "look the part," for its ability to enhance an audience member's change in knowledge, attitude or behavior.

A final area to be considered in the role of celebrity influence in motion picture effects is the importance of source attractiveness as a peripheral cue. This role returns to the involvement variable and the Elaboration Likelihood Model.

Celebrity as a Peripheral Cue

Petty and Cacioppo (1986) reported an experiment in which students were exposed to an issue (of either low or high involvement) presented by a celebrity or noncelebrity source. The experiment used print advertising of a fictitious product.

The product, a razor, was presented in an advertisement featuring either a well-known sports celebrity or an unknown citizen. Not only did students report "liking" the celebrity more than the unknown citizen, they also were more likely to agree with the celebrity endorser in low-involvement situations. In high-involvement situations, neither the celebrity nor the unknown actor enhanced the message effectiveness (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, pp. 143-146).

As related to motion picture research, one may question the increased ability of persuasion because of celebrities when involvement is low. There are two different effects suggested by this model.

First, when involvement is low does the moviegoing public view the actor as a celebrity rather than the character portrayed? This is an interesting question, given our common recall of an actor's name rather than the character's name following exposure to a movie. Second, what is the effect when audience members select movies based on issues not leading men and

women? With selective exposure such as this, celebrity influence may have little or no effect.

Celebrity Influence and Effect Summary

Celebrity influence is an important consideration in motion picture effects research for three reasons. First, the way an audience member identifies with a movie star may influence the effect of a motion picture. Second, the success in casting actors to "match-up" with the character they portray may enhance the credibility of the character and the effect of the movie. And third, source attractiveness has a noteworthy role along the peripheral route of persuasion in the Elaboration Likelihood Model as an indicator of the level of audience involvement.

Celebrity influence was the last factor to be addressed in this study meant to explore the effect of motion pictures. There are undoubtedly other variables and theories that could result in equally intriguing research questions to explore motion picture effects. And I believe motion picture effects is an area of research that merits further evaluation. This study should merely whet the interest of communication practitioners and organizations eager to continue to believe it's not "just a movie."

Summary

The dearth of contemporary motion picture effects research provides little insight into the place of motion pictures in contemporary media effects

theory. The following statement reflects what we know of the relationship between media effects theory and the state of motion picture effects research.

The few contemporary motion picture effects studies--which have emphasized empirical analysis of data without consideration of situational variables--report a tendency toward powerful effects findings despite contemporary (situational) media effects theory.

This statement alludes to a lag between the state of motion picture effects research and media effects theory. Indeed, this study found waning interest in motion picture research since the early part of the 20th century. The gap in the literature discussed earlier, was explained in terms of: the separation of film as art and movies as entertainment, the lack of a focused discipline for research, television technology, the money-making motive of Hollywood producers, and question of defining movies as mass media (Austin, 1983; Jowett & Linton, 1989; Turner, 1988). All of these explanations seem to support the scant evidence of motion picture research in the last 50 years--with virtually none conducted in the last ten years.

The motion picture effects research reviewed in this chapter was analyzed empirically (Domino, 1983; Elliot & Schenck-Hamlin, 1979; Moore, 1971; Rosen, 1948). Because much attention in past studies focused on measuring effect without attention to explaining why any effect may occur, the situational view of current media effects theory was not explored.

Finally, television technology, which has been named the culprit in stealing the research emphasis formerly applied to movies, has not been considered or used to study the effects of motion pictures as discussed. This study used the VCR to set the stage for contemporary motion picture effects research. The parallels between VCR use and theater viewing (e.g., movie selection, uninterrupted viewing and monetary investment) make this possible (Levy, 1989; Lindstrom, 1989).

Employing the VCR as part of the research design introduced it as a vehicle that can span the gap between motion pictures and television technology. This is particularly important in contemporary research because television technology and movies are becoming more closely linked.

These issues gave rise to the idea that motion pictures, if included in contemporary, qualitative research that incorporates television technology, may tend toward situational media effects findings. The next step was to devise specific research questions to test that idea.

Research Questions

The following research questions were developed in this study because the existing literature on motion picture effects was inadequate to suggest a hypothesis. The questions address the effect motion pictures have on certain audiences of entertainment-oriented motion pictures with military themes.

The first set of questions asks how effect or lack of effect relates to the level of involvement audience members feel toward a movie issue or message. In regard to the role of involvement in testing the situational effects of motion pictures, this study is designed to answer three specific questions:

RQ_{1a}: Does the extent to which moviegoing publics connect themselves with the armed forces (level of involvement) influence the communication effect of an entertainment-oriented motion picture with a military theme?

Grunig and Repper (1990) explained that involvement may generate active communication behavior (p. 28). And when combined with the other two variables of the situational theory of publics--problem and constraint recognition--that active communication may result in communication effects such as: knowledge, attitude and belief(p. 29).

RQ_{1b}: Are subjects who report a high level of involvement with the armed forces motivated to process messages communicated by entertainment-oriented movies resulting in a situational effect?

Petty and Cacioppo (1986) described information processing as occurring along a central route of persuasion for highly involved subjects. This central route was indicated by careful and thoughtful consideration of information. Favorable or unfavorable thoughts result in positive or negative attitude changes, respectively. This level of involvement is more likely to

create active audiences who will seek and process information (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

RQ_{1c}: Do the low-involvement characteristics of motion pictures override the high (belief-based) involvement people feel toward an issue or message communicated by entertainment-oriented motion pictures with military themes resulting in an all-powerful effect?

Low involvement may lead to the processing of information along a peripheral route of persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Along the peripheral route, environment and event have a greater influence on subjects. Motion pictures may possess some environmental and event characteristics unique from other media that may effect all moviegoers (Tudor, 1969; McLuhan, 1983; Gamble & Gamble, 1989). If all processing occurs along the peripheral route to persuasion because of these unique characteristics, subjects will not be motivated to process a motion picture's message. The passive processing that occurs may result in attitude shifts dependent on peripheral cues.

Source attractiveness is a special cue identified along the peripheral route to persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Because celebrities are the sources in motion pictures, this cue became a special interest when considering

low-involvement processing. Research questions specific to celebrity influence include:

RQ_{2a}: Do subjects report that they are likely to have gained a greater understanding of the armed forces or are more likely to engage in enlistment or reenlistment activities because of identification with, or desire to imitate, the role of a leading character in an entertainment-oriented motion picture with a military theme?

One justification for the assumed effect of motion pictures is the apparent imitative impact reflected in fashion and style among young people (Schickel, 1985; Atkins & Block, 1983). Alperstein (1986) reported that the identification fans feel with celebrities is so strong that they will seek to rationalize or forgive stars when commercial endorsements seem inconsistent.

RQ_{2b}: Do subjects report that a sense of celebrity "match-up" toward the leading characters in entertainment-oriented motion pictures with military themes has influenced their understanding of the armed forces or their desire to enlist or reenlist in the armed forces?

Kamins, Brand, Hoeke and Moe (1989) reported enhanced spokesperson credibility when celebrities were successfully matched with products based on the attractiveness-relation of celebrity and product. A successful match-up also increased the receiver's perception of how the product could enhance his or her own attractiveness.

RQ_{2c}: Does the level of involvement subjects report with the armed forces determine their response to actors as peripheral cues of motion pictures?

According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) subjects who are not motivated or able to process messages along the central route to persuasion are influenced by peripheral cues. The attitude change that takes place in the presence of these cues is relatively temporary and may have played a part in studies that test individuals immediately after motion picture viewing.

Answering the Questions

The following chapter explains the research design I used to answer the research questions. I begin the explanation with a review of the qualitative method. I then discuss the considerations and decisions that resulted in my selection of the focus group strategy.

The method is described in enough detail to facilitate replication. I include a detailed explanation of how I prepared to conduct the research as a first-time, focus group moderator. This should be particularly helpful to any reader unfamiliar with the nuances of focus group research.

METHOD

The research methods applied in the contemporary motion picture effects studies presented in the previous chapter seem to support the popular belief that exposure to motion pictures results in attitude change among audience members. However the research does not explain why motion pictures generate all-powerful effects in contrast to contemporary (situational) media effects theory. This disagreement between the findings of motion picture effects research and contemporary media effects theory made me question the attitude change and attendant variables involved in what seemed an almost speculative consensus among past studies.

I decided to apply a research strategy designed to focus on the process (and variables) that previous research in the area ignored. That strategy is the focus group interview. The studies I examined when reviewing the literature concentrated on quantitative methods (with the possible exception of Domino's 1983 field study). Posed quantitatively, the method then answered the question, "How many people will change their attitude or behavior (with how much change) based on exposure to a specific motion picture?"

Since this study sets out to explain why those reported behaviors and attitudes change, I became interested in the focus group as an exploratory

research strategy rooted in the "why" of communication effects research. Merton (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1990)--a pioneer in focused interviews whose work coincidentally began as military-sponsored research on the effectiveness of particular communication vehicles, to include motion pictures--wrote:

In the beginning, the primary, though not the exclusive, purpose of the focused interview was to provide some basis for *interpreting* statistically significant effects of mass communications. But in general, *experimental studies of effects*, and inquiries into patterned definitions of social situations might well profit by the use of focused interviews in research. (p. 5)

Neither surveys nor experiments (nor Domino's field study) have gone beyond reporting change consequent to the audiences' exposure to a movie about a particular group from politicians to mental patients.

Where the method stands between formative and evaluative research in the practical sense of this case is blurred by past faith in the power of motion pictures to bring about a desired change in attitude and behavior. That faith has been enough to support the relationship between the Pentagon and Hollywood since the 1920s (Shain, 1972, p. 641). However, since the entire research process can be viewed as cyclical (Broom & Dozier, 1990) it is neither too late nor superfluous to conduct research on the effectiveness of

motion pictures as a means of communicating to one of the armed forces' publics, enlistment-age men and women.⁴

This chapter discusses the decision to use a qualitative research method to examine a communication effects process traditionally studied through quantitative means. It also explains how the standards applied to the two methods are subtly different but equally valid.

The focus group--as a stand alone research strategy--is discussed through a review of the its advantages and limitations. These advantages and limitations are then considered in relation to this study.

The Qualitative Issue

Not every study is appropriate for qualitative research, but in some cases qualitative research is both appropriate and preferred. Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 19), addressed the question, "Why do qualitative research?" with a number of reasons that included:

- individual research experience
- the stage of research in a given area
- the nature of the research question
- explaining a phenomenon about which little is known or perhaps

much is known but a "novel and fresh slant" (p. 19) is needed.

Marshall and Rossman (1989) echoed these reasons by neatly summarizing the strength of qualitative studies in "research that is exploratory

or descriptive and that stresses the importance of context, setting, and subjects' frame of reference" (p. 46). Given the need to delve into the process of motion picture effects, to identify variables operating in the process and to do so preserving as nearly as possible the characteristics of viewing a full-length movie, qualitative research is both appropriate and preferred for this study.

Readers particularly resistant to qualitative research may consider themselves members of what they believe to be the opposite camp of quantitative research. L. Grunig (1990) cautioned against this head-on-head comparison of the two methods "since they are designed to tackle different kinds of problems" (p. 8).

Quantitative research can, as in the case of audience effect research, determine if people in fact report change in attitude or behavior (in this case attributed to motion picture exposure). Qualitative research sets out to identify "the range of behaviors and attitudes inherent in human social action" (Grunig, 1990, p. 8). The analysis of qualitatively gathered data is designed to answer the "why," not vying to answer the "how much" or "how many" that is the domain of quantitative methods.

Not only are qualitative and quantitative research designed to tackle different problems, Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 249) suggested different criteria should be applied when judging either approach. They pointed out that most qualitative researchers believe that the canons of good science applied to

quantitative research are inappropriate to qualitative research--or at least in need of modification.

Redefining the Usual Canons of "Good Science"

Although qualitative research shares the "good science" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 250) goal that depends on adherence to set standards, those standards differ from quantitative inquiry when strictly applied as internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 145). Strauss and Corbin (1990) offered a set of questions as criteria by which to judge qualitative research designed in support of what they call "grounded theory."

Grounded theory was described as "inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In a grounded-theory study "data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other" (p. 23).

The questions proposed as standards by which to judge grounded-theory studies concentrate on the theoretical framework of the study and, according to Strauss and Corbin, may be considered unconventional "by most quantitative and even many qualitative researchers" (p. 253). The questions may not seem unconventional to Lincoln and Guba (1985), who also developed questions to measure the trustworthiness of qualitative research. As constructs, the Lincoln

and Guba standards are credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability.

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 296) began proposing alternatives to the conventional criteria of quantitative research with internal validity. Internal validity is achieved in conventional research when the conclusions drawn from an experiment reflect what went on during the experiment (Babbie, 1989, p. 221).

Redefined, internal validity becomes credibility. This "truth value" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 294) calls for a demonstration that the study was conducted in observance of an accurate description and identification of the subject.

The focus groups in this study, for example, rendered a total of 48 subjects drawn from high school student and first-term soldier populations further defined by unwaiverable requirements for age, gender and military affiliation. These subpopulations are discussed in greater detail under the "participants" subheading later in this chapter.

Dependability

Dependability is presented as the qualitative alternative to the conventional criterion of reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 299). A study meets the criteria for reliability when a technique, applied to an object time after time, yields the same results (Babbie, 1989, p. 121).

A study is dependable when it does not assume the unchanging universe envisioned through reliability but accepts the "assumption that the social world is always changing" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 147). A study that is dependable, then, is flexible--allowing for the changes of the social world.

The focus group depends greatly on the moderator's skills to uphold the dependability of the study. One example of such flexibility is to vary the order of the guide questions to preserve the integrity of the group-generated conversation. It is critical that the moderator play on the strength of the method by encouraging group interaction in the focus group setting.

Adjusting the moderator's involvement is another way to enhance dependability within focus groups. More moderator involvement is necessary for some groups than others or simply at key points in the interview process (a slow start, for example).

Broom and Dozier (1990, p. 329) warned moderators about group "dominators." If a participant begins to dominate the group, the moderator

may need tactfully to control the participant or even artfully separate him or her from the group in extreme cases.

Moderator knowledge and practice are critical to dependability in the study. I concentrated on my own preparedness by reviewing tapes and literature of the technique as well as talking with experienced moderators. The pilot study, discussed separately, was invaluable in testing and refining my moderator skills.

Transferability

Transferability most closely parallels external validity (generalizability) among the conventional criteria. Marshall and Rossman (1989) pointed out that a qualitative study was not generalizable to other settings and populations. The strength of the transferability is in the study's theoretical framework.

Although I would not expect to generalize the findings of this study to other populations, I would hope that future researchers working from some of the same theoretical constructs could call on this study. In this regard, Lincoln and Guba (1985) made clear that "if there is to be transferability, the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make application elsewhere" (p. 298).

Confirmability

Confirmability most nearly corresponds to the conventional canon of objectivity. Whether this "independence of mind" (Babbie, 1989, p. 45) even

exists in quantitative studies is not particularly convincing to me. However, if the findings of a qualitative study are said to be confirmed by another, Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 300) claimed that the shift of the emphasis from the investigator to the data eliminates the possible interjection of bias. If the emphasis is to shift to data, then assurance that data collection and analysis were executed free of value-laden judgement is critical to a confirmable study.

Marshall and Rossman (1989) suggested ways in which a researcher might control for biases. Controls included using a research partner to play the "devil's advocate" (p. 147). In the following section describing the role of the note-taker, this aspect of control is evident.

Another control is value-free note taking. This two-sets-of-notes method was applied during the review of the tapes for this study. The explanation of the system of data collection and analysis that follow best illustrates the confirmability perspective of the study.

Selecting a Research Strategy

Every research strategy, it seems, can be argued as superior to the next. No method is better than the one that affords the best fit for the requirements and limitations of the research question it sets out to answer.

My study had its own set of requirements and limitations. Considerations included: the purpose of the study (the research question), the

practical limitations in conducting the study, the unit of analysis and my research experience and expertise.

The purpose of my study was exploratory. In studying the effect that motion pictures have on audiences, I wanted to identify the variables that may suggest the effect of attitude change. Although past studies identified a process of change, there were no explanations to help me understand the process.

