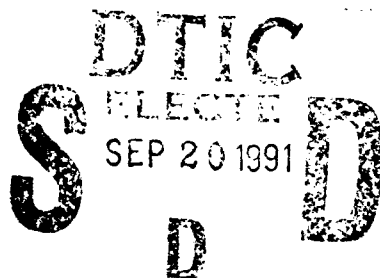


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A STUDY TO DETERMINE THE PERCEPTION OF UNINTENDED
MESSAGES BY VIEWERS OF TWO UNITED STATES ARMY
TELEVISION COMMERCIALS



A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
San Diego State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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in
Radio and Television

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by
Gary Lee Keck
Fall 1990

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The work and effort that is involved in writing a thesis is shared by four individuals. As the author of this work, I feel a great sense of accomplishment in seeing the effort completed. At the same time I realize that without the assistance of my committee members, this goal could not have been reached.

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CHAPTER I

A PRESENTATION OF THE PROBLEM

Since the first crude images produced by the early kinescopes made it possible for motion pictures to come into our homes, interested persons have tried to determine how the viewer has perceived the messages being delivered by television. How are the myriad of images that are presented at the speed of light interpreted? Is television a relatively straightforward medium being encoded and decoded with accuracy, or is the entire process complicated by the various individual characteristics that make up the person watching? These questions pertaining to how messages are being transmitted and received through the medium of television are the basis of this study into intended and unintended message perception.

Some of the basic elements of communication must be considered to attempt to understand what is perceived by individuals when they are engaged in television viewing. The significance of the medium, the inability to gain feedback, and the manner in which the receiver decodes the message are some of the communication

elements that should be considered. In a one-way communication medium like television, does distortion occur which causes messages to be perceived which were not intended by the creator of the message?

Numerous studies have been undertaken to determine the effects of television. Some studies that have focused on the political issues provide evidence that unintended messages may exist in the minds of viewers. Did Richard Nixon lose the 1960 election with Kennedy because of his appearance?¹ Did the viewer of the debate listen to his answers and ideas, or did his screen presence convey a different message than Mr. Nixon was trying to present? Books written on the subject of politics and television address this issue. There are authors that believe this happened.²

Studies into television affecting the attitudes of children toward violence also support the concept of unintended messages. A study by A. W. Gomberg discovered that many children who play "cowboys and Indians" perceived from television that all Indians are bad and all cowboys are good. The idea of bleeding and being bad seemed directly related to television viewing experiences.³

A common question in each of these areas of investigation is whether there are messages that are

perceived by the television viewer that the producer did not intend. If we can identify these unintended messages, and determine if they are causing viewers to get perceptions different from those intended, we may be able to improve television communication by improving the way in which messages are encoded by the sender who uses the one-way medium of television.

The commercials to be used for the purpose of this analysis have been produced by the United States Army for the purpose of persuading individuals to enlist. These commercials were chosen for several reasons. First is that the army has documented the intended messages that were designated to be in these commercials. Second is that they will provide a comparison because the army considers "Dear Dad" an excellent commercial, and "Basic Excellence" a good commercial. The third reason is that other researchers exploring viewer perceptions have used one message or message type in their studies.⁴ Based on these factors, these commercials should provide data that may answer the research questions posed in this study.

This research is based on the hypothesis that individuals of different ages, ideologies, cultural, educational, and socioeconomic background may, in the process of viewing commercials, perceive messages in their minds that were not intended. Without well

documented commercials to use in the study, it would be difficult to make an accurate analysis.

This exploratory research should provide information that will assist in the communication process as it pertains to a one-way medium like television. Information on how messages are perceived by viewers, which are encoded in a certain manner, should be valuable to many who use the medium of television as a transmission path.

Statement of the Research Problem

This study will analyze viewer responses to determine whether unintended messages are perceived in two television commercials produced by the United States Army to encourage enlistment.

Subproblems

1. The first subproblem is to identify the intended and unintended messages in the United States Army television commercials to encourage enlistment.
2. The second subproblem is to identify unintended messages perceived by the target audience as positive, negative, or neutral in nature.
3. The third subproblem is to determine if there are any differences in the unintended messages perceived

by different demographic groups within the target audience.

Hypotheses

The first hypothesis is that the target audience will perceive the intended messages in the two television commercials produced by the United States Army to encourage enlistment. It is also expected that messages not intended by the United States Army will also be perceived by the target audience.

Explanation of the first hypothesis: Prior research conducted by Celeste Condit indicates that the same message can be perceived by viewers in different ways.⁵ Note that the word perceived is used here and not the word received. Viewers' perceptions of messages are influenced by all of the events in their lives up to the moment that the message is received.⁶ The culture and ideology of a viewer have much to do with what message he thinks is being given to him whenever communication takes place. By testing this hypothesis we may obtain greater insight into how to construct better messages, and reduce the potential for unintended messages that the receiver may perceive. This hypothesis should be confirmed by the data collected from viewers.

The second hypothesis is that the unintended messages that viewers perceive in these television commercials produced by the United States Army may be positive, negative, or neutral in nature.

Explanation of the second hypothesis: It is expected that some unintended messages will be generally the same for all who perceive them. For instance, a commercial about the army may bring to the minds of the audience the thought of war, which is usually a negative experience to most persons. Other unintended messages may also vary in how they are perceived. This hypothesis is based on research findings to the effect that what one person views as negative can be seen as positive or neutral to someone else.⁷ The way in which one perceives a message from along a spectrum of positive to negative depends on one's racial, economic, political, cultural, educational, and social background. Data collected for this research should also confirm this hypothesis.

The third hypothesis is that those with differing demographic backgrounds within the target audience will perceive different unintended messages, or intended messages differently.

Explanation of the third hypothesis: The data are expected to reveal that those individuals who have significantly different social, economic, and cultural

backgrounds, such as race and education, within the target audience, perceive unintended messages that are derived from these differences. As this research is based on commercials produced by the army, it is reasonable to assume that a person who has served in the army will perceive messages differently than someone who has not.

The fourth hypothesis is the null hypothesis, which is that no unintended messages are perceived by any viewers of United States Army television commercials designed to encourage enlistment.

Explanation of the fourth hypothesis: This hypothesis is based on the possibility that the viewers of these two commercials will not perceive any unintended messages. This will not be considered a negative finding, as it will reveal that the message structure, encoding, transmission, and decoding are being performed without any perceptions that would be considered negative to the communication process.

Delimitations

This study is designed to identify if there are unintended messages perceived by viewers of United States Army television commercials designed to encourage enlistment.

This research will not try to study the need for a military, or collect data on the opinion of viewers about the armed forces beyond answering the research question.

The focus of this research is not whether the ultimate intended effect of the commercials is obtained; data gathered is not capable of determining if members of the audience would join the army.

This study is not designed to determine every possible unintended message, as these may be as numerous as the number of viewers. The study will not try to predict what unintended messages may be contained in other commercials produced by the army.

This study will use as a sample group only those adult males who are between the ages of 18 and 24 since this is the target audience the army is attempting to appeal to via these messages.⁸

Definition of Terms

Intended Target Audience--That group of people identified by the United States Army Recruiting Command as the target audience for a specific television commercial.

Message--Information received that elicits ideas, notions, emotions, or opinions that the viewer feels from seeing the commercial.

Unintended Message--Any thought, idea, notion, emotion, or understanding by the viewer which was not specifically intended by the producers of the television commercial.

Importance of the Study

This study, although it deals only with recruitment commercials, is intended to realize a greater understanding of what happens to the messages sent through the television medium, and how they are perceived by the viewer.

We are confronted daily with commercial messages on television. It is critical that those who create messages for this medium gain greater knowledge into the way in which the messages are being perceived.

Commercials produced by the United States Army are not significantly different from many other commercial advertisements. The intention of the producer is to create a message that will influence the viewers within the intended target audience to think, believe, or act in a particular fashion--in this case seek enlistment in the United States Army.

The army would like to persuade individuals within the intended target audience to see the commercial and desire to join the army. This may not occur if those in the target audience perceive unintended messages which discourage them from seeking enlistment. This study will try to examine those unintended messages that the viewer may be perceiving that could affect his decisions.

This study may also be valuable to advertisers of consumer goods and services, as well as any agency that uses television to deliver any message. The knowledge that unintended messages are perceived by television viewers may encourage individuals to monitor more closely the messages they construct. Such knowledge will aid them in reducing unintended messages that bring negative feelings to the viewer.

This study is intended as an exploratory project that will yield findings that may be of value to future researchers studying the communication processes. By exploring the existence of these hidden messages, and examining whether they are positive, neutral, or negative in nature, it may be possible to ensure that the person decoding the message will receive it closer to the way that the encoder intended.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background

A review of the communication process will assist in understanding the research that is to be conducted in this study. There are many models of communication that can be used to depict the total communication process. Some models are very complex in structure, others are simpler in nature, but the elements of communication are usually consistent.¹ In almost any model you will find a sender or source, receiver or destination, message or signal, channel, noise, and feedback.² Examination of the Schramm model in Figure 1 reminds one that communication is best represented as a two-way process.³



Fig. 1. Schramm communication model.

The arrows in Figure 1 represent the constant flow of messages that are affected by noise and feedback. Noise is usually considered any form of distraction, or any other influence, that decreases the effectiveness of the signal or message being transmitted.⁴ Feedback is considered a "thermostat or governor," which allows a system, in this case the communication process, to make corrections on the operation. Feedback allows the sender of the message to make corrections to the encoding part of the communication process to ensure that the decoding is done correctly by the receiver.⁵

Noise may be rendered by both the receiver and sender, and must be dealt with accordingly. For instance, if the sender of the message must compete with a louder auditory stimulus, this "noise" may be overcome by increasing the volume of the message. The element of noise is not always this simple, and may require more than just an increase in volume to overcome.

Elements of noise and feedback play such a critical role in communication that researchers have devoted considerable attention to determining what happens when they are missing from the communication process.

If feedback is missing from the communication process, it is possible that communication is not taking place effectively.⁶ Communication is considered an

ongoing process. As messages are encoded and transmitted, the sender uses feedback to determine if the encoded message is being received in the manner that it was intended. If the sender determines from the feedback that the intended message is not being conveyed, the sender may encode the message differently in hope of greater success that the intended message is received accurately.

Similarly, if the sender is unable to determine the amount of "noise" that must be overcome, it is likely that the communication process will break down to some degree. Noise may take on many aspects. When using a medium like television, there may be the simple fact of a "weak" transmission signal that distorts the video or audio portion of the message. On the other hand, it could be one of the many distractions which occur in the home, or other locations, where television viewing occurs. Another factor of feedback which is difficult to overcome in television is the nonverbal codes being given with the verbal codes of a message.⁷ Nonverbal communication codes are the small gestures, facial expressions, voice inflections, and other signals sent in the communication process that contribute to the feedback and message process.⁸

When the medium of television is used as a transmission path for a message, elements of noise and feedback are no longer part of the communication process. How effective is the communication process when the noise level is unknown and the opportunity for feedback is missing? This study will show that a greater likelihood exists for viewers to perceive unintended messages in a one-way medium like television.