In terms of practical limitations, as an Army-sponsored graduate student, my program of study had a definitive end date. I needed to conduct the study and report the findings in what became a two-month window.

Because I was studying a process of media effects, my unit of analysis was the audience and not the motion picture. Even more specifically, this study focused on the pre-defined target audience for Army recruitment and retention.

Finally, I needed a research method to suit my own experience and expertise as a researcher. My exposure to all methods was through course work. I had no practical experience. Having identified what I considered my requirements and limitations, I began my selection by listing various research methods. I considered the strengths and weaknesses of each in turn to try it on for size. The advantages of focus group research, coupled with my ability to temper the limitations in respect to this study, resulted in its selection.

Focus Group Research

Focus groups, as I mentioned earlier, have their roots in communication effects research--with the irony of military sponsorship. In fact, some of the earliest group interviews were conducted to analyze the effectiveness of Army training and morale films⁵ (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, p. 9). Merton, Fiske and Kendall (1990) provide a history of the method as an introduction to their text, "The Focused Interview: A Manual of Problems and Procedures."

Focus groups typically are composed of six to twelve participants who gather to discuss a topic for 60 to 90 minutes. The topic is assigned by a trained moderator who guides the conversation from a general discussion to a specific focus. The focus group extends the interview from individuals to groups with the advantage of encouraging more, diverse information about the queried situation because of the head-count differential.

Advantages

There are advantages, more subtle than the number of interview participants, that make focus group research the preferred method for some research. The following list, not meant to be exhaustive, includes some of the advantages:

- flexibility
- characteristics of group interaction

- richness of the data collected
- relatively inexpensive and quick
- particular value for special populations

Each of these areas merits consideration because of its importance in this study and because it exposes ideas perhaps unknown to readers unfamiliar with focus group interviews as a stand-alone method for social science research. This section is followed by a discussion of the limitations of focus group interviews.

Flexibility

Flexibility is an advantage both in planning and conducting the focus group. When planning research the flexibility of focus groups is often alluring because they can cover a myriad of topics within diverse populations in settings ranging from the meticulously staged to the impromptu. Stewart and Shamdasani (1990, p. 16) mentioned this flexibility in the planning stage as an advantage.

Blamphin (1990, p. 34) cited flexibility as the greatest strength of focus groups. His study found that the focus group, often noted for its value in the early stages of a program of research, could serve as valid stand-alone research in public affairs programs.

Researchers also have concluded that the value of flexibility extends to research design because the method is equally well-suited to: gathering

information on decision-making (Sevier, 1989), evaluating the effectiveness of communication campaigns (Lorz, 1984; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990), and serving not just as preliminary or self-contained research, but as "follow-up research to clarify findings in the other data" (Morgan, 1988).

Perhaps flexibility most importantly is noted as an advantage during the conduct of the research. Although the researcher approaches the interview with an interview guide to ensure the same questions are addressed with all groups on a given topic, that guide "is not a rigid and restrictive agenda" (Lederman, p. 122). Unlike the survey, for which standardization is a strength, the focus group allows the researcher to probe and explore, often rendering responses that are richer and more in line with the research questions (Morgan, 1988).

But the "richness" of interviewee responses cannot be attributed solely to the moderator's ability in "mining" information (Lederman, p. 118). More often mentioned are the advantages assigned to the interaction of the focus group participants.

Group Interaction

In the group interaction that distinguishes the focus group strategy from most other research resides both its greatest power and its most dangerous and criticized practice. The criticisms are discussed later in this chapter.

Templeton (1987), whose ground breaking in the theoretical and operative examination of focus groups qualifies her as "an adept"--if not a sage--(p. v), said that the advantages of focus groups are sometimes included in an "S-list of qualifiers: Synergism, Snowballing, Stimulation, Security," and so forth (p. 3). Synergism, as defined by "Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary," finds that interaction results in a "total effect greater than the sum of the individual effects."

This explains what Merton, Fiske and Kendall (1990) meant when they wrote:

This is not to say . . . that an interview with ten people will yield ten times the amount of relevant data as the same kind of interview with a single individual. But ordinarily, it will yield a more diversified array of responses. (p. 135)

Morgan described snowballing when he wrote that the group interaction may encourage discussion on a topic that would not come out "in casual conversations or in response to the researcher's preconceived questions" (p. 21). Sevier (1989) talked about security when he described group research as less intimidating than other forms of research.

Lederman (1990) also described security when she discussed the social strength that members of homogeneous groups draw from one another. Even the apathetic group member may be stimulated to participate in a lively group

discussion where speaking is not only relatively safe, but also a "part" of belonging to the group. Given these characteristics, it is easy to understand why the group is often the breeding ground of rich data.

Collection of Rich Data

Because the response format in focus groups is open, respondents provide information that exceeds what is elicited through preconceived researcher questions. In this environment "researcher(s) can obtain deeper levels of meaning, make important connections, and identify subtle nuances in expression in meaning" (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, p. 16).

Building on the value of this data, the analysis is often provided using the respondent's own words. As a result, the information may be easier to understand than complicated statistical analysis (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Blamphin (1990) explained that he became interested in focus groups when he found that a client, given both quantitative data from a survey and information collected during a series of focus groups, preferred using the focus group information in decision-making. However, the way in which any data--qualitative or quantitative--is received depends greatly on its presentation.

Comparatively Quick and Inexpensive

Another advantage that is repeatedly ascribed to focus group research is its quick conduct (Lederman, 1990; Sevier, 1989; Stewart & Shamdasani,

1990). A complete focus group from planning to analysis can be conducted in as little as two weeks (Sevier, 1989).

Focus groups also may be relatively inexpensive because they need not be conducted in natural settings, with sophisticated test equipment, or incur the mailing costs associated with survey research. However, as Morgan (1988) cautioned, not all focus groups are simple or inexpensive.

Application to Special Populations

Among the advantages most important to the research at hand is the value of focus groups when working with special populations such as the less mature (Sevier, 1989) or the less eloquent (Merton, Fiske & Kendall, 1990). This study dealt with such special populations because students and first-term soldiers were the focus group participants.

The special population advantage relates back to the strengths of the group interaction--group security, stimulation, snowballing and so forth. Earlier I mentioned that these characteristics were the heart of the danger and criticism of focus group conduct.

What Do We Sacrifice for Those "S" Words?

Snowballing and security, for example, have been cited as depending on group relationships that actually cripple communication in creating a "groupthink" environment (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, p. 17). The group dynamics that spawn the "s" list are key to what Blamphin (1990) described as

"the general inability to replicate the study, decreasing the reliability (the degree to which the results are the same, no matter how often the research is conducted) and, therefore, the possibility for generalization to a larger population" (pp. 122-123).

Marshall and Rossman (1989) explained that generalization of qualitative studies to other populations and settings can be viewed "by traditional canons as a weakness to the approach" (p. 146). However, the focus group researcher's argument refers to the theoretical framework guiding the study rather than to a general population (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 146).

For example, in this study the focus group interview data from high school students and first-term soldiers can be linked to the processes of media effects and situational communication. The application of the findings to other research in media effects with different populations (an organization's employees), using different vehicles (training films) and in different settings (a corporate retreat) may help fill a theoretical gap such as that exposed at the onset of this study.

A number of the criticisms of the strategy echo criticisms of the qualitative method where the method seems to violate traditional canons that serve as the criteria for judging the approach. As earlier explained, this issue is best resolved when the two are not matched head-to-head.

For this study, I was able to exploit the strengths of the strategy while compensating for its limitations. The following section reviews the choice and application of the focus group interview in this study.

Matching the Research Question to the Method

As I have already pointed out, the qualitative research method in general is designed to answer the "why" question explored in this study. However, matching the question with a particular strategy demanded a close look at how I would ask my subjects "why."

Asking why meant operationalizing the variables that could connect motion pictures with either a situational or an all-powerful media effects perspective. I wanted people to discuss why--not strongly agree or disagree--motion pictures may or may not cause an attitude change. I wanted to know why subjects believed that change may or may not be associated with behavior to occur at some point in their future decision-making--not a short-term response to a motion picture.

To answer why, I could ask participants in the context of viewing a motion picture as a member of a theater audience. I could ask why within a population selected to meet the criteria of having viewed a particular movie or movies. But I knew that people viewed motion pictures with many of the attendant theater characteristics through movie rental for home VCR use. In each of these settings (see Jowett and Linton for motion pictures, 1989; Levy

for VCR, 1990) the activity is described as a collective event that takes place in a group setting.

To create an atmosphere that would encourage a wide range of responses to a narrowly focused process, I subscribed to the one advantage of focus groups most often highlighted in marketing research: the introduction of stimulus material. Much marketing research presents focus groups with some "externally generated stimulus material" (Morgan, 1988, pp. 12-13) such as a new product or prototype to assess customer response.

I decided to show sample scenes excerpted from motion pictures to focus viewers' thoughts on the movies. I believed this was the best method to start discussion on "common ground" without seeming artificial in its attempt to imitate the moviegoing experience.

Focus group members provided both their own responses to the stimulus (in this case the movie) as well as thoughts encouraged through the responses of others. A discussion of motion pictures without a central "focus" is likely to elicit responses about many different motion pictures. In this case, presenting parts of representative movies saved time by establishing the type of movie that would serve as the focal point for discussion.

Practical Considerations

Presenting parts of the movies as a starting point for the discussion resolved one of my practical concerns--how to present the movie in a timely

and representative manner. To accomplish this, I created a movie montage that incorporated approximately three minutes each from three major motion pictures with military themes. Each of the movies had had first-run releases within the last ten years.

This study was not meant to be limited to the three movies represented on videotape. However, the videotape was meant to define a common ground in the group definition of military-theme, entertainment-oriented motion pictures.

Whether subjects had viewed the entirety of any motion picture excerpted on videotape was not a disqualifier because the tapes were only meant as a stimulus to focus the interview. The type of movie to be viewed was not introduced before the interview process to safeguard against consensual discussion before the focus group interview.

This served to bring all the participants on-line for the discussion in an objective and time-efficient manner. The movies and scenes selected, production methods and copyright considerations are discussed under the heading of "External Stimulus" later in this chapter.

The time required to answer the research question was also a practical consideration. The study had to be conducted and the results analyzed within a two-month period. Lederman (1990, p. 120) pointed out that focus groups "allow researchers to gather more data in a relatively shorter time than in

individual interviews." In comparison with the time required to collect questionnaire returns, the focus group also has a time advantage over a large and systematic survey (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, p. 16).

However, the greater the sample in survey research, the better researchers can make "refined descriptive assertions" (Babbie, 1989, p. 254) about general populations. Focus group research neither has this characteristic nor is it selected to represent large populations.

Matching the Sample to the Method

The sample population for this study was selected to parallel the target audience for recruitment and retention activities for the U.S. Army. This resulted in groups from two subpopulations. The first group included male, high school students ages 16 through 18--not yet enlisted in any of the armed forces--to consider the recruitment effect. The second group included male, first-term soldiers--not yet committed to reenlistment--to consider the retention effect.

To this target audience, I decided to add two more subpopulations--the female counterpart to each group. The armed forces do not actively recruit females because they enlist in sufficient numbers. However, women are an important part of the retention population. I decided to add a group of female high school students to compare their responses to those of the male students and female soldiers.

High school students may be less eloquent or forthcoming in expressing their responses to an interviewer than more mature interviewees. In this case the "comfort zone" (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, pp. 33-50) established in the company of a relatively homogeneous group setting may release some of the inhibitions likely in a one-on-one exchange with an adult interviewer.

Sevier (1989, p. 5) reported that because focus groups effectively abate individual anxieties, they are especially helpful when working with less mature audiences, like students. A humorous illustration of the difficulty in interviewing high school students came from Dr. James Roche, an assistant professor instructing a mass communication research class at the University of Maryland.

Roche told the story of a sports reporter who interviewed a high school athlete following record-breaking performance for a sporting event. When the reporter leadingly asked the student if she found the accomplishment to be one of the greatest experiences in her life, the student responded with a simple and self-conscious, "Yes."

Merton, Fiske and Kendall described Army inductees in basic training as another group "ordinarily averse to the interview situation" (1990, p. 143). However, they found that in a group setting the response of one inductee would encourage the active participation of others with increasingly personal and self-appraising responses (p. 143). Of course how well the groups interact

depend on the group characteristics, but also on the expertise of the group moderator.

Researcher Expertise

Although I never had conducted a focus group *per se* before this research, I had spent many hours monitoring group discussions among soldiers. As a company commander, tac officer⁶ and assignment officer I had dealt with the issues of small and large groups of enlisted soldiers, officer candidates and lieutenants, respectively.

In addition to this experience, I had access to individuals who had conducted focus groups in research in the past. Both my thesis adviser and a student at a parallel stage in the master's program offered valued advice in technique and procedure. Finally, I conducted a pilot study and used that experience to refine my technique. The pilot study is described later in this chapter.

The focus group was a method I felt comfortable in conducting. This technique also allowed me to select a critical rather than an empirical procedure of analysis to interpret and present my findings. Acknowledging that the study dealt with special sample populations, required focus, examined a group communication activity and had to be conducted over a fairly short

period of time, the focus group demonstrated sufficient strengths for selection.

The Focus Group Interview in Practice

To develop and conduct this study I combined the practical guidelines of three sources (Morgan, 1988; Broom & Dozier, 1990; L. Grunig, 1990) to create the scrutinizing checklist from which I operated. The flexibility required of effective focus groups was critical when the guidelines did not address events peculiar to the groups' recruitment or interaction.

Having explained the purpose behind the conduct of the group interview, and understanding that the unit of analysis for this study was the group (versus the individual), the next step called for deciding the number of groups conducted. Morgan (1988, p. 42) explained that an important determinant for the number of groups requires consideration of the number of subgroups needed. The more homogeneous the groups, the fewer groups needed.

In this study, the groups were defined in terms of the armed forces' recruiting profile, or the available first-term soldier. These groups were further divided by gender.

Participants

The armed forces' target audience profile for recruiting defined the first two groups. The four characteristics that define this profile are age (17- to 21-years old), gender (male or female), enlistment status (not enlisted in any of

the armed forces), and physical capability. Understanding how a career commitment may influence the involvement variable, I selected high school students in the decision-making stage of planning their futures.

The first group then was composed of male, high school students, 16- to 18-years old, physically able to join the Army with no service commitment. The second sample was female, high school students, 16- to 18-years old, physically able to join the Army with no service commitment. The groups were drawn from Florida because of a resistance to introducing the study among school administrators in Northern Virginia. This answered another concern--the possibility of inordinately high involvement among students who live close to the military-industrial complex of the metropolitan DC area and high exposure to national-level news delivered through local media.

The next two groups were composed of first-term male soldiers from a Northern Virginia army installation and first-term female soldiers from the same installation. The groups were gender specific to match the high school sample. A first-term soldier is defined as a soldier who is in his first enlistment and has not yet committed to a reenlistment.

The geographical location of the soldiers was not judged to be so sensitive as that of the students because of the soldier's intimate knowledge of the military. However, soldiers in training en route to their first duty assignment as well as soldiers assigned to the studied installation were

interviewed. This distinction was made to alleviate the burden of participation from a single unit. The time in service for soldiers ranged from 4 months to 3 and one-half years.

I followed Morgan's (1988) advice to run at least two groups each to allow for a "check," despite the highly similar composition within the groups from each population. The male groups were limited to two each and the females to one each to meet a practical constraint highlighted by L. Grunig (1990, p. 15)--time to conduct the study. Participants of the groups were recruited by high school administrators and members of the soldier's chain of command, respectively.

When determining the size of the groups, my primary consideration was to generate enough conversation from each participant to gain a clear sense of his or her reaction to the motion picture stimulus. Large groups, Morgan (1990, p. 43) cautioned, may generate more conversation--but at a more superficial level and with the possibility of allowing some participants to disregard their responsibility to contribute to the group.

Smaller groups, those of six to eight participants, were selected to cultivate personal conversations that I considered most valuable in revealing the levels of involvement. Broom and Dozier (1990) and Morgan (1988) adopted a common voice in warning focus group planners to recruit more participants than needed.

Eight participants were recruited for each group with a goal of at least six participants per group. In cases where all recruited participants were present for interviews, all were included.

Recruiting Participants

The criteria for selection were passed to the high school liaison and military commanders responsible for identifying group participants. Although I had considered college students for the "civilian" sample, I did not draw from that population because of a possible confounding involvement variable related to the cost of and commitment to higher education.

I coordinated the selection of focus group participants with the administrators and commanders of the students and soldiers, respectively. Initial contact with coordination liaisons for both groups began with telephone calls.

High School Students.

I began my student search with three Northern Virginia high school principals, all of whom refused to host the study in their schools. I resorted to a personal contact in Florida to identify a willing school.

The contact met first with the school principal. As a follow-up to that meeting, I sent the principal a copy of my resume and proposal under a cover letter requesting participation (see Appendix A). I closed the letter by explaining that I would call him within a week.

When I telephoned the principal, he had had an opportunity to review my proposal. He was most receptive to the study and put me in touch with the high school occupational specialist who served as my point of contact for all future coordination.

The occupational specialist offered students an opportunity to volunteer for the focus groups by reading the information on the parental consent forms (see Appenndix B). This information told students that I was an alumna of the high school who was returning to conduct research in support of my graduate studies. Students were told--via the consent forms--that the research involved watching about ten minutes of scenes from entertainment-oriented movies and discussing that material as a group. They were not told that I was an Army officer or that the movies had military themes.

High school seniors were given the opportunity to volunteer during a mandatory language arts class. Students were interviewed during school hours with the permission of the principal serving as authorization for student participation. Parental consent forms were collected from all student participants (see Appendix B).

Soldiers.

I made my first contact in recruiting soldiers with the installation public affairs officer whom I knew from a previous study. He suggested a battalion

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Soldiers.

I made my first contact in recruiting soldiers with the installation public affairs officer whom I knew from a previous study. He suggested a battalion commander who may be receptive to the proposed research. I contacted the commander by telephone.

After briefly describing my research purpose and design, I requested 20 of the battalion's soldiers for two focus groups. The commander gave approval but asked that I also interview soldiers from another unit on the installation.

The commander established his adjutant as my point of contact for coordinating the study. Contacting the adjutant, I found I knew the officer from a previous assignment. The cooperation and support garnered from this unit were outstanding.

With one soldier subgroup to be coordinated, I called the installation officers from my basic branch. Without hesitation, I received support in forming my last focus group from first-term military police soldiers.

videotapes of focus groups. Second, I conducted a pilot study to refine my skills and guide questions. Third, I weighed the use of deception in my role as a moderator. The following sections detail the latter two steps.

Pilot Study

I conducted a pilot study a week before the focus group research was scheduled to begin. The pilot study has been cited as a good way to demonstrate the practicality of the research procedure and the investigator's skills (Locke, Spirduso & Silverman, 1987, p. 68). Marshall and Rossman (1989) also described the pilot as a means to "lend credence to the researcher's claim that he can conduct such a study" (p. 51). Because these were to be my "first days in the field," I considered the pilot critical.

My pilot study was conducted with a group of six male soldiers. All were volunteers. This group was not restricted to first-term soldiers, since I would be returning to this same unit and did not want to exhaust that subpopulation. The soldiers in the pilot study had Army careers that ranged from 18 years to just four months.

The entire process, to include showing the videotape, took 90 minutes. The group size was ideal because it allowed a balanced conversation among group participants.

The interview was conducted in a small, comfortable office in the soldier's billets. Participants seemed at ease in this environment and helped

themselves to refreshments before settling into a small circle for the discussion.

I arrived early to test all the equipment and organize the room. Although the early arrival was good for ensuring my preparedness, the soldiers wandered in and out of the room asking questions about the group and the research. For future interviews, I asked that participants wait in a separate room.

The movie montage was an effective tool to focus the conversation. I noticed several of the soldiers tapping their feet along with the sound track. When the discussion began, I appreciated the montage for its value in keeping the conversation on track. I could insert one of the titles in a probe question and direct the conversation away from other movie titles (other than military theme) that interested the group.

I considered this group highly involved. They summarily dismissed the movies as "not real." They described high-involvement indicators such as family association ("My dad's a master sergeant in the Army and I kind of knew I'd go into the military") or national service ("It was after Vietnam and I felt like I owed my country something") for joining the service.

However, participants believed the movies would have a tremendous value in recruiting high school students. One participant even referred to a conversation he had with a recruiter about the effect of Top Gun: "When 'Top

Gun' came out recruitment came into the Navy. Anytime something hot like one of these movies comes out, people just pile into the recruiter's office, wanting to talk to them about enlisting."

When asked if the movies would affect their future decisions of reenlistment, the soldiers again answered no--explaining that they knew the difference between the real Army and the movies. One soldier described carrying the M-60 machinegun to distinguish reality from the movies:

I can't believe those guys in the movies carry a machinegun around with one hand and fire from the hip. People who don't know any better, they see that and believe it. I know if they had to carry one on a road march it wouldn't seem that great.

One participant who identified his reasons for staying in as family and duty--high involvement indicators--explained that maybe when he had first enlisted, the movies made a difference. When he referred to the allure of the movies before his first enlistment, he mentioned the actor as a celebrity (mentioning John Wayne as a hero), a low-involvement indicator. He added again that the movies would not be effective in keeping him in the Army.

At the conclusion of the pilot study, the soldiers were genuinely interested in the outcome of the study and asked to receive a summary of the findings. One soldier, who was a reservist on active duty, even asked that the results be forwarded to his home.

The soldiers also said that it was fun to be part of the group. This feedback was reinforced when I talked with my point of contact for organizing the group. She told me that when she asked one soldier about the focus group, he explained that he could not discuss it until I had completed my study at the end of the month. However, he did tell her that he was glad to be a part of the study.

My note-taker accompanied me on the pilot and tested her ability to organize the seating chart, monitor discussants and identify the involvement indicators. She also gave me feedback on my role as the moderator. My final moderator decisions are explained below.

Role of the Moderator

Because I was concerned that revealing my occupation and rank may influence the responses of focus group participants, I decided to withhold that information until the conclusion of each group. I weighed my decision to withhold my identity in my moderator role against Kelman's (1967) questions that a researcher must ask to justify the use of deception. I posed the questions: How significant is the study? Are there alternatives to the deception? And how severe is the deception?

I believed that the significance of the study in exploring an area of research that was, at least within the last ten years, largely neglected

outweighed the severity of the deception. Previously I had considered and discounted alternative research methods.

Another alternative was to employ the use of an outside moderator. However, the moderator's effectiveness is a function of "understanding the nature and scope of the research problem, . . . determining the appropriate depth of probing; being up-to-date and familiar with the topic . . . and ultimately the analysis and interpretation of the data" (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, p. 82). I was convinced that effectiveness would be sacrificed by dividing the moderator role.

Finally, I decided to disclose my identity to each group at the conclusion of the interview. Therefore, I considered the deception to be temporary.

To check this use of deception, after I disclosed my identity to the pilot study participants I asked them to respond to written questions about the deception without identifying themselves. The two questions (see Appendix C) read:

The focus group moderator has revealed to you that she is an Army captain. Do you believe having this knowledge before the discussion began would have affected your responses?

yes

no

Do you believe having this knowledge before the discussion began would have affected the responses of other group participants?

yes

no

One participant was called away from the group before the questions were asked. Of the remaining five, four answered no to the first question and one answered yes. The second question may have been more telling: Three answered yes, and two answered no. The one respondent who answered yes to the first question also answered yes to the second question.

In discussion, after the written questions were answered, I asked the participants if they would like to discuss the deception. They quickly came to consensus that although the nonthreatening topic would not necessitate deception, they felt a more "comfortable" environment was created by not knowing my occupation and rank.

This decision is discussed at length because it played a prominent part in my role as moderator. Although I wanted to actively guide the group, I did not want to "give myself away" through the course of the interview.

The centralizing "focus" effect of the videotape and the relative intimacy of a small and homogeneous group were pivotal in my success as a moderator. The movie montage served to focus the interview and bring me on-line with my participants without suspicion. Additionally, the groups were

comfortable discussing what the pilot study group had described as a nonthreatening topic and required little probing or prompting by me. They focused on the research questions with just the guide questions and eye contact or a nod.

In the event of silence, I used eye contact to register my desire that a participant contribute to the group. Occasionally, I called on participants by name. Large name tags presenting the first names of group members facilitated this technique.

The Interview Guide

An interview guide was prepared to support the research questions. The guide consisted of open-ended questions with preplanned probes under each topic (Morgan, p. 56). The guide was used as a "rough map" (Broom & Dozier, 1990, p. 327) that followed the direction of the conversation. It was effective in keeping people on the right track, without ever telling them where to go.

The questions (see Appendix D) progressed from a general "warm up" type, "About how many movies have you seen at a theater during the last 30 days?" to questions developed around the research questions, to a conclusion. The main research questions focused the discussion on the research topic--the purpose of the interview. These questions--topically organized as involvement, celebrity influence, and media effect--included:

1. Involvement questions

a. From what sources (media, family, friends, school, etc.) have you learned about the American armed forces?

b. Can you explain where your image of what a soldier should look or act like came from?

c. Many movies are available on videotape or premium cable within two or three months of their initial release. Some people claim they would rather see movies on tape or cable. Others say they prefer to see movies in a theatre. Do you hold either of these preferences? Why or why not?

2. Celebrity influence questions

a. Do you have any favorite movie stars? If so, who are they? Why are they favorites?

b. How convincingly do you believe the key actors in each of the film "clips" depicted your image of a soldier?

c. Some advertisers suggest that people are likely to purchase products or services based on the spokesperson's attractiveness (example, "x" drinks Pepsi Cola because MC Hammer drinks Pepsi in an advertisement). Can you describe an instance where this is true for you or your friends? Do you believe some people are more likely to make decisions based on celebrity influence? Why?

3. Media effects

- a. What do you believe you learned about the armed forces from motion pictures?
- b. Where would you go to learn about the armed forces? (students only)
- c. Ron Kovic, author of "Born on the Fourth of July" says part of the reason he enlisted in the Marines was the influence of movies like the ones you have just recalled. Can you explain how young people today might respond to this type of movie? Can you think of other situations where people said they did something because of what they saw in a movie?
- d. Overall, would you say that movies have left you with a positive or negative impression of the military as a career? Why?
- e. How would you describe the effect that movies have on you?

I found couching the research questions in reference to the experience or belief of others generated the liveliest and richest discussion. For example, I read the short description of Ron Kovic, who said his decision to join the Marines was influenced by a motion picture. Then I asked the respondents if they could think of situations when they or people they knew did or said they did something because of what they saw in a movie.

Knowing that the interview guide is not meant to be rigid or restrictive (Lederman, 1990, p. 122), I used the probe questions as needed. When

discussion seemed to depart from the focus, a request for clarification got the group back on track. Similarly, when conversation seemed to flag or be dominated by a single individual's view, a request for additional opinions would encourage participants to join and offer their perspective.

Incentives

Since the students were interviewed within their role-defining setting--school--an incentive to entice volunteers was not necessary. Soldiers, volunteering their participation, were offered the incentive of pizza and soft drinks.

Getting Started

Each session started with my introduction, an explanation of focus groups and the purpose of this discussion. For this portion, I followed a checklist (see Appendix E) to ensure all groups were given the same information about issues such as: confidentiality, use of the audiotapes, freedom to leave if they felt uncomfortable, and the value of every member's input. My reference for developing this introduction was Appendix C of "Using Research in Public Relations: Applications to Program Management," by Broom and Dozier (1990).

Although these groups were not composed of people who were strangers,⁷ I did begin with introductions around the room to foster what L. Grunig (1990, p. 19) described as a nonthreatening start to the conversation

among group members. Once these introductions were made, no participant had to sit in dread of saying his or her first words in the group setting.

Introductions were conducted before presentation of the stimulus (the videotape). In this way, the discussion followed the stimulus without any interruption. My opening comments informed participants that I was a graduate student conducting a study in partial fulfillment of my master's degree. They were told they would be viewing a movie montage of three contemporary motion pictures. And after the viewing, they would be asked to comment on the movies.

The note-taker also was identified during this time. I explained the note-taker's role as that of a non-participating observer. During group introductions the note-taker introduced him- or herself.

The Note-Taker

Although the sessions were recorded on audiotape, I used a note-taker as a perceptual check in recording data. Using the level of involvement indicators defined in the conceptualization, the note-taker also noted how he or she would identify each participant--high or low involvement. This notation was used during analysis.

The note-taker also prepared a seating chart and noted the order of conversation according to that chart. This facilitated assigning comments to a numbered position during review of the tapes.

My note-taker in the student groups was a male family member. He was selected because of his previous classroom experience (30 years in public education) and because of his knowledge of the study.

My note-taker for the soldier groups was a student peer with an interest in all types of research. She also had information about the study from its inception. There were no other observers for these group interviews.⁸

External Stimulus

One of the most difficult decisions was how to present the motion pictures to the subjects. Time prohibited showing a full-length movie. Drawing from the literature on VCR use, and a decision to represent only a portion of a movie, I decided on a videotape montage.

I selected three major motion pictures with military themes that had been in first release within the last ten years. Two of the three movies had received military assistance. The third movie, a box office success, had not.

The movies were: "An Officer and a Gentleman" (1982); "Top Gun" (1986); and "Firebirds" (1990). "An Officer and a Gentleman" was the movie produced without military assistance. It was selected because it was produced without assistance. If it rendered the same effects as the other movies, assistance may seem inconsequential.

The other two movies were selected because they were contemporary, military-assisted motion pictures. Approximately three minutes were extracted

from each motion picture to produce the montage. The montage included extracts from several comparable scenes in each movie--not a continuous three minutes from any single scene.

For example, scenes chosen from each movie showed a title screen, the lead character in uniform performing a military duty, and a "guy gets girl" ending. I created the movie montage myself using two videotape machines--one to play and one to record.

I judged copyright issues protected through the fair use doctrine (Copyright Revision Act, 1977, Sec. 107). I used a small amount of the movies that did not relate the plot or "heart of the story" to focus group participants. Specifically I used: 4 minutes out of 1 hour and 25 minutes from "Firebirds," 2 minutes and 19 seconds out of 2 hours and 5 minutes from "Officer and a Gentleman," and 2 minutes and 47 seconds out of 1 hour and 50 minutes from "Top Gun." Additionally, this montage only was shown seven times for the noncommercial research conducted within the course of this thesis.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection for the interviews was accomplished through the use of an audiotape. Since there would be no attempt to analyze "body language" communicated during the interviews, I did not use a video recorder. My

assistant took notes that served as a perceptual check on my impressions to the interview and later of the recordings.

Later, these notes were compared with the interview tapes as a check for researcher bias. Specifically, the notes were compared with the tapes for material accuracy and agreement in identification of participants as low or high involvement.

Recall from the conceptualization that indicators of high involvement made reference to the military experiences of family or friends, pronouncements of military service as a patriotic duty, attention to the character portrayed by the actor and especially attention to the message that character may deliver about the armed forces. In contrast low-involvement indicators included an acute awareness of the moviegoing event, the theater environment or elevated attraction to celebrities.

Analysis of the data followed the qualitative approach of searching "for general statements about the relationships among categories . . . (to build) grounded theory" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 112). Lederman (1990) included among approaches to analyzing the data collected during a focus group: "to use the data as the basis of categories which emerge from them . . . (and) to use the data as the basis for summary statements which attempt to capture the essence of the interviewees' responses" (p. 124).

These approaches were selected for this study because of their "fit" with the structure of a grounded-theory study. The note-taker and I discussed and shared an understanding of the involvement and celebrity influence definitions.

Each time one of these variables was introduced in the group interview, the note-taker highlighted the comment. When reviewing the tapes, I highlighted what I believed to be our common understanding.

Once the notes and taped interviews were compared, commonalities were analyzed critically for theoretical linkages. Disagreement led to additional discussion with the note-taker. In instances where no resolution was reached, the comments were considered further for their relevance to the study. Any comments included in the findings that did not meet in agreement between the note-taker and moderator are so recognized.

Although a content analysis resulting from coding the taped responses was possible, I did not seek to generate numbers. Presentation of the findings instead include direct and partial quotes from the interview tapes to illustrate the data and linkages for this study.