Studies on Television Perceptions

As stated earlier, there is evidence to support the belief that people perceive messages, and make interpretations, based on their backgrounds and cultural differences. The greater the differences, the more likelihood of a communication error. Not only do different cultures cause communication errors, so also do differences between subgroups or subcultures within the same culture. The model shown in Figure 2 depicts graphically this concept. At the bottom is minimum difference; the top is maximum difference. As one moves up the model, the degree of difference increases. The subcultures and subgroups near the bottom are representative of the differences in the American culture that may lead to the perception of unintended messages in television.⁹

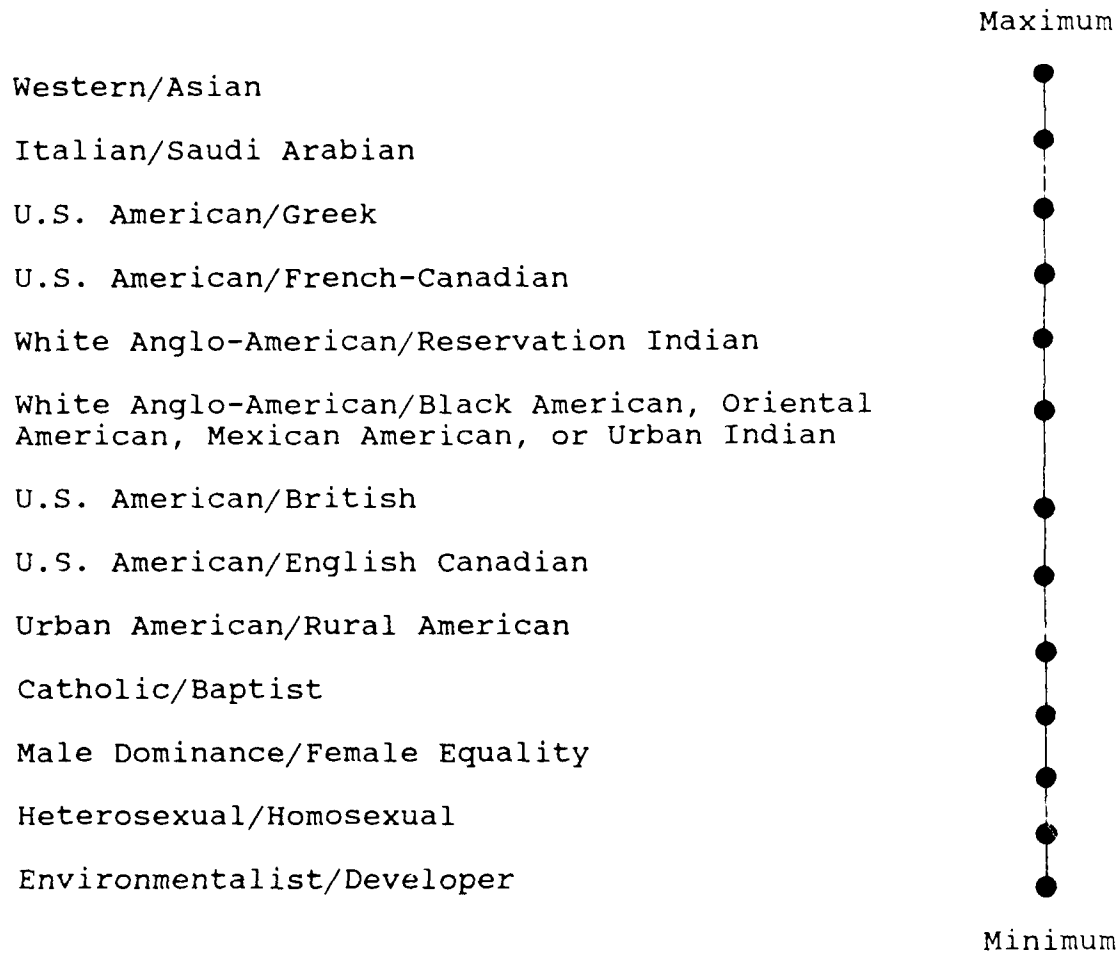


Fig. 2. Arrangement of compared cultures, sub-cultures, and subgroups along a scale of minimum to maximum sociocultural differences.

This study is intended to examine the message perception of individuals who are of the same general cultural background, citizens of the United States in the San Diego area, and try to determine if messages are perceived differently than intended by the producer.

The understanding that the broadcast communicator has no opportunity for feedback, and has no foreknowledge of the elements of the noise that will be introduced into the communication process, may also add to the development of unintended messages on the part of the viewer. The model presented gives an understanding into this possibility, where the sender (broadcaster) and receiver (viewer) are of the same cultural group or subgroup, message perception should be more accurate. If there is a large difference between sender and receiver, perceptions should vary accordingly. The thought process of the viewer is another factor that may affect message perception.

Studies have been done to try to estimate the effect that the thought process has on the interpretation of the message by the receiver, and to determine if audiences are passive or active in their responses. If the audience is active in its thought-processing while viewing television, what effect does this have on the messages being sent?

A study conducted by Birgitta Hoijer in 1989 looked at the relation of television-evoked thoughts to comprehension. The basic research was conducted in two ways. First, one group of subjects watched a program about acid pollution and had an in-depth interview. A second group watched a different program about natural science. They were then asked to fill out a questionnaire on the program.¹⁰

This study was conducted on the assumption that thought uses a language of its own, and that one can communicate very complex ideas in an extremely short time using this "inner speech."¹¹ The test subjects were to watch the programs as they would at home, but were asked not to do anything other than watch television.

When asked about the viewing experience, many of the subjects had thought about the subject matter, but some of the subjects admitted to relating the program to their personal jobs. Others were thinking of very different things, such as how well dressed one of the spokesmen for the program was.¹² The study determined that there were some common themes among the group and that the thoughts which are evoked by watching television can be directly related to these themes. Hoijer concluded that television programs do stimulate thought processes, and there is a connection between the contents

of the program and the contents of the thoughts evoked while watching.

A study conducted in 1978 by Richard Harris and Gregory Monaco tried to show that communication can be developed in such a way that facts can be distorted by the receiver of a message. This study, though dealing with the pragmatic aspect of communication on many levels, showed how the wording of some radio and television resulted in the delivery of a message which was not intended.¹³

Specifically, a Listerine commercial made the claim that Listerine could help fight colds, but did not prevent or cure colds. After viewing the advertisement, a small sample of subjects reported that "Gargoil" (substituted for Listerine) could prevent colds--the exact opposite of what the Listerine advertisement was attempting to convey. This study emphasizes that the message sender assumes its intended message is being received and understood, and does not always know that the message is being misinterpreted.

The study highlights the concept of pragmatic implications formed by people based on their inferential processes. The inferred information seems to be constantly rearranged and modified and input into the information-processing system. Harris and Monaco made

most of their observations based on word choice and speaker inflections, that led them to the findings that people can infer information not given, because of the constant processing condition. After showing a film to a group, the researchers would ask questions about it that had different subtle words, like "the" replaced with "a." These small changes and intonations had varying degrees of effects on those questioned. The researchers concluded that words and inflections, coupled with the constantly changing inferences in people's minds, may cause misunderstanding and misinterpretation.¹⁴

The results of the above research form the basis for this examination of unintentional messages. The ability of people to relate their own ideology, personal inferences, experiences, and the various other factors that are present when they view commercials may cause some messages to be interpreted in ways other than that intended by the presenter.

The Concept of Dual Understanding

The awareness of thought processes going on as people interact with each other, or with a communication medium, is not new. The difficulty is in attempting to understand the degree to which these thought processes interact with the messages being transmitted.

Burgoon notes that in interpersonal communication only about 30 percent of the message being sent is through verbal channels; the majority is nonverbal.¹⁵ The sender of messages does not transmit one message at a time, but several messages simultaneously through verbal and nonverbal means. Since multiple messages are being sent during a conversation, participants in the communication process count on feedback to assist in decoding all of our messages accurately. In interpersonal communication, the ability to alter the message sent by the encoder, according to verbal and nonverbal feedback, exists.

Obviously in interpersonal communication thought processes are used to interpret message transmission and reception to make understanding clearer. When one can see that a message is not being interpreted as one intended it to be, it can be altered. Television, being a one-way medium, obviously does not allow this to take place.

Prior research has begun to examine this concept of how messages, when viewed or read by individuals of different ideologies, are being received in different ways. Celeste Condit's research into the polysemy of a message which was to be delivered through the medium of television showed that two individuals can vary greatly

in what "message" is perceived.¹⁶ Messages are decoded by the receiver, based on their values, culture, social understandings, and any other factors which they care to use.

Condit's research was done by having two individuals review the text of an episode of "Cagney & Lacey" dealing with abortion. The result was two different perceptions of what was presented. It was apparent that the ability of individuals to gain differing perceived meanings from the same material is possible. The study was conducted with individuals who had very contrasting points of view on abortion to increase the degree of variance between perceived messages.¹⁷

Condit determined that the historical framework within which a message is delivered could play an important role in how it is perceived. Since abortion was a controversial issue, Condit concluded that this contributed to the great variation in perceived messages.

Unintentional Messages

The basis of this research is to ascertain if unintentional messages are received by viewers of television commercials. Unintentional messages have been defined as any thoughts or perceptions on the behalf of

the viewer that are not necessarily those of the message conceiver.

There have been many studies about television and its effects. Several support the concept that messages delivered through the television medium are not always received as they were intended.

A study by Vidmar and Rokeach examined a situation comedy that appeared in the early 1970s entitled "All in the Family." The show depicted the life of an American family in which the father was a staunch bigot. The producer had envisioned the show assisting in reducing bigotry by showing the lead character, Archie, as an unintelligent, racially biased, uncaring individual.¹⁸ Archie's only logic for his racial and ethnic biases was obviously--so it was intended--based on ignorant, abnormal, and twisted thinking.

A study of viewers determined that the intended message of the producer was not being received. The study concluded that those people who showed a high tendency for bigotry saw the main character as being correct in his assumptions. They also determined that the "correct" point of view, presented by the live-in son-in-law, was incorrect, and Archie was right.

This study explores the belief that the personal ideologies of the viewer have an important effect on what

is perceived to be the "message" of a television program. Indeed, here it is apparent that the cultural, educational, and ethnic beliefs that are developed over the years play a role in our ability to perceive what message is being sent through a medium like television.