Organizing the Findings

The following chapter presents the findings of the six focus groups and the pilot. The findings are organized by under topic headings by focus group subpopulation and gender. Therefore, what the reader can expect is to locate

information about level of involvement, celebrity influence and media effects by female soldiers, followed by male soldiers and by female students, followed by male students.

For example, the reader can find the comment that indicates a female soldier's level of involvement. The following comments include indicators of the male soldier's level of involvement. Organizing the interview information this way led to a relatively simple identification and comparison of levels of involvement and celebrity influence. And it worked well in the final analysis of the effect of entertainment-oriented motion pictures with military themes.

Also, I found this organization practical when answering the research questions. The research questions are answered directly in the end of the following chapter.

FINDINGS

The U.S. Army provides assistance to entertainment-oriented projects, such as motion pictures, with the hope that the resulting movies that will increase public understanding of the Army and enhance its recruitment and retention programs. A history rich in coordination between Hollywood and the Pentagon suggests those objectives are satisfactorily realized. However, the results reported here represent the first research effort to examine the effects of entertainment-oriented motion pictures with military themes.

This chapter presents the findings from seven focus group interviews. The pilot study findings, considered interesting and substantive, are summarized after a discussion of the six research groups. However, pilot information is not to be considered comparable to information from the other groups because the preselection criteria were different for pilot participants. The recruitment screen and relevant background information for each group is reviewed in this chapter.

When conducting the focus groups, I used an interview guide to introduce the topic areas of involvement, celebrity influence and media effects. The interviews concentrated on determining how focus group participants

reported they were affected by entertainment-oriented motion pictures with military themes.

An advantage of the focus group is the rich data gained through group interaction. To encourage that interaction, I tried to remain flexible and open in my moderator role and followed the course of the conversation rather than a structured interview schedule. To enhance readability and create a parallel structure for reporting the findings, I have presented interview results under question topic areas and not the exact questions and probes used in each group.

To present the data in this chapter, I first reviewed the recruitment screen and described the relevant characteristics of each group. Next I organized the responses of each group by topic area in the order of involvement, celebrity influence and media effects--highlighting the most significant findings.

Presenting the data in this way allowed me to compare and contrast the findings between students and soldiers, and gender both inter- and intra-subpopulation. Thus the results are summarized by soldier groups, student groups, soldier and student groups, female soldier and student groups and male soldier and student groups. Key areas of agreement or disagreement are highlighted in each summary. This analysis served to suggest patterns of motion picture effects--or lack of effects--and was not meant to be

generalizable to all students or soldiers. These group summaries are followed by a direct response to the research questions.

Recruitment Screen

Participants carefully were preselected for the six focus groups to satisfy criteria for the Army's target populations of recruitment and reenlistment. To make the groups as nearly similar as possible in problem and constraint recognition, I asked that the participants allowed to volunteer for the groups meet certain characteristics regarding enlistment status and physical and administrative ability (to enlist or reenlist).

The focus group research strategy accommodated this screen since homogeneity within groups is critical to the comfortable and productive interaction of participants. Recall from the preceding chapter that two groups each of highly similar participants were conducted to ensure observations were not peculiar to the dynamics of any unique set of participants (Morgan, 1988).

The following brief description of each group's participants reflects the preselection effort. This information was gained through warm-up questions or provided by the leaders and administrators who recruited the volunteers.

Focus Group 1 Participants

Participants were selected for this group on the following bases: female, first-term soldiers, engaged in entry-level training, possessing no known physical or administrative characteristics prohibiting reenlistment. The

unit from which the soldiers volunteered was selected because it was a training company from a training battalion with soldiers who recently had enlisted in the Army. There were six participants in this group.

I conducted the interview in a dayroom and used a large-screen television to show the video montage. Group participants reported seeing between zero and four movies in a theater in the last 30 days, and between zero and six movies via a VCR in the same time period. All of the participants had seen at least two of the movies from the video montage. Every participant had seen "Top Gun."

The women reported seeing the movies either in a theater, at home via a VCR or both. They also brought up a number of movies they described as similar to the ones in the montage. The similar movies included: "Full Metal Jacket," "Rolling Thunder," "Hamburger Hill," "Heartbreak Ridge," "Casualties of War," and "Biloxi Blues."

Focus Group 2 Participants

Participants for this group were selected on the following bases: male, first-term soldiers, engaged in advanced individual training (AIT), possessing no known physical or administrative characteristics prohibiting reenlistment. They were drawn from a separate training company within the same battalion as participants in group one. There were six participants in this group.

This interview also was conducted in a dayroom. This time I used a standard-size television to show the video montage. The group participants reported seeing between two and four movies in a theater in the last 30 days, and between two and 12 movies via a VCR in the same time frame. All of the participants had seen at least two of the movies from the video montage. Every participant had seen "Top Gun."

The men reported seeing the movies either in a theater, at home via a VCR or both. They also brought up a number of movies they described as similar to the ones in the montage. The similar movies included: "Platoon," "Flight of the Intruder," "Red Dawn," "Navy Seals," and "Iron Eagle."

Focus Group 3 Participants

Participants were selected for this group on the following bases: male, first-term soldiers, having successfully completed all entry-level training and currently serving in their military occupational skill (MOS), possessing no known physical and administrative characteristics prohibiting reenlistment. The unit from which the soldiers volunteered was selected because staff members were receptive to the research project and could make available facilities to show the video montage. There were eight participants in this group.

I conducted the interview in a headquarters conference room and used a standard-size television to show the video montage. The group participants

reported seeing between zero and four movies in a theater in the last 30 days and between zero and 50 movies via a VCR in the same time period. All of the participants had seen at least "Top Gun" from the video montage.

The men in this group reported seeing the movie(s) either in a theater, at home via a VCR or both. They also brought up movies they described as similar to the ones in the montage. The similar movies included: "Full Metal Jacket," "Heartbreak Ridge," "Born on the Fourth of July," and "The Package."

Focus Group 4 Participants

Participants for this group were selected on the following bases: female, high school seniors, having parental permission to participate in the focus group, possessing no known physical or administrative characteristics that would prohibit enlistment. All the student groups were drawn from one school. The school was selected because it was geographically displaced from military installations and federal government, and because school administrators were receptive to the study. There were seven participants in this group.

I conducted the interview in an isolated corner of the school library and used a standard-size television to show the video montage. The same location and television set were used for all students groups. All student focus group

interviews were conducted during sequential class periods within a single school day.

Participants of this group reported seeing between one and four movies in a theater in the last 30 days and between one and 15 movies via a VCR in the same time period. All of the participants had seen at least "Top Gun" from the video montage.

The young women reported seeing the movie(s) in a theater, at home via a VCR or on premium cable channels such as HBO. Some reported seeing the movies by two or three of these media. They brought up only "Born on the Fourth of July" as a movie similar to those on the video montage.

Focus Group 5 Participants

Participants for this group were selected on the following bases: male, high school seniors, having parental permission to participate in the focus group, possessing no known physical or administrative characteristics that would prohibit enlistment. The school information and physical setting for the interview are the same as group four. There were seven participants in this group.

The group participants reported seeing between zero and six movies in a theater in the last 30 days and between six and 30 movies via a VCR in the same time period. All of the participants had seen at least "Top Gun" and "Officer and a Gentleman" from the video montage.

The young men reported seeing the movies in a theater, at home via a VCR or on premium cable channels such as HBO. Some reported seeing the movies by two or three of these media. They brought up "Navy Seals," "Rambo," and "Platoon" as movies similar to those on the video montage.

Focus Group 6 Participants

Participants for this group were selected on the following bases: male, high school seniors, having parental permission to participate in the focus group, possessing no known physical or administrative characteristics prohibiting enlistment. The school information and physical setting for the interview are the same as groups four and five. There were seven participants in this group.

The group participants reported seeing between zero and five movies in a theater in the last 30 days and between one and three movies via a VCR in the same time period. All of the participants had seen all of the movies from the video montage.

This group of young men also reported seeing the movies in a theater, at home via a VCR or on premium cable channels such as HBO. Some reported seeing the movies by two or three of these media. They brought up "Born on the Fourth of July," "Patton," "Navy Seals," and "Days of Thunder" as movies similar to those on the video montage.

The Pilot Focus Group

Participants for this focus group were not held to the same preselection standards as the other soldier groups because I later drew focus group number three from the same unit and could not risk exhausting the subpopulation. Participants were selected for the pilot group on the following bases: male, Army soldiers, volunteering to participate in a 90-minute study. There were six participants who had served from four months to 19 years in the Army.

The interview was conducted in a small, comfortable office in the soldier's billets, and a standard-size television was used to show the video montage. The participants reported seeing between zero and 12 movies in a theater in the last 30 days and between zero and 20 via a VCR during the same time period. All of the participants had seen at least "Officer and a Gentleman" from the video montage.

The soldiers reported seeing the movie(s) in a theater or at home via a VCR, or by both media. They mentioned four movies that they considered similar to the ones in the montage. The similar movies included: "Predator II," "Flight of the Intruder," "Navy Seals," and "Full Metal Jacket."

Participant Summary

All participants appeared genuinely interested in the video montage. I was surprised to find that more participants had seen the oldest movie on the videotape, "Officer and a Gentleman," than the most recent release,

"Firebirds." Using the videotape stimulus and brainstorming what movies the group considered similar to those in the montage proved a good way to establish common ground and get the conversation started. Once the group was interacting, I began to introduce questions from the topic areas of involvement, celebrity influence and media effects.

Involvement

The first set of questions was designed to identify participants' level of involvement with the armed forces. The three issues related to involvement are discussed below.⁹

How (if at all) do participants describe their "connection" with the armed forces?

Group 1: Female Soldiers

Three of the soldiers agreed that their first involvement with the armed forces was through male family members. They cited fathers, a step-father and brothers who were currently or had formerly served in a branch of the service.

Two of the women agreed that they started to think about how the armed forces could change their lives while in college. Explaining this connection, they said they learned about the Army, specifically, through

students in the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program at their schools. One of these women further attributed her connection to financial difficulties that made her seek out the Army's education assistance plan.

The sixth woman said she could not remember what first had made her aware of the Army. She talked about her awareness in terms of "the image [military service] projects. When someone knows you're in the military they have respect for you." She explained that she had heard family and friends refer to soldiers and sailors with that same respect.

Group 2: Male AIT Soldiers

Four of the soldiers said their first involvement with the armed forces was through contact with family and friends currently or formerly serving in a branch of the service. They cited a step-father, uncle, brother and best friend as their first connection with military service.

One soldier said that he could not recall any single connection, rather a mixture of information through the news and entertainment media. The last soldier to speak explained that he could distinctly remember seeing a recruiter's flyer while a high school freshman. He said the pamphlet "planted the seed" of his interest in the Army.

Group 3: Male Soldiers Serving in Their MOS

Seven of the eight participants in this group responded with a clear idea of their involvement with the military. One soldier said he could not think of anything in particular.

Five of the soldiers explained that they had family and friends currently or formerly serving in the military. One of these five soldiers explained that stories of military service were always a part of his life because his grandfather had served during World War I and his own father had served during World War II.

Another soldier described himself as "extremely patriotic." He explained that he felt an obligation to serve. He also had been active in high school ROTC before joining the Army.

This group included the only participant who claimed motion pictures were his first connection with the military. He said his most recent impression before enlisting was from television advertising that emphasized the travel, education and training benefits of the Army. But he said movies were the first thing to "paint a picture in [his] head" about the military.

Group 4: Female Students

Four members of this group said they felt no interest or involvement with the armed forces. One young woman, who said she learned about the armed forces through a combination of the news media and the experiences of

male friends and family members, reasoned that people could not really learn about the armed forces through movies. She doubted that an individual could get a true picture of military service "unless he gets in there and does it" or asks friends serving in the military what it is all about.

One young woman referred to a step-father who had served in Vietnam as her connection with military service. Another acknowledged a recent feeling of involvement with the military, saying that news coverage of the Gulf War made her aware of how "what soldiers do" could affect everyone.

Group 5: Male Students (a)

Two of the seven students in this group explained that their first connection to the armed forces was through friends currently serving. One of those students called on the experiences of his friends to discredit the validity of military movies. He described his friends as "normal people" and the movies as "just a bunch of hype."

Two students said their first connection was through the news media. One student said he could recall a single television documentary about Army sports as his first connection. Another student offered no response to the question or group conversation around the topic. The last student said he guessed his involvement was from everywhere, "mostly tv and movies."

Group 6: Male Students (b)

Five of the seven members of this group credited the military experiences of family members as their connection to the military. The relationships included fathers, a step-father, brothers, an uncle and a male cousin. One student neither responded to the question here nor addressed the topic in later conversation.

A student on the high school wrestling team explained that he sought out an Army recruiter after viewing a television program that suggested the Army as a way to use his athletic skill. He said, "I went to the recruiter after I saw something on TV about Army wrestling. Because I am a wrestler, I thought it [the Army's education plan] was a way to go to college."

A student whose father recently had retired from the Navy said he thought his experiences as a "Navy son" affected the way he saw movies with military themes. Referring to "Top Gun," he said: "I've been on carriers and seen the planes take off. I've seen what it's really like."

How have participants formed their expectations of the armed forces?

Group 1: Female Soldiers

Despite references to family and school as their first connection with the armed forces, this question generated discussion around impressions made

by the media. For example, the woman who explained that her foster brothers encouraged her to join the Army said that her first image of a soldier was of Goldie Hawn in the 1980 movie "Private Benjamin."

Despite her earlier reference to her brothers, at this point she said: "The first time I ever saw anything about the military was the movie 'Private Benjamin.' There's a girl here who I feel can relate perfectly to her."

One woman who said her father represented her image of a soldier expressed concern that outside of "Private Benjamin," she could not think of movies with military themes that depicted female servicemembers. She emphasized that the experiences of female soldiers are "a lot different than what the movies show."

A young soldier who learned about the armed forces from her uncle said the television character "Gomer Pyle" formed her image of marines before she joined the Army. All of the group members confirmed her association, saying that they could vividly remember the antics of the comical Marine private and his sergeant.

Group 2: Male AIT Soldiers

This group also agreed that their images of soldiers came from exposure to the media--specifically movies. Two soldiers cited a specific movie. One recalled "Rambo" and the other remembered "Full Metal Jacket."

A soldier who did not claim any connection to any of the Armed

Forces before his enlistment explained that movies were his sole reference for what a soldier should "look like." He concluded: "How many other places do you ever see soldiers? In a parade, maybe."

Group 3: Male Soldiers Serving in Their MOS

Although this group also concurred that their image of soldiers before their enlistment came from motion pictures, they quickly turned to a discussion of how they were dissatisfied with that image.

They contrasted what they **really** knew of soldiers to the motion picture portrayal of soldiers. Even movies they enjoyed and found entertaining, they agreed were unrealistic or "just a movie."

Surprisingly, the soldier who felt connected with the Army from a father and grandfather who served in World War II and I, respectively, recalled "Gomer Pyle" as his first impression of servicemen. The other members of the group appeared embarrassed slightly by this reference and disagreed that the television series left them with an image of how a marine looks.

Group 4: Female Students

The members of this group never mentioned the movies in their discussion of where they got their ideas of what soldiers should look like. They attributed their images to the news media, specifically to news coverage of the Gulf War.

None of the women mentioned female soldiers. Instead they described soldiers, sailors and airmen as "strong, tough-looking guys" who would be able "to protect" them.

Group 5: Male Students (a)

Members agreed that the movies formed their image of what service members look like. However, they expressed doubt that the image was correct. One student who cited no previous connection to the armed forces said that movies represented all he knew about the military.

Other group members were more critical. Of the movies from the video montage, they agreed the characters were fictional and too heroic to reflect what they thought was "really happening." They agreed that the 1986 movie "Platoon" was realistic and that it was the kind of movie that presented an "accurate" image. They believed, as one said, that "there were people like that."

Focus Group 6: Male Students (b)

Two of the students who earlier referred to fathers who had served in the military said real soldiers and sailors shaped their impressions of what servicemen look like. These impressions were not necessarily of their fathers, but servicemen they had seen associated with their fathers.

The rest of the group acknowledged that their associations with people in the military probably shaped their impressions. With little discussion they

agreed this must have been the case because they were "the only ones [they] knew."

How does the environment in which movies are viewed influence the effect of the movie?

Group 1: Female Soldiers

Members agreed that watching movies at home via a VCR was preferred. They liked the convenience of pausing the movie to get snacks or go to the bathroom. In the case of movies they said they would watch more than once, they said they would wait for a video release rather than return to the theater.

The soldiers cited high theater admission costs as a deterrent to "going to the movies." None of the women acknowledged any other characteristics unique to the theater environment or movie-going event. But, the woman with the foster brother described herself as "getting into the movies and really losing herself" in a theater environment.

Group 2: Male AIT Soldiers

Members disagreed on how the theater environment influenced their thoughts, attitudes and behavior after a movie. One member said there simply was not much difference between seeing a movie at home or in a theater.

Another said that although the theater left him with that "larger than life" impression, he did not feel like he sacrificed anything for the convenience of the replay and pause buttons on his VCR.

The group (all six) recently had seen a movie together. Three members agreed the collective viewing experience of a theater resulted in a "much more intense experience." One of these three described a situation when audience laughter during a funny scene, and not the scene itself, prompted him to laugh as well.

Another soldier reminded the group that after they viewed the action movie together, they wanted "to go and mess with somebody." A fourth group member agreed at this point, conceding, "I'm sure if I was at home that after watching that [movie], I would just 'click' turn [television] off and go get a coke."

Group 3: Male Soldiers Serving in Their MOS

Participants came to a speedy consensus that theaters were too expensive and movie audiences too distracting to offer any advantage over renting movies for home viewing via a VCR. One soldier said that some adventure movies were more exciting on a large screen. But, even that qualification would "depend on the movie."

Group 4: Female Students

This group agreed on distinct environmental characteristics that influenced the way they thought about and behaved after viewing movies in a theater. Their discussion was so lively that I have included a direct portion of their interaction:

Student 5: I like the sound in the theater. The theater just has more sound.

Student 1: It seems like you're right in the middle of the action and everything.

Student 4: At home it's just like TV. It's boring. It's just not the same.

Student 1: Sitting in the movie theater is better. It's like, real dark and the screen is big. I like the tension and the emotion of the people around me. It makes a difference.

The students also described different behavior following theater attendance and home VCR viewing. They agreed that after seeing a movie in a theater, they would think about it and talk about it for days. Home viewing produced a different effect. One student explained that when a rented videotape was over, she just "popped in a new one."

Group 5: Male Students (a)

These students also described a different and more intense effect following movie-viewing in a theater. They used the movie "Top Gun" as an example of the impact of viewing a movie in a theater.

One student said that watching "Top Gun" at home had "no effect, but at the theater when the jets take off you get a realistic effect." Another student agreed that he liked the "rumbling" sensation of "feeling the jets take-off" in a theater. He described the feeling as more realistic.

When the students described their behavior following theater attendance, they referred to watching the movie with others. One student talked about seeing a karate movie with friends and coming out of the theater excited about karate and excited about fighting with someone. They also said they talked about the movies longer after viewing them in a theater than with VCR viewing. They agreed that even watching the movie at home with friends, the effect was different and did not seem to last as long.

Group 6: Male Students (b)

This group also noted distinct characteristics associated with viewing movies in a theater. They discussed characteristics from sound, to screen size, to popcorn. Together, they agreed these characteristics left them with a different feeling. Again the group's comments are best presented in direct quotation:

Student 7: It's a different feeling. Like at the theater watching "Rocky," if you're younger, you want to box.

Student 3: Yeah. Like I wanted to box when I got out of it.

Student 4: Like with these military movies, you want to go sign up.

Student 2: Yeah, you do.

When I followed up on the next-to-last comment by asking the student if he would actually enlist because of a movie, he responded, "No, but other people might."

Celebrity Influence

The next set of questions was designed to determine the influence of celebrities in any changes in knowledge, attitude or behavior that participants report have occurred following their exposure to motion pictures.

Do participants report imitative behavior of those celebrities to whom they describe themselves as most attracted?

Group 1: Female Soldiers

Beginning with a discussion of imitative behavior in advertising, all members of the group agreed they would not purchase a product they did not otherwise want based on a spokesperson's endorsement. Several members

acknowledged their belief that celebrities often endorse products and services they (celebrities) do not use.

One woman said she was unaware of celebrity status when watching movies: "I don't even think about the star. I get engrossed in the movie and why he's there and what he's doing. Really more into the movie."

The women concluded that although they were attracted to male actors, they did not want to imitate their behavior. They expressed concern that there were no female leads to imitate. One woman's comments best summarized the group consensus:

Soldier 3: One thing about the military movies that influenced me just a tad is that the guys in the movies were *major bods and major looks*. But they still need a movie that shows what it is like to be a woman trying to deal with the place and the personalities of so many men.

Group 2: Male AIT Soldiers

None of the group members indicated a desire to imitate the behavior of an actor in a movie role. However, two soldiers explained a motivation to compete with the actor. A soldier identifying himself as an athlete explained that actors in physically demanding roles make him "motivated to do something. . . . want to compete with athletes. . . . gives [him] something to

shoot for." The second soldier simply said it makes him think, "Well, I can do that!"

Group 3: Male Soldiers Serving in Their MOS

This group was divided into three major responses on celebrity imitation. Some members said they do what they want to do without regard to celebrities. Two members agreed that although they would not try to imitate an actor, adolescents or children would. And other soldiers agreed that given the "right" celebrity, they might try to imitate an actor's movie role.

Using "Top Gun" as an example, one soldier explained: "I don't like Tom Cruise. But Emilio Estevez, that would be different. If it is somebody you believe, maybe you could picture doing that."

Group 4: Female Students

The students in this group expressed differing opinions on this concept. Two young women indicated that other people may imitate actors, but they would not. They also mentioned that younger audience members were more likely to engage in imitative behavior.

One woman said that she might try something because of a celebrity endorsement, but added that continued behavior would be her decision.

Another woman mentioned a somewhat competitive perspective, explaining: "If I saw an actress I liked doing something, I might say: If she can do that, I can do it."

Group 5: Male Students (a)

This group presented two responses heard in other groups. Participants agreed they would not imitate an actor because the loyalty would be misplaced. They said it would not actually be imitating the actor because "actors get paid so much for what they do." They also agreed that "little kids," which they defined as 4- to 13-year-olds, would try to imitate actors.

Group 6: Male Students (b)

This group differed in their reports that they would engage in imitative behavior. Some of the group said no, it "doesn't happen" for them or anyone else. Another four students said they would imitate or had imitated behavior they observed in movies. However, they did not focus on a celebrity, but the movie.

One particularly interesting point was made about the way the Hollywood community rallied around the soldiers in the Persian Gulf. A student said: "Lots of people want to be like actors now because they supported Desert Storm. That helps the American public get behind our troops. That way, the actors helped out a lot."

Does the celebrity "match-up" between a character and the actor portraying that character influence reported changes in knowledge, attitude or behavior?

Group 1: Female Soldiers

The members agreed that they learned more from movies that were realistic and included actors that "looked the part." They first focussed on the movies from the video montage, saying they were unbelievable because the actors looked "too good" and made military service seem "too fun and easier than it really is."

One tongue-in-cheek comment regarding the match-up of the actors in "Top Gun" drew approval from the whole group: "Sure they look good in 'Top Gun.' But once you get here the guys are more like 'Biloxi Blues,' . . . no muscles and beer bellies!"

Group 2: Male AIT Soldiers

Participants agreed that the only military-themed movie that successfully matched actors to their characters was the 1987 movie "Full Metal Jacket."¹⁰ They described this as the most credible movie they could recall about the military. One soldier said, "In comparison, other movies aren't even close to the real military."

Group 3: Male Soldiers Serving in Their MOS

This group strongly agreed that the ability of an actor to look the part was important in their reaction to a movie. Discussion first focused on the video montage. Two soldiers explained that "Firebirds" was "totally unbelievable" and "totally off" because the lead (Nicholas Cage) was a "rag-bag."

Another soldier contrasted "Officer and a Gentleman" as more believable because of the match-up created by Louis Gossett, Jr., who was cast as the drill instructor. A fourth soldier interjected that if comparisons were to be made, "Full Metal Jacket" offered the best match-up because "those guys were all right for their roles."

Group 4: Female Students

The students in this group never truly discussed celebrity match-up as a concept that affected the way they processed movies. Although I returned to the issue twice, their comments remained brief and only related to the actor's physical attractiveness.

Group 5: Male Students (a)

Members of the group agreed that they had learned more from the 1986 movie "Platoon" than "Top Gun" because the actors in "Platoon" seemed more like "real soldiers."

Group 6: Male Students (b)

Group members focused strictly on the video montage and evaluated the credibility of each movie based on the lead actor. They agreed that "Firebirds" was unbelievable and would not change their attitudes toward the military (favorably or unfavorably) because of the mismatch between actor Nicholas Cage and his character. They described Cage as "kind of wimpy," looking "like a druggie or a bum" and "too goofy."

They contrasted that match-up to Tom Cruise in "Top Gun." They first agreed that "Top Gun" heightened their interest in the Navy. One student described Cruise as "a typical Navy guy." The student whose father recently had retired from the Navy seemed to validate the idea for the group when he said he had been around real Navy pilots and he agreed that Cruise looked typical.

Media Effects

These questions narrowed focus group discussion to the self-reported change in knowledge, attitude or belief that occurs after viewing motion pictures. For questions from this topic area, it was helpful to ask participants to respond as they were affected and as they believed others were affected. Third-person allusions often gave way to more personal comments.

What, if anything, do people learn about the U.S. Armed Forces from motion pictures like the ones shown on the video montage?

Group 1: Female Soldiers

Two of the participants quickly acknowledged that they learned about the discipline involved in military training from movies. However, the rest of the group was eager to discuss what they had not learned about--specifically, the treatment of women.

The women expressed concern that what they learned from the movies established performance expectations based on male characters. They explained that when those expectations were not realized, they became disillusioned. The women described disappointment in being prohibited from engaging in the same training as their male counterparts. An interesting issue was raised over the comparative importance of male versus female soldiers. Three of the women related a common scenario from basic training in which they were told by drill sergeants to get out of the way of their male peers because, "The Joes [male soldiers] are more important than we are because we can't go to combat."

They agreed that knowing what really happens in treatment between male and female soldiers, the movies would not motivate them to reenlist. They also expressed concern that their male counterparts did not learn what

women were capable of because the movies had no major female characters. One of the women said the movies needed major female characters because: "It would make men see women as soldiers. If they saw them doing the same thing in a movie. That would make it better."

Group 2: Male AIT Soldiers

The group talked about the movie "Full Metal Jacket" again when responding to this topic. They agreed the movie accurately depicted their entry-level training experiences. They explained that learning, from that movie, what basic training was really like would have dissuaded them from joining the Army. This group saw the movie "Full Metal Jacket" together, as a group, after enlisting.

Group 3: Male Soldiers Serving in Their MOS

This group agreed that they did not learn anything about the armed forces from motion pictures. As one soldier put it: "The detailed aspects of a soldier I learned in the military. That's the only place you can learn them."

Group 4: Female Students

One student said she had "learned names of some of the helicopters, like Apache" from one of the movies ("Firebirds"). The other young women agreed that they were more likely to learn about the armed forces from:

- people currently or formerly serving in the military
- recruiters

- information in the library

One woman added, "Not from a film, no way."

Group 5: Male Students (a)

This issue generated little conversation. One student who did respond said he could not learn about the armed forces from movies because of their limited scope. He explained that movies were too focused on the lives of one or two characters to present a complete picture of any branch of service.

Two students agreed that people who were already interested in military service may attend a movie to "get a little more background on it," or to "get an idea of what something is like."

Group 6: Male Students (b)

One student said he thought he had learned something, but he could not remember what. The student whose step-father was retired from the Air Force thought that movies could "open people's views to certain things and make them less narrow minded."

The student with a brother in the reserves offered his response to the movie "Born on the Fourth of July" as an example. He explained that he learned about the way some Americans treated soldiers returning from Vietnam: "After I saw that movie I was really disgusted with half of America. Because I couldn't believe that Americans would spit on soldiers. . . . I was shocked, upset and . . . furious."

Another specific example came from a student who said he learned President Bush's policy on aggressive action against the drug cartels from the movie "Firebirds."

The following topic generated more discussion than any other in each focus group. For this reason, I have included the exact wording I used to introduce the question.

Ron Kovic, author of "Born on the Fourth of July" says part of the reason he enlisted in the Marines was the influence of movies like the ones you have just recalled. Can you explain how young people today might respond to this type of movie? Can you think of other situations where people said they did something because of what they saw in a movie?

Do you believe you or people you know are motivated to change their behavior based on exposure to an entertainment-oriented motion picture with a military theme?

Group 1: Female Soldiers

The female soldiers agreed that "followers" and people with "low self-esteem" were likely to make career choices based on what they saw in movies. One woman who earlier said she learned about military service through college

ROTC explained that "people have strong minds and say: 'I'm going to make my own decisions and not let the media tell me what to do.'"

The woman who said she was at least partially attracted to movies because of male leads said military movies were "just like any other movie. One out of ten will hit you at home. The rest is just entertainment." However, she thought the three movies in the video montage would "create a positive image" of the military as a profession. Still she explained her immunity to any effect because she knew "deep down inside" the Army would not be her career.

Two soldiers agreed the movies give hope for their own futures in the Army and may stimulate interest in reenlistment. As one woman explained, she was aware of the rank of military characters. Referring to "Top Gun" and "Officer and a Gentleman," she said that she felt motivated to "stay in and get that rank." Another confirmed that the movies were "inspiring" and lent "hope that the future would be different."

Group 2: Male AIT Soldiers

This group began discussing movies as they would affect others. They progressed to a discussion of personal effect. An interesting comment came from a soldier who shifted from a first- to a third-person reference in one uninterrupted comment:

When I first saw "Top Gun" I wasn't even considering the military at all. But seeing the planes, seeing how fast they go, it kind of exhilarates you. So if a little kid saw it they would think they'd like to fly planes. Everybody likes to fly planes.

Another soldier described friends who joined the reserves to try out what they saw in movies. If they were pleased with the reserves, they would opt for active duty. A soldier who offered no response when the question of connection (involvement) was raised added that he thought military movies had a stronger effect when people otherwise were not exposed to the armed forces. He said he thought people might change their attitudes or enlist "because when you're out in the civilian world you don't see anything about the Army unless it's the movies."

The soldier with a step-father who had served in Vietnam said he "got into 'Top Gun' and felt motivated." Another soldier interrupted with, "Like a feeling, I want to be like him [the Tom Cruise character]."

Finally the soldiers began to discuss the effect the movies may have on each of them. Two soldiers indicated that they viewed a particular movie that resulted in their visits to recruiters. The soldier with a best friend and uncle in the Air Force said "Top Gun" motivated him to visit a recruiter. When he was told his vision was too poor for pilot training, he asked about the Army hoping to fly helicopters.

Another soldier, who said that before enlisting his only knowledge of the Army was through movies and recruiter pamphlets, credited "Platoon" as the motivating force behind his visit to a recruiter. For reasons he did not explain, he said the marines would not accept him. He concluded, "So I joined the Army."

One soldier who adamantly disagreed that movies could affect enlistment attributed his decision to enlist to his brother. He said that he had seen some military-themed movies before enlisting and said to himself, "I wouldn't do that." But his brother, home on leave from the Army, convinced him to enlist "in just a couple of days."

Group 3: Male Soldiers Serving in Their MOS

Three of the soldiers from this group agreed that when people watch movies, they are mindful of the fiction that makes the movie exciting and interesting. Understanding that movies are fiction, they reasoned, would lessen the effect of movies because people would not realistically expect in their own lives what they saw in movies. Specifically, one of the soldiers explained that he did not believe audience members watched movies thinking, "This is how it's going to be if I join up. . . . how great it's going to be if I join up."

The soldier who said his impression of the armed forces before enlisting came from the "pictures [movies] painted in [his] head," agreed that

"most rational people who go to the movies will understand that this is fiction." But he said that at least in his case, certain "aspects" of movies influenced some of his decisions. To explain, he said he went to a Navy recruiter because of the influence of the movie "Officer and a Gentleman." He said: "I preferred to go in the Navy. . . . What I liked about the Navy was that uniform--that nice white uniform. So although you realize it [the movie] is fiction, some aspects may affect you."