Vidmar and Rokeach pointed out that there is evidence to show that the same unintentional messages were being received by viewers of the situation comedy "Sanford and Son." A survey of viewers asked which of the characters on the show most typically portrayed a Black man. Fifty-six percent said that Fred Sanford was a typical Black man. Only 26 percent thought that Lamont, the industrious son, was a typical Black man.¹⁹ These perceptions on the part of the viewer were probably not intended by the producer, but that was the message that was being perceived by the viewers.

Sonia Livingstone examined a soap opera in England called "Coronation Street." She explored the previous viewing habits of the audience as a basis for thought input in relation to how the viewers perceived the characters' interactions. Livingstone determined that the thoughts of viewers varied greatly with the amount of this program they had previously been exposed to. She also discovered that the interpretation of the programming was based on social values learned. Tied to

the understanding that viewers "see" things differently, it was noted that "we cannot know what contents to correlate with which beliefs, or what 'effects' might result . . . unless we first know how they interpret and make sense of these programs."²⁰

Jacoby, Hoyer and Sheluga attempted to determine if miscomprehension exists in television advertising. This study, which attempted to determine the miscomprehension of advertising, tried to determine if there was a "normative range" of miscomprehension.²¹ Viewers in this study were shown film clips and then given a quiz based on the clip. Questions were designed to be oriented toward accurate and inaccurate facts that should be obtained from the clips. The questions were true and false in nature. The analysis of responses concluded that a miscomprehension index of 29.6 percent existed in the study group. Almost one-third of those who watched a commercial could not give accurate facts as to which brand was presented, or other important information that was presented.

It is difficult to use these figures to actually create a "normative range," but the study concluded that of the 60 test communications employed, all were misunderstood in some way by every viewer. In the limitations of this study the researchers admit that

these figures of miscomprehension are only estimates. Despite this, it emphasizes the fact that miscomprehension exists in television advertising.

Although there are no specific studies that point out the positive existence of unintended messages, there are some studies that give an indication that they exist.

A content analysis of 814 television commercials conducted by Swayne and Greco in 1987 revealed that elderly individuals were portrayed in only 7 percent of the messages.²² The actual percentage of those over the age of 65 in the U.S. is 12 percent. This may seem a minor point; however, the percentage of elderly in the U.S. will continue to grow through the 1990s and will reach 22 percent by the year 2000. It is possible that the percentage of elderly portrayed was simply an oversight by producers, but such oversights may lead to unintended messages. Advertisers may want to consider how they portray the elderly in the future.

The study also pointed out that the elderly believe they are inaccurately stereotyped in television, radio, and magazine advertising, but generally portrayed as "likeable."²³ When elderly people in the role of "advisor" was examined, it was discovered that 64 percent of the time a male was used as the "advisor."²⁴ This is

not consistent with the fact that women generally live longer than men.

This study on the elderly as portrayed on the three national television networks reveals that advertisers do not show the elderly in commercials in the true percentage to the population. Consideration should be given to the view by the elderly on this point. Do the elderly notice such things when viewing television? Is the high percentage of male "advisors" portrayed in commercials, which is the opposite of the elderly male to female ratio within the population, viewed by elderly women without any notion of misrepresentation? Such questions suggest a need for further study into unintended messages.

A study conducted by Donald Kanter exposes one of the basic premises that this study is based upon: that the preconceived feelings of viewers plays an important part in message perception. Kanter discovered that "45 percent of 1,000 respondents viewing 15 commercials believe: 'The people who paid for this ad think I am not very smart.'"²⁵ It also found that the ability of recall was higher among commercials that viewers believed they thought were saying "you're not very smart."²⁶ The study could not conclude positively that this perception

influenced all buying behavior, but made it clear that this perception must be considered by the advertiser.

This study in particular brings out the possibility of unintended messages. The notion that someone believes that an advertiser is implying that he or she is unintelligent must somehow come from the commercial message.

Summary

This study is designed to extend some of the previous research that has been done in misunderstanding, comprehension, and the ability of the television viewer to perceive the message that is being delivered. The perception of unintended messages may be one of the factors that causes a commercial message to be less successful than the creator anticipated.

It can be seen that if the intended message agrees with the viewer's present line of thinking, as in the case with the audience of "All in the Family" who agree with the producer's feelings that bigotry is wrong, then the intended message will probably be perceived. The same study shows though how the intended message can be perceived in a totally different way based on the receiver's point of view.

Condit's research into the polysemy of messages brings an understanding of just how much difference there can be between the perceptions of individuals regarding the message that is being sent by the television producer or writer.

The study into the miscomprehension of commercials sheds light on the fact that some individuals do not understand or factually retain what they see on television. This could lead potentially to unintended messages.

These related studies give insight into the area of television perception. Messages are sent and received according to the preconceived understandings of the sender and receiver. If we can understand better how these messages are received by the viewer, and identify any unintended messages that are viewed as negative in nature, it may be possible to reduce the amount of discord that these unintended messages produce by changing or eliminating them.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

The design of this study is to collect data from a sample population, analyze the data, and make inferences about the larger population.¹ Although this research is exploratory in nature, it attempts to shed light on the way in which television is viewed.

This study will adhere to the basic principles of research, those of universality, replication, control, and measure.² The research will be designed in such a way that when other researchers, at different points in time and perhaps under different circumstances, apply the same techniques to the same data, the results will be the same.

Whenever people's perceptions are the basis of research, it is critical to note that people may differ in their interpretations from one region or culture to another.³ The design is universal, the inferences are not, but the inferences should be valid and useful in a similar population, given the use of the same methodology.

It is not intended that this study be the key to total understanding when dealing with human perception as it relates to television viewing and persuasion. It is intended that discoveries will be made that will lead to the ability to better understand the reasons for the perceptions, and how these understandings will be valuable to those who create messages for television.

Objectives

The first objective is to identify the intended and unintended messages contained within the two United States Army commercials to encourage enlistment. To accomplish this objective, two specific methodologies will be used. The first will be to gain the assistance of the army in describing the intended messages that it attempted to design into the commercials. The second will be to conduct a focus group to verify the army's documentation of intended messages and determine if any unintended messages are perceived.

The United States Army Recruiting Command has been very cooperative in assisting in this research. Two commercials were provided by the army to conduct this research. They are entitled "Dear Dad" and "Basic Excellence." An executive summary was provided by the army which outlined the intended messages that the producers

wished to convey via these commercials. Complete scripts of these commercials can be found in Appendix E. A short synopsis of the communications objectives would be the following: "Dear Dad" is intended to communicate the personal growth, maturation, and character development gained from serving in the army. It is intended to show the events and training that build these characteristics into those who serve with the United States Army. This commercial also attempts to portray the army as exciting, adventuresome, and challenging.

Although all of these were not specific intended messages when conceived, the army has admitted based on their own research that they exist, so they will not be counted as possible unintended messages.⁴ Unfortunately, the research into this area was proprietary in nature and was not made available in detail.

The second commercial, "Basic Excellence," was also intended to communicate the message of building character and developing personal strengths from army experiences. This commercial uses the background of basic training as an opportunity to discover one's abilities to overcome personal fears and inhibitions. It was intended to depict the army as physically challenging and a way to prepare for the future.⁵

This information provided by the army is the starting point for accomplishing the first objective, but further investigation into the intended messages is required prior to analysis of the unintended messages.

To accomplish this a focus group will be used to view each of the commercials. The group will closely examine each commercial in detail to establish which specific parts of the commercials contain intended or unintended messages. The group will be divided into two separate sessions to avoid any one individual from dominating the interaction of the group. This will also allow a comparison between comments from each session to enhance the reliability of input. The same moderator will be in both sessions to ensure uniformity of the focus group structure and procedures.

The focus group will be composed of individuals selected randomly from students attending San Diego State University the summer session of 1990 that meet the criteria of the target audience. These individuals will be chosen to match the general population percentage as far as number of Whites, Hispanics, Blacks, and Asians contained within the San Diego area.⁶ The focus group will be composed of a total of 10 individuals, divided into two sessions.

The members of the focus group will have the opportunity to view the commercials as many times as desired and provide input. The first objective of the group is to determine what intended messages are perceived in the commercials. These observations will be compared to the information provided by the army. The second objective is to determine if any unintended messages are perceived by the group. The third objective of the focus group is to determine whether a message is perceived as positive, neutral, or negative in the mind of the viewer.

The information determined via the focus group will then be used as the basis for development of the questionnaires for these commercials to be viewed by the sample population in the San Diego area.

The focus group input will also provide qualitative data that can be used in conjunction with the quantitative data that will be collected from the sample population via the questionnaires. The two sessions will be videotaped for further analysis if needed.

Another objective is to determine if there are unintended messages that differ for different demographic groups within the target audience. This will also be accomplished by responses to the questionnaire as determined by the focus group input. It is expected that

some groups within the target audience, based on the educational, social, and cultural backgrounds, will have different views on what messages are being conveyed by the commercials. Comparisons will be made of the data to determine if there is a pattern of perception identified by demographics that is significant to this study.

By analyzing the data gathered via the questionnaires, it will be then possible to make inferences to the existence of unintended messages perceived by the viewers of these two commercials. The overall results are expected to lead to a better understanding of what messages, intended or unintended, existing in these commercials have negative, positive, or neutral meaning to the viewers. This understanding of the possible existence of unintended perceived messages may assist those who use television as a means of communication to better encode messages for the audience intended.

Population and Sample

Since the target audience for these particular commercials provided by the army is males ages 18 to 24, the population that this study is composed of is males 18 to 24 years of age living within the city and county of San Diego, California. This obviously negates any generalizations being made to females within the

population, as they are not targeted by the commercials. Four hundred respondents will be drawn from the population, with 200 viewing each of the commercials. The respondents will be selected from locations in the San Diego area that will provide a sample that contains individuals of the same general demographics as found within the population overall. For San Diego, the breakdown of demographics is as follows: Non-Hispanic Whites, 69 percent; Hispanics, 17 percent; Asian and other, 9 percent; Black, 5 percent.⁷

The sample surveyed will attempt to match these percentages as closely as possible to give greater significance to the overall results of the research. Individuals will be asked to participate only on a voluntary basis. This may cause some discrepancy between percentages of participants in the demographic areas and the actual demographic breakdown of the population.

Design Steps and Procedures

The procedure to be used in collecting data for analysis in answering the research question will be a survey conducted within the community of San Diego. Since it is not feasible or realistic to expect respondents in a survey of this nature to have remembered viewing a specific commercial message, and since the

survey is directed to a target audience, it will require the researcher to physically visit locations within the community and arrange to have subjects view the commercials.

This procedure, although not truly random in nature, ensures that the sample population will be selected from the different geographic locations within the larger population region that allows greater possibility of obtaining the demographic breakdown discussed earlier. Research locations will include city recreational centers in different locations within the community, city libraries, community colleges, extended educational complexes, and a major university.

Separate questionnaires are constructed for each of the commercial messages. Separate data sets will also be presented for each of the commercial messages, and these will be analyzed separately. This is necessary, as no two commercial messages can be perceived in the same fashion.

Instrumentation

The instruments for this research will be two questionnaires that will be designed in the same way for each commercial. The questionnaire will first address message perception, and then address demographic

information of the respondent. Questions will be designed to provide nominal and ordinal data to which a variety of statistical tests can be applied if needed.

An important aspect of the questionnaire will be an open-ended structure. After the respondents have been questioned as to their agreement or disagreement with statements culled from the focus group, they will have an opportunity to respond with any perceptions of their own. This will give the entire sample population an opportunity to provide input regarding what they perceive in the commercial message. Of course comments will not be required, as many may agree with the spectrum of perceptions outlined in the questionnaire. Comments provided will be analyzed for frequency and general classification as positive, negative, or neutral. This serves as an additional means of identifying unintended messages in these two commercials.

The survey form will also contain basic questions to ascertain demographic characteristics. Respondents will be asked to provide information regarding age, sex, race, education, and other data necessary for the comparison of the sample population with the general population. Most of the questions pertaining to unintended messages as determined by the focus group will be asked in a manner that will yield responses based on

the degree of agreement or disagreement to the idea posed. A scale of one to five will be used on these questions to allow for statistical analysis.

Data Processing and Analysis

After the questionnaires have been collected, the data will be input into the basic SPSS statistical format for analysis. The open-ended portion of the questionnaire may yield comments that will be significant to the focus group perceptions. These comments will be compared first for substantiating the perceptions made by the focus group. Next they will be analyzed for any trends in perceived messages that are different from those already perceived. Lastly they will be analyzed for providing data that will answer why a message is perceived by a certain individual or group. The breakdown of demographic groups will be examined to ensure that the sample population generally matches the demographic population of the San Diego area. If the breakdown is not closely matched, some of the sample of certain demographic groups will be randomly eliminated, or more respondents will be gathered from other demographic groups, depending on the error that exists in the sample.

The first hypothesis, that both intended and unintended messages will be perceived by the viewers of United States Army commercials, will be tested by the frequency of responses to questions designed to elicit this information. This hypothesis should be confirmed with a significant frequency of agreement on the part of the respondents based on the messages identified by the focus group.

As no studies currently exist pertaining directly to unintended messages, and no precedence exists for determining what percentage of agreement from the sample could be used to make an inference to the general population, an agreement of 30 percent or more will be considered significant. This figure is based on Jacoby et al.'s study pertaining to the miscomprehension in television commercials discussed in Chapter II.⁸ Intended message verification should also meet the 30 percent criterion to infer that an intended message is perceived by the target audience.

Demographic breakdowns will reveal if some messages are perceived differently by those individuals who come from different subgroups or subcultures within the same general culture of the sample population.

The second hypothesis, that the unintended messages can be positive, negative, or neutral in nature,

will also be examined from a standpoint of frequency of agreement to the survey. Qualitative responses on the aspect of positive, neutral, or negative messages will be analyzed both from the input of the focus group and the input from the open-ended survey questions.

It will also be useful to break these respondents into the demographic groups that agree on the nature of the message to see if any patterns can be established which will aid in determining whether a message is perceived as positive, negative, or neutral.

Some general unintended messages, like the idea of war being a negative experience, will likely be perceived by many of the viewers of a commercial of this type. These general messages are not the intent of this study. This study is designed to detect specific unintended messages, which can be categorized as positive, negative, or neutral, and may be used to develop further research into this area.

The third hypothesis, that different socio-economic backgrounds will cause different perceived unintended messages among the different demographic groups, will be the final point of analysis. It is expected that the data obtained via the questionnaires will reveal similarity of perceived messages among viewers with similar social characteristics. It should

also be possible to predict how certain types of people in the general population, based on their subgroups or subcultures, will perceive messages within the commercial. Cross tabulation will be presented to show the relationship between responses and demographic backgrounds.

It is hoped that the results of this study will enable communicators to better tailor a message to the intended demographic audience. This may result in the reduction of negative unintended messages that may be part of the cause of unsuccessful commercial messages.

It is expected that the analysis of the data based on the hypotheses that have been developed will lead to the answers to the three subproblems of the study. This in turn will lead to a well structured and reasoned answer to the research question, which will shed new light into the area of television commercial advertising. This exploratory study should yield valuable information to anyone using the medium of television.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF DATA AND FINDINGS

Introduction

The data will be presented in the order in which they were collected. Data pertaining to the focus group will be examined first to gain a complete understanding of the development of the questions contained in the survey instruments. Next, the data collected from the individual surveys will be analyzed.

Frequency tables, cross-tables, Pearson's correlation, and multiple regression tables will be presented to support the acceptance or rejection of the hypotheses presented.

Qualitative Data

An understanding of the focus group data is critical in this research. This study sought to determine the perceptions of individuals as they pertain to the television viewing experience. A common frame of reference from which to make inferences is necessary for the purposes of credibility. The focus group was

designed to establish this common reference, and to provide a starting point from which to assess the viewing audience in the sample population.

The focus group was designed to gain input from individuals within the target audience of the two commercials used in this study. This input was then used to create the questionnaires that were administered to the sample population, which was composed entirely of individuals who fell within the target audience of the two commercials.

The focus group was divided into two sessions. The same moderator attended both sessions to ensure that they were conducted in the same manner. This also facilitated gaining agreement from the sessions on what was perceived as a positive, neutral, or negative message. This assessment of message perception is very important when making an analysis of the data collected from the sample.

The focus group was composed of eight individuals ranging in age from 18 to 23. The demographic breakdown of the group was five Caucasians, one Black, one Asian, and one Hispanic. The focus group was then subdivided into two smaller groups referred to as sessions. Including the moderator, each session was composed of five individuals. Each session was conducted in the

following manner. The group was informed that the objective of the session was to view two television commercials and provide comments on what, if any, messages were perceived by the group. The straightforward messages were expected to be commented on, as the intended messages within the commercials needed to be understood as well as any unintended messages. The group was informed that a perceived message could be a feeling, something they felt uncomfortable with, or anything in the commercial that keyed a thought process that made them think of something.

The commercials were shown in the same order for each session; first "Basic Excellence" was shown and then "Dear Dad." In each case the commercials were shown three times before any comments were solicited. This procedure was conducted to allow the individuals within the session to evaluate in their own minds any messages that they believed they perceived prior to commenting. This also gave the session the opportunity to view the commercials in depth, and ensure that the words or visuals presented were causing consistent messages to be perceived.

Development of Questions for the Surveys

The input of the focus group, plus the comments received from the sample, are key to evaluating if unintended messages are, or are not, perceived, and why. A complete overview of comments and opinions expressed by the focus group can be found in Appendix F. Only those comments central to the development of the questions used on the surveys will be presented in this chapter.

There are twelve questions in each survey. The first seven address message perceptions, and the last five pertain to demographic and psychographic information. This order was chosen to ensure that message perceptions were examined while the commercial was in the forefront of the respondent's mind. At the conclusion of the demographic section was an open-ended question which gave the respondent an opportunity to provide input pertaining to his own perceptions about the commercial.

Questionnaire 1 contains five questions based on unintended messages as perceived by the focus group participants. These questions were derived from those messages that both sessions of the focus group agreed existed in their minds from watching the commercial. An examination of each of these questions will assist in evaluating the data received from the sample population.

The questions were presented in both a positive and negative manner, to ensure that the individuals surveyed had to purposely change from agreement to disagreement to perceive the message in the same way the focus group perceived it. It is important to remember that "perception" by the focus group is considered a message for the purpose of this study.

The first question dealt with the perception by the focus group participants that the drill sergeant portrayed in the commercial was unrealistic. This depiction of the drill sergeant was believed by the focus group to be an attempt by the creators of the commercial to deceive the audience. When queried as to their feelings about their perception of the drill sergeant, the group stated that any perceived deception by an advertiser is negative in nature.

Question 2 dealt with the intended message pertaining to the idea that the activities being conducted in this commercial are exciting and challenging. As part of the methodology stated earlier, intended messages will also be evaluated to determine if they are perceived by the sample. This intended message was perceived by both sessions of the focus group.

The third question was based on the perception by the focus group that engaging in the activities portrayed

in the commercial will not lead to a good civilian job. Both sessions felt that this message was confusing and somewhat misleading. Although the group did not feel that this message was as negative as the perceived deception in the portrayal of the drill sergeant, it was felt to be somewhat negative in nature.

Questions 4, 5, and 6 all dealt with the perceived message of the type of person to whom this commercial was attempting to appeal. Both sessions believed that this commercial was intended for people who are easily persuaded. They also thought that it was intended for those who are of less than average intelligence and currently without direction in life, or who had no definite plans for their future.

When asked what was meant by less than average in intelligence, the group members responded that it could be described as someone who scored below the national IQ average for adults. The national average for the IQ test is 100. Persons considered to be below average in intelligence are those whose scores fall more than 16 points below the national average, or receive 84 or less on the IQ test.¹ These particular messages were not believed to be negative by the group; they just agreed upon this perception. These messages were considered neutral or only slightly negative in nature, because the army was

providing an opportunity for employment for these individuals.

Question 7 was based on the intended message in this commercial that teamwork was a characteristic gained from experiencing the activities being portrayed in this commercial. This message was perceived in both sessions of the focus group.

Questions 8 through 12 are basic demographic questions about age, race, education, and whether or not the respondent had served with one of the armed forces, or had a relative that had served with one of the armed forces. The last part of the questionnaire was an open-ended question which allowed general comments on any messages perceived by the respondent as a result of watching the commercial. It was an opportunity to discover perceptions that the focus group did not perceive. Selected comments received from the respondents will be presented to assist in the analysis of the data gathered in this study. A complete list of all comments received can be found in Appendix G.

Questionnaire 2 was developed in exactly the same manner as the first questionnaire. It also has twelve questions; the first seven pertain to message perception and the last five pertain to demographic information. An

open-ended question also follows the demographic portion of this questionnaire.

The first question pertained to the perception of the focus group that the individual in the commercial had joined the army and is jumping out of airplanes to prove his courage to his father. The focus group felt that this message had a negative quality because they assumed that the father and son had a negative relationship which caused the son to want to impress him.

Question 2 dealt with the perception by the focus group that the words "character," "maturity," and "team-work," which were flashed on the screen during the "Dear Dad" commercial, were not strongly associated with the actions depicted. The general feeling was not negative, but of uneasiness, as if other words like "confidence building," or "exciting," would be more appropriate. This message, the group judged, would best be classified as neutral.

Question 3 was based on the perception of the focus group that the visual and verbal messages were in conflict. At one point in the "Dear Dad" commercial, soldiers were jumping out of an airplane with the narrator saying that the soldiers' actions will help them "get the most out of life." These two messages were perceived by the focus group to be inconsistent. There

was agreement among the group that this message was an attempt to mislead the audience and therefore negative in nature.