The soldier whose father and grandfather had served in the World Wars said he felt the effect of the movie "Full Metal Jacket" when he saw it after he had enlisted but before entering active duty. He said the movie represented a side of the Army he had not thought about previously. He added: "I was scared to death. After that, I didn't want to go in."

Despite how soldiers felt military movies would affect them, when the conversation shifted to the perceptions of high school students, they agreed the effect would be great. The behavioral effect they discussed most was enlistment.

The group concurred that the movies represented on the video montage would motivate enlistment among high school students because:

- Students "haven't been in our shoes."
- Students do not have first-hand experience of the military.

- Students are isolated from the realities of military service and more vulnerable to the "Hollywood version" of military life styles and job satisfaction.

Group 4: Female Students

The female students flatly rejected the notion that movies, with or without military themes, would affect their attitudes or behavior. However, they did agree that "young children" were motivated to think or do certain things based on the movies they viewed. The example was made of young children going in sewer drains to act like "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles."

The young women came to consensus that age and maturity were the characteristics that enabled individuals to distinguish motion picture fiction from reality. Two students suggested that in the case of movies with military themes, they would "check" information from the movies by asking questions of male family members with military experience.

When discussing enlistment specifically, they only spoke in terms of the effects motion pictures have on others. Still, only one student thought of a case in which she believed a male friend joined the Army because of movies. Another woman offered a different opinion. She explained that individuals enlist because they do not know what else to do after high school

In general, the women showed little interest in movies with military themes. They branched into a discussion of how physically demanding the

military seemed to be. They responded to the movies in kind. One woman explained that although she was an "athletic person," the obstacle course in "Officer and a Gentleman" looked too hard. Another woman alluded to the control wielded by military leaders as a negative point demonstrated through the movies.

Group 5: Male Students (a)

The students in this group expressed an idea not mentioned by any other group in response to this topic--how the movies might affect someone who is already interested in military service. They believed if the message of the movie was proattitudinal, individuals were likely to experience an increase of positive attitudes or actions in the direction of the message. Of those students who may not be interested in military service, students explained, "going out and seeing a movie for two hours doesn't change anything."

One student thought that "smaller children" were more affected by movies. He talked about his own childhood: "When you're smaller, [movies] may make a difference, because I wanted to be in the Navy. And I saw movies and read comic books. When you're little you don't think about everything. You just see guns and stuff."

The students also agreed that even the excitement that accompanied seeing a movie with friends was temporary. A few of the students explained

that beyond the initial excitement of talking about a movie with friends, a motion picture was, in most cases, "just a movie."

Group 6: Male Students (b)

The members of this group talked first about behavioral effects, then attitudinal effects. However, most discussion focused on how movies affect people's behavior given movies other than those with military themes. For example: learning to box after watching "Rocky," attending actual auto races after viewing "Days of Thunder" or actually buying stock and studying the stock market after watching "Wall Street."

The student with a brother in the reserves said, "Other people may join the military because of the movies." The student whose father, grandfather and uncle all had served in a branch of the service added that movies "give you an urge to do what you see." He continued:

Movies might inspire you to different things--whatever the movie is about. Like love movies make you want to go out and get a good girlfriend. Or like what we're watching right now, about going into the service. They give you inspiration.

Interesting comments centered on how movies have changed Americans attitudes toward the armed forces--and specifically the men and women serving in the armed forces--since Vietnam. Again, I considered the interaction

between group members so important that I included the conversation verbatim:

Student 4: I think these movies have changed our opinion about the military a lot.

Student 3: Look at Vietnam 'til now.

Student 4: Everyone is [now] very patriotic and the movies are a major reason why.

Student 6: Movies have changed people's opinions.

Student 3: A lot of Vietnam movies showed how bad America treated soldiers. People looked at that and said: Oh man, we've got to change.

The Pilot Study: Summary of Comments

All but two members of this group attributed their connection with the military to family members and friends. One of the other two said that he felt a patriotic duty to join a branch of the service. The last soldier to speak was the soldier with 19 years in the Army. He explained that as a teenager, he had been picked up by the police as he was making his way to Canada (presumably to avoid the draft). He said the police gave him a choice, "jail or join the Army."

The responses to what members of this group believed they had learned about the armed forces from movies differed depending on the years of service

of the respondent. The soldiers with more time in service considered themselves "experts" on the military and discredited most of what they saw as false, exaggerated or "bogus." The soldiers explained that being in the Army "changes your perspective." Even the soldiers with less time in the Army--four and nineteen months--said that what they thought they had learned had not agreed with what they had experienced. Specifically, military life was less exciting and the duty was mundane. The group agreed that a movie on the "real day-to-day Army" would be "boring."

The group reached a speedy consensus regarding the lack of power through celebrity influence. Like a respondent from one of the six research groups, one soldier said people with "low self-esteem" may try to imitate someone else. The soldier with seven years in service added that everybody knows "those guys get big bucks" for endorsements and acting jobs.

On the question of celebrity match-up one soldier said that in advertising, match-up was important. He provided the example that obviously "Roseanne Barr couldn't sell diet stuff." They were concerned about the depiction of soldiers in movies less for their impression than for how they believed other people might view them as soldiers. Two of the soldiers thought that the casting of Nicholas Cage as the Army warrant officer in "Firebirds" was poor and contributed to the "bogus" presentation of the Army.

Two of the soldiers said that movies did have some effect on them. The soldier with 19 months in service concluded that movies were "attention getting" and "piqued [his] interest" in activities and products. The soldier with seven years in the Army said movies, in a theater as opposed to home viewing via a VCR, left him with ideas that he wanted to talk about. He attributed this difference to the overwhelming visual presentation in a theater.

The other soldiers, including the soldier with just four months service, agreed that movies--in a theater or at home--are for entertainment. And as one soldier explained, "Especially in the case of a movie with a military theme, it's just a movie because we know the difference between what's real and what's not."

At this point I wonder if the subtitle of this study should have been "It's just a movie." The statement, or some variation of it, was repeated in every focus group. Yet, the level of group consensus and the point at which the idea was interjected differed among groups.

There were differences and similarities between groups that may not be apparent in the by-group topic summaries of the focus group findings presented above. The following section compares and contrasts the level of involvement, celebrity influence and media effects findings between groups. The first section summarizes the findings within each subpopulation and compares and contrasts findings between genders.

The next section compares and contrasts findings between soldiers and students. The last comparisons and contrasts are drawn between female students and female soldiers and between male students and male soldiers. The chapter concludes with a direct response to each of the six research questions.

Between-Group Summaries

Soldiers

Comments regarding family members and friends currently or formerly serving in the military, a sense of patriotic duty and expectations of personal gain from the Army's education plan characterized high levels of involvement for 75 percent of the soldiers interviewed (excluding the pilot study). Only two of the 20 soldiers (both males) in the three focus groups indicated that they formed their initial impressions of the armed forces based on media images.

Interestingly, no matter how soldiers said they were involved with the military, their lasting images of what servicemen and women "look like" were mostly from motion pictures and television. But the high level of involvement indicated by 75 percent of the group may be reflected in their thoughtful consideration of these images. The women, for example, expressed concern that there were few female characters representing women in the military--in fact, they could remember only "Private Benjamin." The men in group three

(male soldiers serving in their MOS) were not satisfied with the characters in movies because their experience told them what soldiers really look like.

And the soldiers indicated when actors do not match the expected image of a soldier, sailor, airman or marine, the movies are less believable. They described believability as important to learning. To this end, the groups even agreed on what movies cast actors in roles fitting the physical appearance of members of the military.

But believability did not translate to the likelihood that a soldier would be motivated to imitate the behavior of an actor. The soldiers tended to dismiss this idea. Although the males were willing to entertain the notion of "challenging" movie stars, the women were unable to follow this logic because of the lack of female leads.

The soldiers agreed that they had not learned about the armed forces through movies. All three groups cited instances where actual events differed from movie representations and discredited movies' ability to affect their knowledge about their profession.

The soldiers tended to agree that movies could affect some people some of the time in some way. Only one soldier out of the 20 interviewed seemed to have made his decision to enlist based on movies. That was the soldier who thought everything that he learned about the Army before enlisting came from movie representations. He attributed his enlistment to the movie "Officer and

a Gentleman." The decisions of others may have included information or "inspiration" of movies, but most certainly combined a few involving variables--both individual and stimulus defined. No soldiers indicated that involvement with the medium of motion pictures was inherently involving to motivate changes in knowledge, attitude or behavior.

Finally, although some male and female soldiers were quick to say that they would not be motivated to think or act differently after viewing a motion picture, they felt other people certainly would. There were several references to the likelihood that high school students would enlist based on movies. The following section summarizes the students' responses.

Students

Roughly one-half (12 of 21) of the students described high-involvement indicators when explaining their connection to the armed forces. They included indicators such as: family members and friends currently or formerly serving in the military, a feeling that they could be affected by the war in the Persian Gulf and interest in applying sports expertise while earning college funds through a special sports program. Six members from among all of the student groups said they had no involvement and felt they were in no way affected by the armed forces. Four of the six were females.

The students referred back to people they knew or had seen in uniform to evoke their images of soldiers. Only one male group felt movies helped

shape this impression. And they were skeptical of what they saw versus what was "really happening" in the armed forces.

Male and female students thought that some people might imitate celebrity portrayals of characters to include military characters. Imitative behavior they ascribed to younger and less mature audiences. Celebrity match-up seemed a particularly difficult concept for the female students. Their low involvement with and uncertainty of the role of members of the armed forces seemed to cloud this issue.

The effect that male and female students explained motion pictures with military themes had on their knowledge of and attitude toward the military varied. Men, it appeared, were more likely to match their level of involvement with an idea that the armed forces did offer a career option. The women, on the other hand, did not find it as easy to envision the military as a career. They were more likely to recognize constraints such as the physical demands or the entry into a traditionally male occupation.

Overall, the students said that sometimes a movie was "just a movie." And sometimes in some situations some people may be motivated to learn more or behave differently after viewing some motion pictures.

Comparison of Findings of Soldier and Student Groups

The students seem to differ most from the soldiers in what they believed they had learned from the movies. The soldiers sometimes were

critical of motion picture portrayal of the activities and lifestyles of servicemen and women. They used their expertise to resolve differences between what they described as fiction and reality. Students, though often skeptical of movies' depiction of the military, had less confidence in their ability to verify information. This seemed to result in less thoughtful consideration and easier acceptance of some portrayals as realistic.

The students, not surprisingly, described a lower level of involvement with the military than soldiers recalled of their preenlistment days. However, the high-involvement indicators between the groups were similar and focused on association with friends and family members with military experience.

The students did report a greater involvement in the characteristics of the movie-going event and viewing movies in a theater than soldiers.

However, this low level of involvement did not appear to result in greater or unbiased changes in knowledge, attitude or behavior toward the armed forces.

The influence of celebrities found little support in either group.

Students and soldiers dismissed the notion of imitating the behavior of celebrities. Although both groups thought that movies were more believable when actors looked the part (match-up), there was a difference in the perceptions of what soldiers "should" look like. It is noteworthy that members from soldier and student groups agreed that for one government-assisted

movie, "Firebirds," the mismatch between the leading character and the actor was distracting.

An interesting similarity between the two groups was that some soldiers and students believed that individuals in the next younger age group would be affected by motion pictures. For example, soldiers said high school students would be affected and high school students said grade school children would be affected.

Comparison of Findings Between Genders

Females

The greatest differences between groups were between the female soldiers and female students. The female soldiers reported viewing fewer movies in the 30 days before the focus groups than their student counterparts. However, the soldiers recalled six movies with military themes to the students' one.

The female soldiers overwhelmingly identified with high-involvement indicators with the military. In contrast, four of the seven female students claimed no involvement with the military.

The female soldiers were critical of the motion picture portrayal of military personnel--especially in that females were not represented. The students seemed to expect only males in the roles. They accepted what they saw with little thoughtful consideration.

The female students--like the students overall-- were more attuned to the low-involvement indicators of the moviegoing event. Female soldiers preferred home viewing via a VCR to avoid high theater costs and increase their comfort level.

Both groups thought that they were unlikely to imitate a celebrity. And both groups focused on celebrity attractiveness when asked to consider match-up between actors and their military characters.

Neither group reported a greater effect on their change in knowledge, attitude or behavior toward the military based on viewing motion pictures. However, both groups thought that other people were likely to be affected--especially people younger, less mature and with lower self-esteem than themselves.

Males

The males, as a group, reported viewing more movies on a VCR in the last 30 days than females. However, the greatest difference in the number of movies viewed was between males soldiers and male students. One male from a soldier group said he had watched 50 movies via a VCR in the last 30 days, while a male student said he had watched only three.

Ten of the 14 soldiers (excluding the pilot study) described themselves with high-involvement indicators. Eight of the 14 students used high-involvement indicators.

Although both groups said movies helped shape their impressions of soldiers, the soldiers were more critical of the actors' portrayals. The students explained that the movies were sometimes all they knew of the military.

The male soldiers were roughly divided on the effect of the theater environment. On the other hand, there was consensus that they preferred VCR viewing and would not choose a theater over VCR rental. The students were more aware of the low-involvement, environmental features of the theater.

Neither male students nor soldiers acknowledged a desire to imitate actors. Both groups were aware of what they thought soldiers should look like and do. As such, both groups were critical of celebrity match-up in motion pictures. The groups were similar in their agreement that believability, based on match-up, enhanced the learning effect of movies.

Some members of both groups said that movies had affected their knowledge of, or behavior toward, the armed forces. Still, there was only one soldier (and no students) who did not include the influence of movies with other factors.

Direct responses to issues of knowledge, attitude and behavior changes narrowed throughout each of the focus group interviews. Together, the comments from the seven groups sufficiently answer the six research questions

in this study. The following section restates and answers each question in turn.

Research Questions

The first three questions examine how effect or lack of effect relates to the level of involvement focus group members feel toward a movie issue or message. Low-level involvement is stimulus-defined and changes in knowledge, attitude and behavior are attributed to motion picture characteristics such as: acute awareness of the moviegoing event, the theater environment or elevated attraction to celebrities. High involvement is individual-defined and changes are attributed to references to the military experiences of family or friends, pronouncements of military service as a patriotic duty, attention to the character portrayed by the actor and especially attention to the message that movie characters may deliver about the armed forces.

RQ_{1a}: Does the extent to which moviegoing publics connect themselves with the armed forces (level of involvement) influence the communication effect of an entertainment-oriented motion picture with a military theme?

Involvement seemed to have its greatest effect on changes in knowledge about the armed forces. High involvement associations typically led to critical processing of information presented via motion pictures. Information may or may not be accepted in part based on the individual's level of involvement

with the military. Lower levels of involvement seemed to result in less thoughtful consideration of ideas and greater acceptance of motion picture portrayals.

The students and soldiers who expressed high levels of involvement with the military were likely to evaluate messages for their "reality." Low-involvement students and preenlistment descriptions by soldiers indicated that an inability to evaluate critically movie messages heightened the importance of the low-level involvement characteristics associated with the movie itself. For example, soldiers who attributed enlistment (at least partly) to the white uniforms in "Officer and a Gentleman," or the realistic "rumbling" of the jets in "Top Gun," were describing low-level involvement characteristics.

Involvement, although important, relies on interaction with other situational factors. The high school women, for example, seemed to identify constraints to military careers (such as physical hardship) that caused them to be less likely to be affected by the motion pictures regardless of their level of involvement.

Soldiers came closest to being similar in perceived levels of problem and constraint recognition. A full 75 percent of them (excluding the pilot study) recalled high-involvement indicators that were apparent before they enlisted. This involvement did seem important in responding to the second research question.

RQ_{1b}: Are subjects who report a high level of involvement with the armed forces motivated to process messages communicated by entertainment-oriented movies resulting in a situational effect?

Both soldiers and students who expressed high levels of involvement described a thoughtful, skeptical and sometimes critical processing of messages from motion pictures. Individuals displaying high-involvement characteristics acknowledged stimulus-defined characteristics, such as theater environment. However, they explained that there was no sacrifice made in viewing a movie via a VCR instead.