The next two questions pertained to the character traits that were described by the words appearing on the screen during the commercial. Question 4 dealt with the intended message by the army that the activities being portrayed would develop the traits being described by the words appearing on the screen. The focus group perceived this intended message and judged it as positive in nature.

Question 5 is designed to determine if the sample population agrees with the focus group's perception that these traits could also be developed by doing things other than joining the army and jumping out of airplanes. This message was judged to be neutral by the focus group.

Question 6 explores the perception of the focus group that this commercial portrayed life in the army factually. Although it was not a documented intended message of the commercial by the army, the focus group felt strongly that this commercial was a true representation of life in the army today. The message was perceived by the group as a positive unintended message because they considered this particular commercial to be

more factual than other army commercials to which they had been exposed.

Question 7 was based on the perception of the group that the activities being depicted in the commercial would not lead to a good civilian job. At the end of this commercial the soldiers are firing a cannon. The focus group felt strongly that this was not a skill needed in the civilian world. The intended message of the commercial was to depict teamwork, but the negative message of showing unusable skills was very dominant among the focus group.

The last five questions were exactly the same for this survey as the other. Demographic information pertaining to age, race, education, service in the armed forces or the service of a relative was solicited. The last question was again the open-ended comment portion that allowed the respondent to express personal views on what he perceived in the commercial message. With an understanding of how the focus group perceived these commercial messages, it was possible to develop a questionnaire with which to sample the population in order to answer the stated research question.

Collection of the Sample

The sample goal was 400 respondents overall, with 200 for each commercial. Sample locations throughout the San Diego community were used to contact the respondents. An attempt to include individuals of varying backgrounds was accomplished by sampling individuals in recreation centers, libraries, cultural learning centers, community colleges, and a university. The sample was composed of 18- to 24-year-old males living in the San Diego community. The demographic make-up of all ages within the San Diego community was the guideline for this sample. Generally the sample was composed of individuals representing the overall demographic breakdown of racial types represented in the San Diego area. There are variations, but this may be more representative of the very narrow age factor involved in the sample. Higher percentages of Blacks and Asian/Others were collected than expected. This was probably associated with the specific locations used in collecting the sample. For example, a recreation center may have more Blacks in attendance if it is located in a predominantly Black area. There were significantly higher percentages of Whites and Hispanics in the sample, with Whites

dominating significantly. Whites compose the highest racial percentage in the San Diego area.

Male individuals were approached at the different locations and asked if they were between the ages of 18 and 24. If they were, they were then asked to voluntarily participate in research pertaining to television. Respondents desiring to participate were then taken to a room and shown a commercial. After viewing the commercial, they were asked to answer the survey prepared for that commercial. The exact sample was 391 respondents, with 195 respondents for "Basic Excellence" and 196 for "Dear Dad."

Quantitative Data

The data from the sample have been presented to answer the research question. Where appropriate, frequency distributions, cross-tabulation tables, chi square significance factors, Pearson correlations, and regression models will be presented to assist in analyzing the findings. The tables will be used to assist in explaining the "why" of a finding where possible. Each hypothesis will be discussed after all the data are presented.

Where chi square or other significance factors are expressed, they will be of those with values that are

less than .05. When the values are near, but above, .05, the data are presented as suggesting a trend.

The data will be presented in two sets. First the data pertaining to the "Basic Excellence" commercial will be addressed, followed by the "Dear Dad" commercial. Comparisons that are significant to both commercials will then be discussed.

"Basic Excellence" Findings

Of the 195 respondents, 54 percent were White, 23 percent were Hispanic, 14 percent were Black, and 9 percent Asian/Other. Since the percentage of Blacks serving in the army is much higher than the San Diego population norms, the sample will not be altered.² Table 1 shows the age distribution of the sample. Table 2 shows the education distribution. The number of persons that have had some college refers to any type of college instruction beyond high school. The actual number of college graduates in the sample is 9 percent. Although college graduation may be considered more significant than attendance, it will be shown that attendance at college is also significant to the perception of unintended messages.

Of the 195 surveyed, 6 percent had served with one of the armed forces of the United States, and

TABLE 1

AGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE "BASIC EXCELLENCE" SAMPLE

Age groups	Number of respondents in group
18	24
19	28
20	27
21	40
22	32
23	17
24	26
	1 missing
	—
Total	195

TABLE 2

EDUCATION DISTRIBUTION OF THE "BASIC EXCELLENCE" SAMPLE

Education groups	Number of respondents in group
Below high school	6
High school graduates only	37
Attended some college	131
College graduates	17
Higher	3
	1 missing
	—
Total	195

77 percent had a relative that had served, or is serving, with one of the armed forces of the United States.

The criteria for establishing that the sample group had perceived the message in the same manner as the focus group was to achieve a 30 percent agreement level or higher. The response required to coincide with the focus group's perception of a message varied between answering agree or disagree, depending on how the question was presented. Refer to Appendix B for the exact wording of the questions on each questionnaire.

Question 1 required a response of disagree or strongly disagree to coincide with the focus group's perceived message that the drill sergeant in the commercial was not portrayed realistically. Thirty-one percent of the respondents answered disagree, and 8 percent strongly disagreed, for a total of 39 percent. According to the criteria established, this message was perceived by a significant percentage of the sample population.

Question 2 pertained to the intended message of the army that the activities in the commercial were exciting and challenging. The response of agree or strongly agree would match the focus group's perception of this message. Fifty-four percent agreed and 7 percent strongly agreed, for a total of 61 percent. This intended message was obviously perceived by the sample.

Question 3 was based on the perception by the focus group that doing what was seen in the commercial will not lead to a good civilian job. The response of disagree or strongly disagree would coincide with the focus group's perception. Fifty-three percent disagreed and 13 percent strongly disagreed, for a total of 66 percent. Respondents obviously agreed with the focus group's perception of this message.

Questions 4, 5, and 6 were based on the perceptions of the focus group about to whom they felt this commercial was directed. The focus group perceived that those easily persuaded, of less than average intelligence, and without direction in life would be more interested in the information presented. A response of agree or strongly agree would confirm this perception.

Question 4 had an agree level of 53 percent, and a strongly agree level of 18 percent, for a total of 71 percent. Question 5 had an agree and strongly agree level of 40 percent and 9 percent, respectively, for a total of 49 percent. Question 6 was 59 percent and 19 percent for agree and strongly agree, respectively, for a total of 78 percent. Although Question 5 had a somewhat lower percentage than Questions 4 and 6, perceptions regarding the target audience for this commercial are very strong.

The last question pertaining to message perception is Question 7, which tested the intended message in this commercial pertaining to the depiction of personal accomplishment. The response of agree or strongly agree would be in tune with the perceptions of the focus group that personal accomplishment is well depicted. Fifty-two percent agreed and 16 percent strongly agreed to the intended message, for a total of 68 percent. This intended message seems clearly perceived by the viewers of this commercial.

These data reveal that all of the questions pertaining to unintended messages in the "Basic Excellence" commercial exceeded the 30 percent criterion established. This information in itself is significant, as one would not expect every perception of a small group to be agreed with by a larger sample. One might conclude that the criterion established was too low. Suppose that a 50 percent criterion had been established. Based on this new criterion, all but two messages were perceived by the sample in the same manner as the focus group, and one of those was at 49 percent.

Even if the position is taken that the questions were worded in such a manner as to lend themselves to gaining the responses desired to support the hypothesis desired, a 100 percent agreement rate is impressive.

An examination of some of the comments provided by the respondents will assist in showing that the messages perceived by the focus group may have been perceived by the sample regardless of how the questions were worded. The following comment was received in the open-ended portion of a questionnaire after the respondent had answered the question pertaining to the perception that the commercial is directed toward those without direction in life: "People who lack self confidence and direction would see this commercial, and think, 'yeah, that's for me, I can do something. . . .'" Another respondent commented: ". . . if you don't feel that you have a place in society and are going nowhere. There is a place for you in the army [sic]."

Question 5 pertained to the perception that this commercial was directed toward individuals who are less than average in intelligence. One commented, "I think this commercial is directed toward the guy that thinks of himself less than his peer's [sic]. . . ."

These comments indicate that even after an individual agreed with a message in the question portion of the survey, he either forgot that he had made it known, or felt strongly enough about this perception to reiterate it in the open-ended portion.

The frequency of responses that support the focus group perceptions is only one aspect of the data collected. To be of real value the data must attempt to explain why something occurred or did not occur. To try to gain this understanding, a comparison will be made between the demographic characteristics of the sample and the responses to the message perceptions presented in the survey.

All of the questions were cross-tabulated with the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Those that reveal a factor that assists in explaining who perceives a message, or why a perception exists, will be presented.

Table 3 shows that when age is compared with the message perception of the accuracy of the portrayal of the drill sergeant in Question 1, 18-year-olds perceive the sergeant differently than those of all the other ages. The values have been recoded to "agree," "not sure," and "disagree" for simplicity. Apparently between the age of 18 and 19, individuals' perceptions change drastically. The same observation was noted when comparing respondents' ages to Question 3, whether the activities in the commercial will lead to a good civilian job. A cross-tabulation with a significant factor of .0091 revealed that only 18-year-olds agreed

overwhelmingly with this perception, contrary to the rest of the ages surveyed. The reason for this may be education, formal or informal, which will be examined later in this chapter.

Race was not a factor in most tests of the data, but showed great significance when compared to the perception of the drill sergeant being portrayed accurately in Question 1. Table 4 shows that while Whites generally were not sure, Blacks seemed to feel that the drill sergeant was portrayed accurately. Hispanics and Asians/Others, on the other hand, seemed to disagree with this perception more strongly than the other races. This may have been because the drill sergeant was either Hispanic or Asian in appearance, it was difficult to tell precisely. This may have caused problems with those of the same race.

Race was not significant to any other messages, but a trend was displayed by Blacks not to perceive that the "Basic Excellence" commercial was directed toward those who were less than average in intelligence. All other races displayed the same perception as the focus group. The significance factor for the cross-tabulation of race to the perception of to whom this message was directed in Question 5 was .0602. There is no obvious reason for this variation presented by the data

TABLE 3

CROSS-TABULATION OF AGE TO THE PERCEPTION THAT
THE DRILL SERGEANT WAS PORTRAYED ACCURATELY

	Age						
	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Agree	62%	28%	18%	25%	37%	23%	30%
Not Sure	25%	28%	22%	40%	15%	35%	35%
Disagree	13%	42%	60%	35%	47%	42%	35%
(collective percentages)							
Chi square = 22.72878				Significance = .0301			

TABLE 4

CROSS-TABULATION OF RACE TO THE PERCEPTION THAT
THE DRILL SERGEANT WAS PORTRAYED ACCURATELY

	Race			
	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/Other
Strongly Agree	--	14%	5%	6%
Agree	26%	39%	28%	22%
Not Sure	36%	14%	27%	11%
Disagree	27%	21%	36%	56%
Strongly Disagree	11%	11%	3%	6%
(collective percentages)				
Chi square = 28.99430			Significance = .0039	

collected. Another strong trend was apparent when race was cross-tabulated with the perception by the focus group that the commercial was directed toward those easily persuaded (Question 4). The sample displayed agreement among all races to this perception. The significance factor was .0554 in this comparison.

Education appears to be the strongest predictor of how the messages perceived by the focus group will be perceived by the sample, as can be attested by cross-tabulations between education and all seven questions. Table 5 depicts the correlation between education and the perception that the activities being shown in the commercial will lead to a good civilian job (Question 3). It is possible to predict that within the target audience of this commercial, as the education level of an individual increases, so will his perception of the message that the activities being conducted will not lead to a good civilian job.

Education is also significant regarding the perceived target audience for this commercial. Table 6 shows that when education is cross-tabulated with the perception that this commercial is directed toward individuals who are without direction in life (Question 6), as the education level increases, the perception increases. This may be based on the idea held by many

TABLE 5

CROSS-TABULATION OF EDUCATION TO THE PERCEPTION THAT
THE ACTIVITIES IN THE COMMERCIAL WILL
LEAD TO A GOOD CIVILIAN LIFE

	Education				
	Non-H.S. graduate	H.S. graduate	Some college	College graduate	Higher
Strongly Agree	17%	3%	3%	--	--
Agree	33%	3%	9%	18%	--
Not Sure	--	30%	21%	23%	--
Disagree	17%	60%	55%	29%	67%
Strongly Disagree	34%	6%	12%	29%	33%
		(collective percentages)			
Chi square = 26.37688				Significance = .0490	

TABLE 6

CROSS-TABULATION OF EDUCATION TO THE PERCEPTION THAT
THIS COMMERCIAL IS DIRECTED TO THOSE
WITHOUT DIRECTION IN LIFE

	Education				
	Non-H.S. graduate	H.S. graduate	Some college	College graduate	Higher
Strongly Agree	17%	3%	22%	29%	--
Agree	--	73%	56%	71%	100%
Not Sure	50%	11%	13%	--	--
Disagree	17%	5%	7%	--	--
Strongly Disagree	16%	8%	2%	--	--
		(collective percentages)			
Chi square = 33.96319				Significance = .0055	

individuals that as one increases in education, one increases in the ability to find employment.

This was also true with the perceptions that the commercial was directed toward those who are easily persuaded and less than average in intelligence. The significance factor was .0031 and .0158, respectively, for these comparisons between education and the perceptions about to whom the commercial was directed.

The perception of the message that this commercial is intended for those without direction in life may be supported by the data gathered from the sample. Table 7 shows the comparison between Question 6, pertaining to the commercial being directed toward those without direction in life, and Question 11, which asked if the respondent had served in the armed forces. Fifty-five percent of those who had served in the armed forces agreed that the commercial is directed to those who are without direction in life.

A multiple regression model also supported this finding. A significance of .0003 was found when Question 6, the perception that this commercial was directed toward those without direction in life, was labeled as the dependent variable; and age, race, education, and having served in the armed forces were labeled as the independent variables. Education and having served in

TABLE 7

CROSS-TABULATION OF SERVING IN THE ARMED FORCES
TO THE PERCEPTION THAT THIS COMMERCIAL
WAS DIRECTED TOWARD THOSE WITHOUT
DIRECTION IN LIFE

	Served in armed forces	
	Yes	No
Strongly Agree	--	20%
Agree	55%	60%
Not Sure	9%	13%
Disagree	27%	5%
Strongly Disagree	9%	2%
(collective percentages)		
Chi square = 11.03042	Significance = .0262	

the armed forces became significant predictors with a .0008 and .0102 factor, respectively.

Since this commercial was considered "average" in the army's estimation, it might be logical to assume that a greater percentage of unintended messages are perceived by the target audience of this commercial than a commercial that is considered excellent by the army, as is "Dear Dad." This would coincide with the communication theory that a message which is encoded more clearly will be decoded with a greater understanding of what the sender intended.

"Dear Dad" Findings

This sample was composed of 196 individuals. Of those, 59 percent were White, 21 percent Hispanic, 14 percent Black, and 6 percent Asian/Other. These percentages are generally representative of the San Diego community. Here again the research locations used may have been a factor in a higher percentage of Blacks in the sample than reported in the population of San Diego, which was 5 percent.

Tables 8 and 9 show the age and education distribution of the sample. College graduates make up 10 percent of this sample. Of those sampled 7 percent had served in the armed forces and 80 percent had a

TABLE 8
AGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE "DEAR DAD" SAMPLE

Age groups	Number of respondents in group
18	19
19	25
20	34
21	41
22	30
23	19
24	27
	1 missing
	—
Total	195

TABLE 9
EDUCATION DISTRIBUTION OF THE "DEAR DAD" SAMPLE

Education groups	Number of respondents in group
Below high school	6
High school graduates only	38
Attended some college	128
College graduates	20
Higher	3
	1 missing
	—
Total	196

relative who had served, or is serving, in one of the armed forces.

As with the data pertaining to "Basic Excellence," an agreement rate of 30 percent or higher by the sample, with the perceptions of the focus group, will be considered significant to having perceived the same message.

The first question, pertaining to the perception of the focus group that the soldier was jumping out of airplanes to prove his courage to his father, needed a response of agree or strongly agree to coincide with the focus group's perception. Of the sample, 27 percent agreed and 7 percent strongly agreed, for a total of 34 percent.

Question 2, based on the perception of the focus group that the words appearing on the screen were unrelated to the action portrayed, needed a response of agree or strongly agree to correspond with the focus group. Thirty-three percent agreed and 3 percent strongly agreed, for a total of 36 percent. These first two messages meet the criteria for this study, but they do not have the percentage strength demonstrated by other messages evaluated. This may support the belief by the army that this is a better commercial than the first.

Question 3, that deals with the perception of the focus group that the verbal message of getting the most out of life is inconsistent with the visual message of jumping out of airplanes, required an agree or strongly agree answer to match the focus group perception. Forty percent agreed and 13 percent strongly agreed, for a total of 53 percent. This indicates a much stronger agreement with the focus group of message perception by the sample.

Question 4 dealt with the intended message by the army that the traits described by words appearing on the screen could be developed by the activities portrayed. Forty-one percent agreed and 8 percent strongly agreed with this message, for a total of 49 percent. Only 26 percent disagreed with this perception, so it is apparent that this intended message was clearly perceived.

The perception that these traits could be developed by doing things like organized sports, as posed in Question 5, was strongly supported. Sixty-three percent agreed and 18 percent strongly agreed with this perception. If this thought did come into the mind of a viewer as it did with the focus group, it could be significant to the overall way in which the commercial is received.

Question 6 poses an interesting situation. Although not an intended message documented by the army, the perception of the focus group was that this commercial was an accurate portrayal of what life is like in the army. An agree or strongly agree response would coincide with this perception. Twenty-three percent agreed and 14 percent strongly agreed with this message, for a total of 37 percent. This would indicate that this unintended message, which the focus group considered positive, if viewed in the same manner as the focus group, might be beneficial to the overall commercial.

Question 7 was based on the perception that firing a cannon could be of no use to an individual in civilian life. The response of disagree or strongly disagree would support the focus group perception. Of those surveyed, 40 percent disagreed and 35 percent strongly disagreed, for a total of 75 percent. If the viewer of this commercial does not perceive the intended message of building teamwork by firing the cannon, there is a strong possibility that this unintended message will detract from the commercial message.

Open-ended comments provided by respondents had many more favorable opinions about the image of the army portrayed in this commercial. The assessment of the army that this commercial is of a higher quality than the

"Basic Excellence" commercial seems supported by these comments.

However, there were comments that suggested some viewers did not perceive the message as positive. One individual wrote: "Quit glamourising [sic] war. Yes, I believe we need a military defense, but the army isn't McDonalds. This isn't 'Food, folks, and fun,' it's war." Another commented: ". . . But I don't know if it is ethically correct to offer the army as a surragate [sic] family. You can get that from a gang and make more money." Referring to the perception that the verbal message is inconsistent with the visual message, consider this comment: "Jumping from a plane takes courage or someone yelling in your ear. Firing a cannon for practice and loading ammunition don't seem to be glorified events that would persuade me to join the army."

Although not addressed on this questionnaire, a respondent wrote: "I think that armed forces commercials are w/out a doubt targeted towards high school graduates or drop outs w/ no direction in life." This comment supports the perception of the focus group when watching the "Basic Excellence: commercial, which was that the commercial was directed toward those without direction in life. Another commented: "The commercial call out

thoughts [sic] people that have no direction in life. . . ."

As with the "Basic Excellence" data, an analysis of the data that will give some insight as to why a perception exists is more valuable than merely determining that it exists. The data support the conclusion that in most circumstances the perception of unintended messages is directly correlated to the education level of the viewer.

Table 10 shows the correlation between education and the response to Question 2 pertaining to the perception that the words appearing on the screen were unrelated to the action depicted. Analysis of this table reveals that perceptions differ with education. The trend with these data, unlike the data from the "Basic Excellence" sample, is not simply that the higher the education, the most likely to perceive the message. Individuals who have either failed to graduate from high school or have not had any college education also seemed to perceive that the words were unrelated. Yet, those who had some college and college graduates disagreed overwhelmingly to the perception that the words were unrelated to the action. Those beyond college graduation were not sure whether the words were unrelated or not.

The education level of the respondent in the target audience also affected how other messages were perceived. In the first set of data pertaining to the "Basic Excellence" commercial, it can be deduced that messages were perceived to coincide with the focus group as education increased.

Table 11 reveals that this is not the case with the messages perceived in this commercial. As the education level increased within the sample, there were changes within the agreement level as to the focus group's perceptions. Respondents who had a high school education or less perceived the message that the verbal and visual messages were inconsistent (Question 3) to a higher degree than did those who had some college or were college graduates. Individuals who has post-graduate educations did not perceive this message at all the way the focus group did.