One group of male students explained that people who already were interested in the military may be more affected by the movies. The female soldiers, for example, who said the motion pictures give them hope for their future Army careers seemed motivated to consider the personal effect they expected the military to have on them. They said they paid attention to the rank assigned movie characters. One woman said the movies motivated her to "stay in and get that rank."

Some students however, noting little or no involvement with the military, were more aware of the low-involvement characteristics of movies. Their responses were important to answering the third research question.

RQ_{1c}: Do the low-involvement characteristics of motion pictures override the high (belief-based) involvement people feel toward an issue or

message communicated by entertainment-oriented motion pictures with military themes resulting in an all-powerful effect?

Low-involvement characteristics at their most extreme resulted in reports of short-term changes in behavior. The changes reported by students included: talking about the movie for several days, mock fighting (karate), boxing, and thinking about enlisting in the military (but not actually doing so). Importantly, these characteristics did not override other high-involvement or other situational factors such as constraint recognition. When knowledge, attitudes or behavior changes occur after viewing a motion picture, it appears that the low-involvement characteristics defined by the stimulus are not wholly responsible.

Soldiers, primarily associating with high levels of involvement, were aware of low-involvement characteristics of movies. However, they were less likely to mention these characteristics when discussing movies.

Similarly, neither group considered the desire to imitate celebrity behavior important in the way they thought about movies. Comments in response to celebrity identification and match-up respond to the next research question.

RQ_{2a}: Do subjects report that they are likely to have gained a greater understanding of the armed forces or are more likely to engage in enlistment or reenlistment activities because of identification with, or desire to imitate,

the role of a leading character in an entertainment-oriented motion picture with a military theme?

This issue drew a flat negative in the way both students and soldiers thought they were affected by movies. Even when they considered their favorite movie stars, they reasoned that there was no rationale for imitation because the actors were well-paid for what they portrayed on screen.

Both groups thought this issue was dependent on the age and maturity of audience members. Soldiers said that adolescents, and high school students said that young children, would engage in imitative behavior.

Students and soldiers agreed that they would not imitate celebrities--for example enlist because "Top Gun" star, Tom Cruise, is a favorite actor. Yet, they did judge it important that Tom Cruise **look like** a Navy pilot in the same movie. Their comments on this issue respond to the following question.

RQ_{2b}: Do subjects report that a sense of celebrity "match-up" toward the leading characters in entertainment-oriented motion pictures with military themes has influenced their understanding of the armed forces or their desire to enlist or reenlist in the armed forces?

Both students and soldiers agreed that the more believable a movie was, the more they could learn from it. For this reason, they considered celebrity match-up important to the effect of motion pictures.

This understanding was illustrated very well by the ability of the soldiers in particular (but also one student group) to use the same examples between groups when discussing match-up. The movie "Full Metal Jacket" was mentioned in every soldier group, including the pilot, as particularly real because the actors were right for the roles. Soldiers agreed that people unfamiliar with the military could learn the "real" activities from this movie.

Similarly, the soldier groups and one student group felt that the movie "Firebirds" was a particularly incredible movie because of the mismatch between actor Nicholas Cage and his Army warrant officer character. The match-up effect was lost on the female high school students because they were unable for the most part to summon a clear image of what a soldier, sailor, airman or marine "should" look like. Given their low level of involvement, they were more aware of the physical attractiveness of the actor. Still their response to the movies lends interesting insight to answering the last question.

RQ_{2c}: Does the level of involvement subjects report with the armed forces determine their response to actors as peripheral cues of motion pictures?

Although the high school females were more aware of the actors than the issue of the military in the video montage, any attraction was short-lived and unpredictable of behavior. Subjects indicating high levels of involvement with the military seemed to focus on movie characters. For example, one of

the female soldiers explained that she did not pay attention to celebrities as she watched movies. Instead, she described herself as "engrossed in the movie." The actor, versus the character, had little effect regardless of the viewer's level of involvement.

CONCLUSIONS

The overall effect entertainment-oriented motion pictures with military themes have on increasing public understanding of the armed forces and enhancing recruitment and retention activity is situational. This chapter combines the theoretical framework of chapter two with the findings of chapter four in the synthesis that leads to this conclusion. The chapter also makes suggestions toward how these research findings can be used to capitalize on those situational effects to best achieve Army public affairs objectives. A separate heading discusses further implications of the study. I also include the limitations of this study that I believe are critical to understanding and using these findings. The chapter concludes with suggestions for further research and direction for that research.

Summary of Findings

As I stated from the onset, this research was important in its simplest terms for examining motion pictures as a mass medium. A gap in the literature seemed to have left motion pictures in the all-powerful media effects era--no longer accepted by contemporary theorists. Framing this study in contemporary theory exposed some of the myths that may have been

responsible for the perpetuation of this notion that movies have great power over the knowledge, attitudes and behavior of the viewing audience.

Recall the purpose of this study was to determine if government assistance to the production of entertainment-oriented, military-themed motion pictures (1) increases public understanding of the U.S. Armed Forces and (2) enhances U.S. Armed Forces recruiting and retention programs. The findings showed that sometimes, some people report some changes in knowledge, attitude or behavior toward the armed forces after viewing some entertainment-oriented movies with military themes. This study exposed some of the myths of motion picture power while explaining this situational effect.

One explanation for continuation of this notion of power is the typical researcher's failure to question why people elect to see a certain movie. Findings reported through studies that have forced exposure or dismissed the importance of self-selection may have attributed more power to movies than I found among the participants of this study.

For example, Moore's (1971) study of Illinois school children excluded selection altogether by design. Students who were shown "Birth of a Nation" reported some attitudinal shift in an experimental environment where they did not select the vehicle to which they were exposed.

Also recall the discussion in the conceptualization where Rosen (1948) found that students expressed an increased tolerance toward Jewish people

after viewing "Gentleman's Agreement." He acknowledged that some members of his experimental group chose not to attend the movie. However, he dismissed the possibility that their elective absence would affect his finding.

In this study, focus group reports showed self-selection had an impact on the effect of movies. Further, involvement was found to influence selection. For example, female high school students who reported no involvement with the military were unable to recall movies they found similar to those on the video montage. This inability may indicate that they do not voluntarily expose themselves to movies with military themes.

Male students also introduced the idea that students who were interested in the military after high school were more likely to watch movies with military themes. Movies obviously will not affect those individuals who never expose themselves to the vehicle.

Rosen (1948) also said that his subjects' responses that others would be more affected by motion pictures than they themselves, were a projection of their (subjects) own attitude change. As a result, he suggested an indirect approach when "assessing the subjective reactions to propaganda media" (p. 534). Yet this study revealed a finding more like Davison's (1982) third-person effect--that people are likely to overestimate the effect mass communication has on others in issues of great importance to them.

For an example recall the soldiers' comments in the findings chapter. They stated that movies would have a greater effect on the behavior of high school students than on themselves. This effect, soldiers explained, occurred because students do not understand the "real Army" and "haven't been in [soldiers'] shoes."

As Davison (1989) explained, people consider themselves experts on issues important to them. And experts report that other people--not experts--are likely to be more influenced by the media. So even as individuals discount the effect movies have on them, the power myth is propagated through the effect assumed on others. A third explanation for effect exposed by this study was testing short-term effects of motion-picture viewing.

Moore (1971) reported an insignificant shift in attitude, which he could not attribute conclusively to motion picture exposure, when he conducted same-day posttesting of audience members. This "shift," even in verbiage, relates to the low-involvement processing of messages along the peripheral route of persuasion in the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

One group each of soldiers and students in this study reported that they wanted to "mess with somebody" or fight after seeing an action movie in a theater environment. Yet they described this effect as relatively short-lived--lasting a few days. The environment, a stimulus-defined low involvement

characteristic, seemed to evoke a temporary behavior change as postulated by Petty and Cacioppo (1986). Testing subjects in time frames more distant from motion picture viewing may result in reports of a less-powerful effect.

Finally, motion picture effect may appear more powerful depending on the situational context of the viewer. Elliot and Schenk-Hamlin (1979) observed in their own motion picture effects study of "All the President's Men" that movies always have delivered more than entertainment because movies are some audience members' only exposure to a portrayed group or situation.

However, Domino (1983) did not question his subjects' exposure to the mentally ill when examining the effect of the movie "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest." Studies that investigate the effect of movies without regard to the situational context of subjects may report greater effect. This is especially likely in the case of relatively "taboo" issues, such as mental illness; or in isolated test populations, as was the case in testing race attitudes among the all-white student population in Moore's (1971) study. Indeed, given no other information about an issue than a movie, the movie may have more than an entertaining role.

For example, one soldier in a focus group described this "only exposure" syndrome when he explained that all he knew of the military before

enlisting was through movies. He went on to attribute his own enlistment not only to movies, but to a particular movie--"An Officer and a Gentleman."

In addition to these exposés, this study found situational changes in knowledge, attitude and behavior based on subjects' reported involvement with the armed forces. Involvement was found to be important in the situational effect; however, it was among other situational factors and not predictive of motion picture effects in isolation. This finding defers to the critical interaction of the situational factors in J. Grunig's (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) situational theory of publics.

Even the effort to select publics high in problem recognition and low in constraint recognition as the variables were defined for this study did not successfully isolate involvement in every focus group. For example, the high school women in this study described high constraint recognition toward the military as a career because of the perceived physical hardships associated with service in the armed forces.

However, this finding did not diminish the situational effect of motion pictures. And the levels of involvement did play an important role in demonstrating that motion pictures do not possess unique characteristics that result in greater effect than other media. Additionally, the involvement indicators developed for this study may be valuable in targeting publics for recruiting communication.

Because recruiting activities are critical to the proliferation of an all-volunteer force, this segmentation may be particularly important. As J. Grunig explained, public relations managers "are concerned about the behavior of publics because these behaviors . . . interfere with or enhance the ability of an organization to achieve its goals" (Grunig & Repper, 1990, p. 19). Clearly, behavior resulting in adequate enlistment and reenlistment levels is of momentous importance to the armed forces.

One high-involvement indicator that seemed to appear in particularly high numbers across the members of soldier focus groups was association with family or friends currently or formerly serving in a branch of the armed forces. Almost two-thirds of the soldiers identified family or friends or both as their preenlistment involvement with the military. In contrast, less than half (43 percent) of students applied the same high involvement indicator.

Focus group participants who identified high-involvement indicators were motivated to critically process information in motion pictures more than low-involvement participants. For example, the soldiers were critical of the appearance of actors portraying soldiers and attentive to the rank insignia worn. The female soldiers who thought that these movies may motivate them toward reenlistment explained that they wanted to "stay in and get that rank."

The students also expressed the belief that students who already were considering the military for employment after graduation were likely to be

more attentive to the movies. Similarly, two students who claimed an intent to enlist identified high involvement that motivated them to seek and process information on the armed forces--a relative in the Army and interest in educational assistance through the Army college fund.

The low involvement that is stimulus-defined may be unique to motion pictures in some identifiable ways--screen size, sense-surround sound, being part of an audience, and so on. However, this study found that it does not override other situational factors and result in a powerful and separate effect that can be credited solely to motion pictures.

Low-involvement characteristics were not even valued consistently across groups as the soldiers generally reported that they would prefer to watch movies in the comfort of their own homes via a VCR. Further, six of the seven groups (including the pilot) reported having seen more movies via a VCR in the last 30 days than at a theater. When effect was attributed to low-involvement characteristics of motion picture viewing, it was noted as temporary. This finding is consistent with the effect of processing information along a peripheral route of persuasion in the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

The favor many of the students expressed toward theater viewing may be more a result of their social orientation than of attraction to the low-involvement characteristics of the medium. It is possible that the moviegoing

event is defined differently for high school students than for adults--resulting in a true preference toward the social event of movie going. In the case of students, orientation may be toward driving the family car, getting together with a date or friends and getting out of the house, versus the theater environment.

Perhaps least powerful among the proposed factors of effect in motion pictures was the role of the celebrity imitation. The finding in this area corresponded with Alperstein's (1986) study.

As Alperstein (1986) reported, when individuals feel a strong attraction to a celebrity, and that celebrity does something contradictory to the fans' established attitude, the fans seek to resolve that dissonance. In this study, the relationship between moviegoers and movie stars did seem to parallel the treatment of celebrities in advertising. For example, one group of students said imitative behavior would not actually be imitating the actor because "actors get paid so much for what they do."

Some students and soldiers reported a desire to compete with a celebrity based on the role portrayed. However, they said strictly imitative behavior described small children. They used the example of children imitating the popular Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.

However, an area that precipitated surprising response was the celebrity match-up hypothesis (Kamins, 1990). Particularly on the learning effect of

motion pictures, focus groups considered celebrity match-up between the actor and movie character important. Kamins (1990) reported that matching a physically attractive actor with an attractiveness-related product would enhance the spokesperson's credibility and the receiver's attitude toward the ad. Similarly, students and soldiers reported that when an actor "looked the part," they were likely to find the movie more believable and report that they learned more from the movie.

Focus groups clearly understood the match-up hypothesis as I had related it to motion pictures. In fact, they cited specific examples from entertainment-oriented motion pictures with military themes. The importance of this situational factor was emphasized when focus group participants repeatedly offered the same movie examples of good and poor match-ups-- "Full Metal Jacket" and "Firebirds," respectively.

Heightened interest in actors versus movie characters did not prove to be a useful indicator of low involvement. I had suggested high-involvement individuals would be more attentive to the character interaction in the movie than the viewer who was involved with the medium. Although source attractiveness was suggested as a powerful peripheral cue in message processing when individual involvement was not a motivator in the Elaboration Likelihood Model, awareness of actor attractiveness was raised only once in these focus groups.

The soldier describing her attention to the character, and not his star status, previously had used high involvement indicators to describe herself. Still, the fact that the idea did not come up in other groups nor generate additional conversation in this group suggests additional testing of actors as a peripheral cue in processing motion picture messages.

The situational effects of movies do not negate the possible affect motion pictures may have on audience members. However, it does indicate that the use of motion pictures to increase public understanding of the armed forces or to enhance recruiting and retention activity must be tempered with research on publics and a realistic expectation of what effects are likely. Certain implications for the future use of motion pictures as a communication tool of Army public affairs practitioners are suggested by this research.

Suggestions for Army Public Affairs

This study not only has confirmed that entertainment-oriented motion pictures with military themes have a situational effect on individuals, but it also has been valuable in identifying some of the situational factors that enhance that effect. An awareness of these factors suggests when, and with what publics, motion pictures may be a valuable vehicle for communicating the Army Story. It also suggests that other media may be used with less cost and greater flexibility than the full-length Hollywood production.

The role of involvement in the situational theory, when combined with the situational factors of problem and constraint recognition, can be used to segment those publics most likely to be affected by a message. Exploring involvement resulted in one high-involvement indicator that does not align with the traditional target profile criteria in Army recruiting--association with family members who have served or are serving in the armed forces.

Because movies realistically cannot target audiences according to so narrow a demographic profile, an alternative medium may be a better vehicle for recruitment efforts. Such a vehicle may be direct-mail videotapes sent to high-school-age sons and daughters of military members. In support of this suggestion is the high rate of videotape viewing observed among members of these focus groups and Lindstrom's (1989) confirmation of the popularity of the VCR.

Further confirming the VCR recommendation is the finding that low-involvement indicators associated with viewing motion pictures in theaters seemed to have only a temporary effect on the participants in this study. Since Army recruiters typically do not lie in wait after the release of the 7:30 p.m. showing of a motion picture, this effect would appear of little value in meeting one of the movie objectives of the armed forces--enhancing recruitment and retention activities.

However, other entertainment media may offer the same effect at less cost and with greater immediacy. According to Major Chris Chalko of Army Public Affairs in Los Angeles, his office receives many requests for assistance to made-for-television movies. These can be produced relatively quickly and may require shorter periods of coordination with a technical liaison than a full-length major motion picture. Additionally, they better may be able to address current events, such as the Gulf War, that potentially increase the level of involvement people feel with the armed forces.

As the armed forces continue to support entertainment-oriented motion pictures, it may be wise to request that moviemakers conduct research in celebrity match-up when selecting actors to portray servicemen and women. Currently, casting occurs independent of armed forces input. But this study showed input may be valuable because individuals may be affected more by actors they believe credibly portray military characters.