Question 7, the perception of this commercial as a true representation of life in the army, follows more closely the pattern of the higher the education of the respondent, the less likely the perception of this message. The significance factor when cross-tabulating education to the perception that this commercial is an accurate representation of the army is .0000, with a chi square of 90.55248. Based on these data, those with a

TABLE 10

CROSS-TABULATION OF EDUCATION TO THE PERCEPTION THAT
THE ACTIVITY IS UNRELATED TO THE WORDS
APPEARING ON THE SCREEN

	Education				
	Non-H.S. graduate	H.S. graduate	Some college	College graduate	Higher
Strongly Agree	--	--	5%	--	--
Agree	50%	61%	25%	30%	33%
Not Sure	17%	26%	15%	10%	67%
Disagree	--	11%	48%	60%	--
Strongly Disagree	33%	2%	7%	--	--

(collective percentages)

Chi square = 47.49691

Significance = .0001

TABLE 11

CROSS-TABULATION OF EDUCATION TO THE PERCEPTION THAT THE
VERBAL MESSAGE OF "HELP ME GET THE MOST OUT OF LIFE"
IS INCONSISTENT WITH THE VISUAL MESSAGE OF
JUMPING OUT OF PLANES

	Education				
	Non-H.S. graduate	H.S. graduate	Some college	College graduate	Higher
Strongly Agree	50%	8%	12%	20%	--
Agree	33%	76%	33%	20%	33%
Not Sure	17%	3%	21%	40%	--
Disagree	--	13%	31%	20%	33%
Strongly Disagree	--	--	3%	--	33%

(collective percentages)

Chi square = 56.53737

Significance = .0000

high school education will perceive this message in the same manner that the focus group did, and will probably receive it positively, as did the focus group.

Table 12 shows that when age is cross-tabulated with the perception that this commercial is a true representation of the army, younger individuals will perceive this message in the manner that the focus group did. The older the respondent, the less likely the agreement with this perception.

Race also seemed to be a factor with the perception that this commercial is a true representation of the army. Table 13 shows that Hispanics and Asians/Others are much more likely to agree with the perception of the focus group than Whites or Blacks.

To further substantiate the findings, several Pearson's correlations, which are statistical tools used to determine the significance of one variable to another, were conducted. A correlation between the perception that this commercial was a true representation of the army, and race and education, demonstrated strong significance between these variables. A significance factor of .001 was determined for education and .01 for race. These variables are strong predictors of the perception of this message by the target audience.

TABLE 12

CROSS-TABULATION OF AGE TO THE PERCEPTION THAT THIS
COMMERCIAL IS A TRUE REPRESENTATION OF THE ARMY

	Age						
	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Agree	26%	24%	12%	12%	7%	26%	4%
Not Sure	32%	44%	20%	22%	17%	5%	22%
Disagree	10%	12%	32%	27%	6%	21%	26%
Strongly Disagree	16%	8%	18%	12%	13%	22%	7%

(collective percentages)

Chi square = 43.08512

Significance = .0097

TABLE 13

CROSS-TABULATION OF RACE TO THE PERCEPTION THAT
THIS COMMERCIAL WAS A TRUE REPRESENTATION
OF THE ARMY

	Race			
	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/Other
Strongly Agree	3%	3%	34%	36%
Agree	16%	28%	37%	36%
Not Sure	24%	18%	12%	18%
Disagree	37%	29%	12%	9%
Strongly Disagree	19%	6%	5%	--

(collective percentages)

Chi square = 47.86476

Significance = .0000

The data confirm that the unintended messages which the focus group believed existed in these commercials are perceived in various significant degrees by the sample population. Where the significance is strong in cross-tabulation between variables, the indication is that education is the most important factor as to whether an individual perceives a message or not. With some messages, race and age are factors to a lesser degree.

Based on the data in this study, the army's assessment of these commercials may be correct as to the belief that the "Dear Dad" commercial is more successful than "Basic Excellence." The perceived truthful portrayal by the army in "Dear Dad" is probably received in a positive manner by the target audience as was the case with the focus group and sample.

Confirmation or Rejection of the Hypotheses

The first hypothesis was that the target audience will perceive the intended messages in two television commercials produced by the United States Army as encouraging enlistment. It was also expected that messages not intended by the United States Army would be perceived by the target audience.

The qualitative data collected from the focus group combined with the quantitative data collected from

the sample confirm the conclusion that this hypothesis should be accepted. The focus group perceived messages that were not intended by the army. The sample in almost every instance agreed overwhelmingly with the focus group's perceptions. A generalization based on statistical tests finds that the target audience of these commercials will perceive the intended messages, and will perceive unintended messages based on age, education, race, and perhaps other cultural factors. Some of the unintended messages which may be perceived have been revealed by this study.

The second hypothesis was that unintended messages that viewers perceived in the television commercials produced by the United States Army may be positive, neutral, or negative in nature. Based on the perception of the focus group of unintended messages perceived in these commercials, combined with the data revealed by the sample population, this hypothesis has been confirmed.

The third hypothesis was that those with different demographic backgrounds within the target audience will perceive both unintended messages and intended messages differently. The data collected reveal that in certain subcultures or subgroups, race and education, there are significant differences in how messages are perceived.

The fourth hypothesis was the null hypothesis which is that no unintended messages are perceived by any viewers of United States Army television commercials designed to encourage enlistment. The data do not confirm the null hypothesis, and it should be rejected.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Review

This study has attempted to determine the extent to which unintended messages are perceived by the target audience of two television commercials produced by the United States Army to encourage enlistment. Methodologies were used that followed established research practices which should enable this study to be conducted by other researchers in a similar manner at any given time with similar results.

While the methodological procedures are sound, it is expected that perceptions will change as individuals and cultures change. Economic and political issues will also be a factor in determining one's perception. It is not assumed by the researcher that exactly the same message perceptions would be discovered by another researcher.

The small size of the focus group used in this study may have been a negative factor, although the comments provided by the sample indicate that this was

probably not the case. This study was conducted in San Diego, a community which has a high percentage of military personnel within the population. This may have affected this study to some extent.

This study was undertaken prior to the August 1990 invasion of Kuwait by Iraq. Since that time individual perceptions by the target audience of these commercials may have undergone revision. Such changes will always be a factor when conducting research to determine the perceptions of individuals.

Summary of Findings and Their Significance

This study has revealed information that demonstrates that unintended messages are perceived when these commercials are viewed by those within the target audience.

As predicted, the subculture or subgroup that an individual is associated with influences how messages, both intended and unintended, will be perceived.

This study revealed that the greatest predictor of the perception of unintended messages within the target audience is the level of education of the viewer. Race and age can be used as predictors when associated with certain messages, but education was the major factor

that could be associated with the perception of most messages.

This information may seem of significance only to the army, which produced these commercials. Yet, this study can be of benefit to those who use television as a medium for communication.

Improvement of the structure of messages designed for television can only come by gaining a greater understanding of what the viewer of a message is decoding when the message is received. Without an understanding of the ability of the viewer to perceive messages that were not intended, future producers may neglect to consider differences among the target audience. In the case of these two commercials produced by the army, how much difference was considered between an 18-year-old and a 19-year-old? The study revealed that there can be a significant difference in the way that an 18-year-old and a 19-year-old perceive the same commercial message. Does anyone know the differences in perception between a 47-year-old and a 52-year-old? The data gathered from this study would suggest that there may be a great deal.

This study has shown that subcultures and subgroups within the primary culture can be a significant factor in the way in which a message is perceived. These

perceptions vary, often based on which subculture the viewers relate to.

The study has determined that unintended messages can be positive, neutral, and negative. In the case of some messages, the unintended positive message may increase the overall persuasiveness of the primary message. In the case of the "Dear Dad" commercial, the perception of the younger individuals without college education that the army was being truthful in representing life in the service might be one of the most persuasive aspects of the message.

The perception by Hispanics or Asians regarding the drill sergeant in the "Basic Excellence" commercial might be a much more important factor than the producer realized. How much change in perception of the overall message might there be if the drill sergeant had been cast as White or Black? These are the examples of choices that are made by television producers and directors every day. This study should help them to consider carefully how a message is created.

It is possible that a producer might want to narrow the focus of a message based on this research. It can be more profitable to target to a narrower audience in some cases, and take advantage of the perceptions unique to that audience.

This study can assist anyone using television as a delivery medium--not just advertisers--to better understand the different perceptions that may be encountered. If one begins with the premise that a message can be perceived in ways other than intended, one may better encode the message to reduce perceptions that might be negative in nature.

Conclusions from the Study

The following conclusions can be drawn from this study:

First, if one uses the medium of television as a path of communication, it can be expected that some portion of the message will be received in a way other than that which was intended.

Second, the perception of the viewers can be predicted to a certain extent based upon certain demographic characteristics and the culture with which they are associated.

Third, the messages that are perceived by the viewer which were not intended by the sender can be positive, negative, or neutral in nature depending on the individual concerned.

Recommendations for Further Study

Studies into message perceptions seem to be ongoing by those interested in the communication process. This study should be expanded to take in those individuals who do not fall within the target audience of the commercials used. It would be useful to know how parents perceive these commercials. Many veterans from World War II and Korea are still alive, not to mention those who served in Vietnam, Grenada, and Panama. These individuals may represent important opinion makers of the society. Their perceptions may be critical in understanding the advice that might be issued to a young man seeking guidance about military service.

Research into the message perception of females might prove very interesting, as one respondent noted: "Most army commercials give me the impression that the battle of the sexes is over--the women lost! What utter crap. . . ." If the commercial elicited this type of feeling from a 20-year-old male, what is in the mind of a woman when viewing these commercials? This needs examination.

Further research should be done to determine what demographic characteristics influence message perceptions other than age, education, and race. Greater variations

of individuals within the same culture should be explored to assist communicators in understanding how to tailor a message to a certain person, or certain groups or sub-cultures.

Other commercial messages should be studied in the same manner as these two commercials to determine if the perception of unintended messages is found within the target audience of those commercials.

These are just some of the paths that will lead to further enlightenment in the area of television communication. It is hoped that this study will encourage others to pursue this course of research that will make a powerful medium like television more beneficial in the future.

ENDNOTES

ENDNOTES

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CHAPTER II

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

RESEARCH LOCATION REMINDER LETTER

Gary L. Keck
[Address]

July 8, 1990

ADDRESS OF FACILITY

Dear _____,

This letter is a reminder that a Graduate Student from San Diego State University requested the use of your facility as a location for research study. The selection of your facility was based on your geographical location within the San Diego area.

The requirements to conduct this study at your facility are minimal. A room capable of seating 10 to 15 persons, and electricity to power a TV set and VCR are all that is required.

This letter has been sent as a follow-up to the telephonic request to _____ (your representative) that took place on _____ (date) by the student named below. The date scheduled to use your facility is _____. If this is no longer possible, please contact the student at the number listed immediately.

Thank you very much for your cooperation in this study.

Cordially,

Gary L. Keck, Graduate Student
[Telephone]

Roy Madsen, Ph.D.
Chair

Telecommunications & Film Department
San Diego State University

APPENDIX B
QUESTIONNAIRES

QUESTIONNAIRE 1

INSTRUCTIONS: Place the number that corresponds to the answer you choose in the space provided after each question. Choose the most appropriate response available. PLEASE ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS.