Entertainment-oriented motion pictures with military themes may have some effect in some situations, and may in fact best effect a change in knowledge among individuals not otherwise involved with the armed forces. This idea intimates the negligible effect motion pictures appear to have on military retention goals. Two concepts are important to this conclusion.

First, Blumer (1935), who conducted much of the seminal research in the socio-psychological effects of motion pictures, explained that motion

pictures do more than introduce new objects to people--they make immediate and clear, what has been remote and vague. Thus, for those potential recruits who have a "vague and remote" understanding of the military, the movies may shape reality. However, for the weathered soldier, who "knows the real Army," movies with military themes may offer a sharp--and unbelievable--contrast to what is "immediate and clear."

Second, a long-term effect may be observed among some isolated populations that reflects a cultivation approach (Gurevitch 1982, McQuail, 1989). That is, when media descriptions define social reality over time, those descriptions become accepted by heavy viewers of the medium. Although this is an hypothesis generally applied to television (Gerbner, 1986), I believe it may be equally valid for movie-goers who are relatively naive of an object, event or issue except through motion picture portrayals. Recall, too, that in this study most of the viewing of motion pictures took place using the television.

Therefore, given the recruitment audience, movies may achieve a situational effect--but with significant audience waste. Improved audience segmentation may enhance the effect of communication designed to achieve more clearly stated objectives such as enhancing military recruiting--not retention.

Implications of the Research

Despite perpetuation of the myth of motion pictures as a powerful medium, this study stands as a warning to other disciplines that movies are a medium that must be approached with the same skepticism as other media when measuring effect. Interest in visual communication that targets a well-segmented public in either public affairs or advertising campaigns should not be validated by the power ascribed to motion pictures in the past.

However, careful consideration of situational factors--including involvement and celebrity influence--may enhance the effectiveness of media--including motion pictures. Regardless, it is doubtful that movies, for any unique characteristics, are consistently more powerful than other media. When selecting media to carry organizational messages or advertising messages, time is most likely better spent defining the audience than touting the superior characteristics of the medium beyond their capacity for reaching audiences.

As I stated earlier in this chapter, the simple fact that this study tested the effects of motion pictures against a framework of contemporary media effects theory is important to researchers of audience effect. Lack of past research--not to mention the lack of theory-based research--resulted in assumptions about the power of motion pictures. These assumptions may have been manipulated by marketers as well as Hollywood producers looking for

assistance in the production of entertainment-oriented motion pictures with military themes.

Finally, the research is important to the credibility of military public affairs officers as seen by their superiors and other Department of the Army staffs. The history of the military and the media has been clouded with a certain suspicion over the years. As budgets shrink, programs such as motion picture assistance can expect increasing scrutiny. I predict that research will allow military public affairs practitioners to guide their organizations through downsizing "cuts" by having available the answers to questions of the validity of programs such as support to motion picture production, before the call for that information comes.

Although this study yielded the rich data that led to the conclusions and recommendations stated above, it also confronted limitations that merit discussion. The limitations accepted at the onset of the research design and those occurring as part of the study are reviewed in the following section.

Limitations

Certain limiting conditions mentioned in the method section of this study are restated here. Through my choice of research design, I considered each of these weaknesses and determined information gleaned from the study was valid and useful and not a compromise to rigorous research standards.

This study had some shortfalls associated with the focus group method. A recurrent problem across the groups was the "groupthink" environment that seemed to carry discussions from one extreme to the other with less interesting--middle ground--comments subordinated. This problem probably is solved best through increased moderator expertise. Although I watched videotapes, talked to experienced moderators, read literature on the method and conducted a pilot study, I believe the skill associated with unobtrusively drawing all participants into a candid conversation comes with experience. Also, I suspect the age of the focus group participants in this study may have generated the exaggeration I suspect of some responses.

I think, too, that the student groups may have "settled down" a little if there had been more time to conduct their interviews. The student interviews were held to one hour to conform to the school class schedules. The soldier groups, not held to a rigid time frame, seemed to relax and contribute increasingly candid and personal comments as the interviews progressed.

Time was also a limitation in the number of focus groups that were conducted. Although the focus group design never claims generalizability, I would have liked to interview additional groups to compare and contrast the data. Specifically, I feel it would have been valuable to interview students both closer to a military installation and further from the high military retiree rate of Florida. Additionally, time limitations dictated that all the soldiers in

these groups be drawn from one military installation and two military occupational specialties (MOS). Time permitting, I would interview soldiers from different installations and MOSs.

Magnifying the lack of time was adherence to the Army's education program requirement of 12 hours per semester. Because of my class load, I was unable to take advantage of the opportunity to interview military public affairs officers acting as technical liaisons and program officers in Los Angeles, California. However, at the conclusion of the study I spoke with Army Major Chris Chalko of the Los Angeles staff by telephone.

Major Chalko explained that his greatest expectation for the movies would be that they increase public understanding of the armed forces. He also predicted that the weapons and equipment required to portray the Army in contemporary war-fighting roles will not be commercially available as some materials have been in the past. Therefore future motion picture portrayal of the modern military may result in an expanded Army role in assisting and technical advising for motion pictures that will make continued research in this area most important.

My greatest limitation is that I do not have the time to pursue this research. I believe that the situational factors that lead to some audience effect cry for continued exploration to develop communication programs most befitting public affairs objectives. The following section highlights those areas

that I would like to tackle next and short of that, suggest that someone else does.

Directions for Future Research

This study only skimmed the surface of the situational factors influencing how people report they are affected by motion pictures. The first portion of this chapter that starts to debunk some of the myths perpetuated through past studies suggests other factors and concepts that could--any one--be rich ground for continued exploration. Suggested areas include: self-selection, third-person effect, viewers' situational context, and further development of involvement factors and the celebrity match-up hypothesis. As these factors and concepts are identified and lead to the development of a well-segmented public, motion pictures--indeed any mass medium--may be more powerfully employed.

Although this study was conducted as stand-alone research, I believe the strategy fruitfully could be applied in combination with some empirical data on recruiting and retention trends. I am suggesting that focus groups be conducted within territorial regions of recruiting commands. Focus group research could identify situational factors more valuable in segmenting publics than the traditional age and gender profile.

Applying these factors in development of a communication tool then could be evaluated through enlistment and reenlistment interviews, surveys and

additional focus group research in the cyclical research fashion proposed by Broom and Dozier (1990) for determining the effectiveness of public relations programs.

Another area that this study suggests as important is the portrayal of servicewomen in the popular media. The issues for future research in this area should include: how women judge role models; how the movies' portrayal of servicewomen affects the expectations of their male peers; and how movies introduce and deal with possible constraints, such as the physical hardships noted by female students in this study

This study is not meant to propose that the assistance currently rendered in production of entertainment-oriented motion pictures with military themes is wasted on a program unable to meet its objectives. Recall that recruitment and reenlistment are only two of the objectives stated for the program.

Since learning did seem to be the greatest effect from motion pictures, the study seems to suggest the objective of increasing public understanding is better realized. However, this conclusion is a leap I am not willing to make without more research in the area--perhaps exploring the cultivation hypothesis with regard to movies. The information gained through this study must be tempered with a realistic expectation of the situational effect of media.

Appendix A

Correspondence Requesting High School Participation
6012 Good Lion Court
Alexandria, Virginia 22310

February 18, 1991

Principal
XXXXXXXXXX High School
ATTN: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXXX, FL XXXXX

XXXXXXXXXX:

By way of introduction, I am Donna Garrett Boltz, daughter of James Garrett. My father spoke with you February 14, 1991, in reference to research that I would like to conduct in cooperation with XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX High School students.

Enclosed for your review is a brief summary of the proposed research and a resume. As a 1977 graduate of XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX High School, I would like to return to this school to conduct my research.

I must conduct the study during the month of March, 1991. I would be pleased to offer reciprocal extension of cooperation if you would like for me to talk to any of your students about the research process in general, my research in particular, my experiences as one of the first women to graduate from West Point, or the military as a career.

I hope after review of my proposal, you feel my study may properly be conducted among members of the student body at XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX. I will call you on Friday, 22 February to discuss your response.

Thank you for your interest in the study.

Appendix B

Student Participation Consent Form

TO: THE PARENTS OF _____
FROM: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx, OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALIST

Mrs. Donna Garrett Boltz, a 1977 graduate of XXXXX High School, will be conducting a research project at our school in support of her graduate work at the University of Maryland. Mr. XXXXX and Miss XXXXX have agreed to support her project. I have asked for students to volunteer for the project and your son/daughter volunteered. This will take one class period on (English IV) on Thursday, March 21, 1991.

The students will view about ten minutes of scenes from entertainment-oriented motion pictures. After this Mrs. Boltz will guide a discussion about the movies. I will be present to see that all is present and nonthreatening.

Please give your permission for your student to participate.

My son/daughter has permission to participate in Mrs. Boltz's graduate research project during English class on Thursday, March 21, 1991.

Appendix C

Pilot Study Questions on Moderator Deception

The focus group moderator has revealed to you that she is an Army captain. Do you believe having this knowledge before the discussion began would have affected your responses?

yes

no

Do you believe having this knowledge before the discussion began would have affected the responses of other group participants?

yes

no

Appendix D

Interview Guide

I. Warmup questions

1. How many movies have you seen in a theater during the last 30 days?
2. How many movies have you viewed during uninterrupted use of a videocassette player during the last 30 days?
3. Had you seen any of these movies or movies you would consider similar to these in the past? If so, which movies? Did you see the movie at a theater, on cable television or through VCR rental?

II. Main research questions

A. Involvement questions

1. From what sources (media, family, friends, school, etc.) have you learned about the American armed forces?
2. Can you explain where your image of what a soldier should look or act like came from?
3. The *Washington Post* recently reported that some audience members have seen the box office hit "Home Alone" five or six times. What do you think explains this behavior?
4. Many movies are available on videotape or premium cable within two or three months of their initial release. Some people claim they would rather see movies on tape or cable. Others say they prefer to see movies in a theatre. Do you hold either of these preferences? Why or why not?

B. Celebrity influence questions

1. Do you have any favorite movie stars? If so, who are they? Why are they favorites?
2. How convincingly do you believe the key actors in each of the film "clips" depicted your image of a soldier?
3. Some advertisers suggest that people are likely to purchase products or services based on the spokesperson's attractiveness (example, "x" drinks Pepsi Cola because MC Hammer drinks Pepsi in an advertisement). Can you describe an instance where this is true for you or your friends? Do you believe some people are more likely to make decisions based on celebrity influence? Why?

C. Media effects

1. What do you believe you learned about the armed forces from motion pictures?
2. Where would you go to learn about the armed forces?
(students only)
3. Ron Kovic, author of "Born on the Fourth of July" says part of the reason he enlisted in the Marines was the influence of movies like the ones you have just recalled. Can you explain how young people today might respond to this type of movie? Can you think of other situations where people said they did something because of what they saw in a movie?
4. Overall, would you say that movies have left you
with a positive or negative impression of the
military as a career? Why?
5. How would you describe the effect that movies have on you?

III. Concluding question

As we conclude this discussion, would anyone like to add anything or request clarification of anything that was said?

IV. Probe questions

Does anyone have a different opinion?

I'm not sure I understood that, could someone else in the group summarize?

Do you think you could say that in about ten or fifteen words?

Would anyone like to add to that?

Has anyone had a different experience?

Appendix E

Focus Group Protocol

1. Setting up

- ___ a. organize chairs in a circle--push notetaker back (slightly)
- ___ b. lay out labels & pen near door for nametags
- ___ c. set up audiotape & test
- ___ d. set up VCR & test
- ___ e. return Video to start point
- ___ f. place refreshments in the center of the circle (in reach)
- ___ g. organize guide and probe questions

2. Introduction (researcher and study)

- ___ a. Thank participants for preparing a nametag (1st name only) and ask them to wear the tag for the entire interview.
- ___ b. Thank participants for their voluntary participation. Remind them that their participation is voluntary.
If they decide to withdraw at any time during the interview, they may--but urge that they stay once started.
- ___ c. Explain that I am a graduate student in public relations and working on a thesis to fulfill my requirement for a master's degree. As part of that thesis we will spend the next 60 to 90 minutes first viewing a tape, then discussing the topic of the tape.
- ___ d. Explain that the tape will run approximately nine minutes and will show scenes from popular films released in theaters within the last ten years.
- ___ e. There are no right or wrong responses in group discussion. I'm seeking their knowledge and perspective. Accordingly, people may have different opinions and I want to hear those too as the group discussion begins.

___ f. I am audiotaping the discussion to help me to recall the discussion as I later organize my notes for research. The tapes will not be released to anyone else during or after the research.

___ g. Because I will refer to the audiotapes as I complete my research, I ask that everyone speak clearly. Additionally, participants are asked to speak one at a time...but not to respond in a sequential (around the circle) fashion.

___ h. Any comments made in the group are confidential. Participants will not be identified in the study, or to persons requesting information about the study.

___ i. Although I will repeat this at the end, I would request that participants keep our discussion confidential as I am conducting similar groups throughout the unit/school through the end of March.

___ j. I do have expectations of the group as well. That is that everyone participate and contribute to the group discussion. I need to hear from everyone, because each participant has ideas and opinions that are important to my study.

___ k. Explain that I am accompanied by a notetaker who serves as a nonparticipating, objective observer. After the discussion, he or she will help me be objective in reporting participants' comments.

3. Introductions

___ a. To get started, I will ask that all participants introduce themselves (first name only) and recall the last movie that they saw in a theater.

___ b. I will begin the introductions and ask my notetaker to follow me.

___ c. Proceed to group introductions around the circle, beginning to notetaker's right.

4. Show videotape

5. Begin with guide questions (Appendix B)

desired.

6. Conclusion

- ☐ a. Ask if anyone has discovered the purpose of the study; if not, explain.
- ☐ b. Tell participants that they may receive a summary of the findings if
- ☐ c. Disclose my occupation and rank...circulate contact information.
- ☐ d. (Pilot study only) Circulate anonymous response sheet on deception in researcher identification.
- ☐ e. Briefly discuss group response to delayed disclosure of researcher identity.
- ☐ f. Remind group members that the discussion and my identity must not be discussed with others until the end of the month.

Endnotes

1. The "Army Story" is a term used within the Army public affairs community to indicate values or issues central to the Army mission. Along with the team-building concept are concepts of leadership, duty and caring. New "chapters" are added to the story to meet new challenges. Examples of recent additions include leader development and Total Army themes.
2. Although television first was introduced at the 1940 World's Fair, it did not reach the American home in appreciable numbers until nearly a decade later.
3. Personal relevance was also the term used by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) to describe high levels of involvement based on a subject's belief that an issue would have some significant consequence for his own life.
4. Although the recruitment public is described to include men and women, the target audience for armed forces recruiting advertising is a "male only" audience. As explained by recruiting command public affairs officers for both the Army and the Navy, women enlist at a rate commensurate with the non-combatant positions they can fill. Men, on the other hand, are courted through advertising and promotion to boost enlistment.
5. A discussion of these interviews is not included in the conceptualization of this paper because they do not deal with entertainment-oriented motion pictures projected in an entertainment-oriented setting (theater or home VCR use).
6. "Tac" officer is the title applied to officers assigned to lead platoons of officer candidates at the Army Officer Candidate School. The title is derived from the acronym for train, advise and counsel.
7. I found literature mildly advocating strangers in marketing focus groups, but no compelling argument against acquaintances.
8. The student consent form suggests that the high school occupational specialist was an observer for the students groups. However, although he passed through the interview area at times, he did not continuously observe the conduct of groups.
9. The questions within the topic areas are not identical to the questions posed during group interaction. Instead these questions best summarized the

questions for each topic and allowed me to present the findings in an organized, parallel structure.

10. "Full Metal Jacket" was adapted from Gustav Hasford's "The Short Timers." The movie is divided into two parts: basic training at Parris Island and combat experiences in Vietnam. The realistic match-up of actor to role noted by the focus groups may be in part attributed to the casting of the drill instructor (D.I.) in the first half. Drill Instructor Ermey was a former real life D.I.

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