EXAMPLE

6. 2 My age is: (1) 18, (2) 19, (3) 20, (4) 21,
(5) 22, (6) 23, (7) 24.
(This person is 19 years old)

* * BEGIN HERE * *

1. ____ I believe the Drill Sergeant in this commercial was portrayed accurately.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree

2. — The activities being conducted by the soldiers in this commercial looked exciting and challenging.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Strongly	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly
agree				disagree

3. — I think that the activities being conducted in this commercial will lead to a good civilian job.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Strongly	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly
agree				disagree

4. I believe that this commercial is directed toward persons who are easily persuaded.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Strongly	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly
agree				disagree

5. ____ I believe that this commercial is directed toward persons who are of less than average intelligence.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree

6. ____ I believe that this commercial is directed toward persons who are presently without direction in life.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree

7. ____ The concept of personal accomplishment is depicted well in this commercial.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree

8. ____ My age is: (1) 18, (2) 19, (3) 20, (4) 21, (5) 22, (6) 23, (7) 24.

9. ____ I consider myself: (1) White, (2) Black/Afro-American, (3) Hispanic, (4) Asian/other.

10. ____ My education level is: (1) Below High School, (2) High School graduate, (3) Some college, (4) College graduate, (5) Higher.

11. ____ I have served with one of the Armed Forces of the United States: (1) Yes, (2) No.

12. ____ I have a relative who is in, or has been in, one of the Armed Forces of the United States: (1) Yes, (2) No.

* * * *

This research is interested in viewer perceptions on this television commercial. If you have any comments about

what you may have perceived as a message, or feelings you got from watching this commercial, please use the space below to describe it. This is not required, but any comments will be carefully considered as part of the research.

QUESTIONNAIRE 2

INSTRUCTIONS: Place the number that corresponds to the answer you choose in the space provided after each question. Choose the most appropriate response available. PLEASE ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS.

EXAMPLE

6. 2 My age is: (1) 18, (2) 19, (3) 20, (4) 21,
(5) 22, (6) 23, (7) 24.
(This person is 19 years old)

* * BEGIN HERE * *

1. It seems to me that the soldier in this commercial is jumping out of airplanes to prove his courage to his father.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree

2. I think that the action depicted is unrelated to the words that were flashed on the screen.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree

3. The verbal message of "help me get the most out of life," and visual message of jumping out of an airplane are inconsistent.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree

4. I believe the character traits described by the words on the screen could be developed by doing the things portrayed in the commercial.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree

5. ____ I believe the character traits described by the words on the screen can be developed in activities such as organized sports.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree

6. ____ I think that this commercial gave a true representation of what life in the army is like.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree

7. ____ I believe that learning skills like firing a cannon, would give me experience that would be useful in civilian life.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree

8. ____ My age is: (1) 18, (2) 19, (3) 20, (4) 21,
(5) 22, (6) 23, (7) 24.

9. ____ I consider myself: (1) White, (2) Black/Afro-American, (3) Hispanic, (4) Asian/other.

10. ____ My education level is: (1) Below High School, (2) High School graduate, (3) Some college, (4) College graduate, (5) Higher.

11. ____ I have served with one of the Armed Forces of the United States: (1) Yes, (2) No.

12. ____ I have a relative who is in, or has been in, one of the Armed Forces of the United States: (1) Yes, (2) No.

* * * *

This research is interested in viewer perceptions on this television commercial. If you have any comments about

what you may have perceived as a message, or feelings you got from watching this commercial, please use the space below to describe it. This is not required, but any comments will be carefully considered as part of the research.

APPENDIX C

REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
United States Army Student Detachment
Fort Benjamin Harrison, IN 462066

19 October 1989

Commander
United States Army Recruiting Command
ATTN: APVG-VZE-CDR
Fort Sheridan, Ill.

Dear Sir,

1. My name is Captain Gary L. Keck, and the purpose of this letter is to request assistance for a research project that I am conducting in conjunction with my master's thesis.

2. I am attending San Diego State University under a fully funded program. My master's degree is in Radio and Television. The subject of my thesis research is the unintended messages of television commercials produced by the United States Army for recruiting.

3. The specific concerns this study deals with is unintended messages perceived by the viewers of these commercials.

4. I would appreciate your assistance in providing the items listed on the enclosure to ensure that the designs of the Army in making these commercials is properly documented in the thesis.

GARY L. KECK
CPT, FA
STUDENT

Enclosures (2)

Explanation of research.
List of items desired.

EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH

This research project is to examine specific television commercials, those produced by the U.S. Army for the purpose of encouraging enlistment, to try and determine if there are unintended messages perceived by the intended target audience.

This research is based on the hypothesis that people of different ages, ideologies, and cultural backgrounds, will in the process of viewing a television commercial produced by the United States Army, perceive, or construct messages in their minds, not intended.

The purpose of this research is to assist media users in evaluating their productions for any unintended messages that may cause undesirable feelings on the viewer's part. For example, if a commercial depicts a skill that someone is learning while serving in the armed forces as beneficial in the civilian arena, it will be valuable to find out if this message is perceived correctly.

This can be related to any commercial message. If it is discovered that viewers perceive messages other than how intended, it will help in restructuring the message to eliminate them.

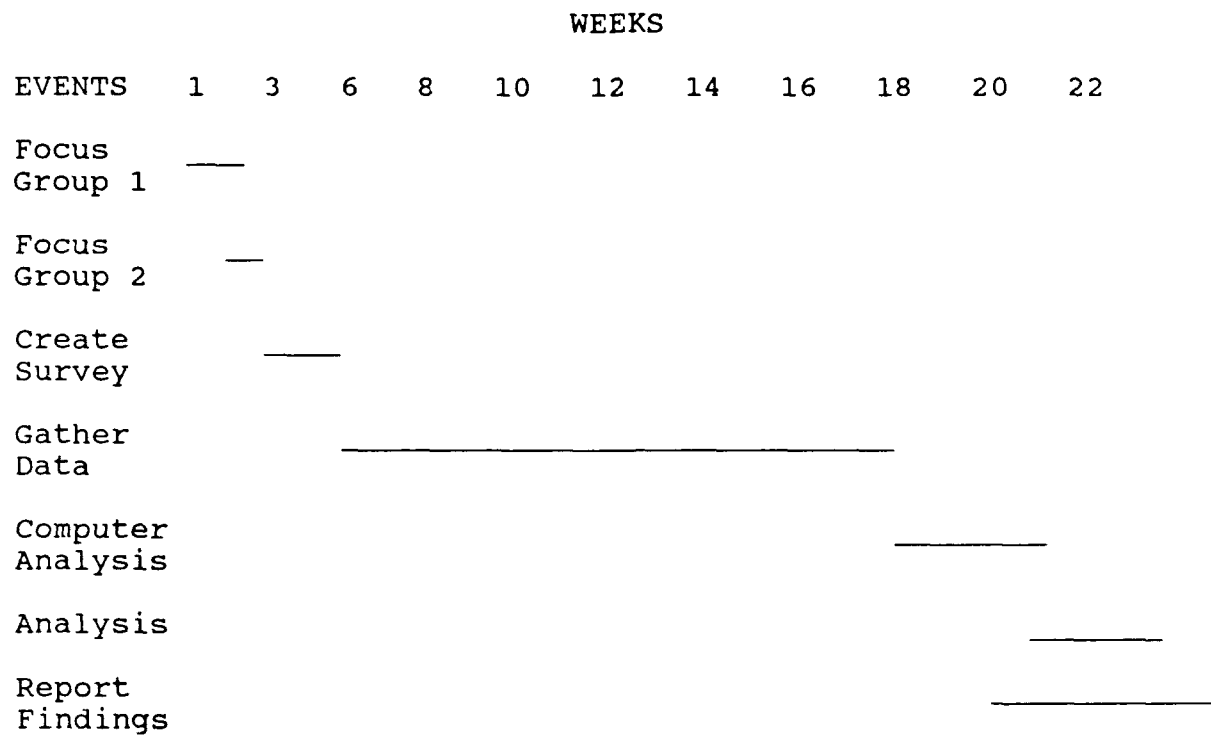
Data for this research will be obtained by random samples of different demographic types in the San Diego, California, area. An analysis of the data will be made to determine if the hypothesis of unintended messages is supported.

I will be happy to forward a copy of my completed thesis to your office for use as you see fit upon conclusion of my research.

ITEMS DESIRED FROM U.S. ARMY
RECRUITING COMMAND

1. Two commercials that will be aired in the next six months to a year.
2. A fact sheet, or production sheet that identifies the intended messages and goals of the commercials provided.
3. Any other information that would be critical to an accurate study based on these commercials.

APPENDIX D
TIME TASK CHART



NOTE: This schedule will begin on or about 15 June 1990.

Fig. 3. Time task chart.

APPENDIX E

SCRIPT OF COMMERCIALS USED IN STUDY

SCRIPT FOR "BASIC EXCELLENCE"

(A 30-Second Television Commercial)

VIDEO: Opening sequence is of a young man (Main Character), dressed in camouflage uniform, engaged in physical activity requiring him to negotiate an obstacle as part of an obstacle course in what appears to be a "basic training" type of environment of one of the uniformed services.

AUDIO: Individual in opening sequence is thinking to himself (Audience can hear him) "What did you get yourself into McMannas!"

VIDEO: Quick shots of soldiers negotiating obstacles, conducting other physical events including hand to hand combat drills. Main character is "flipped" over another soldier's shoulder.

AUDIO: Background sounds of shouts of encouragement, screaming, yelling, etc.

VIDEO: Main character continues going through the obstacle course, attempts to negotiate an obstacle much like a playground horizontal ladder, falls off before reaching the end.

AUDIO: Background noises of shouts of encouragement. Drill sergeant yells in a loud voice at main character, "Do it again McMannas!"

VIDEO: Look of concern on face of main character as he proceeds to attempt the obstacle.

VIDEO: Cut to main character preparing to slide down a very long rope suspended over water. Drill sergeant from preceding shot is hooking a safety "clip" onto main character.

AUDIO: Main character is thinking (Audience can hear) "And then it all kinda came together."

VIDEO: Quick shots of main character and drill sergeant preparing for the final moment when McMannas will slide down the rope.

AUDIO: Narrator--"There's no telling what you can do"

VIDEO: Main character is prepared to go down the rope.

AUDIO: Drill Sergeant says in quieter voice, "OK McMannas . . . go." Narrator continues--"Especially when you have somebody who really believes you can do it."

VIDEO: From bottom end of rope we see main character sliding down the rope.

AUDIO: Theme for United States Army is being sung, "Be all that you can be, get an edge on life in the Army."

VIDEO: As commercial ends we see main character at the bottom of the rope being congratulated by his friends. Cut to single shot of drill sergeant who has been motivating this group, he has a smile on his face as he watches the congratulations of main character in accomplishing the rope slide.

VIDEO: An 800 number is superimposed on the screen that can be called to get more information about the army as the scene of congratulations continues. Then the commercial ends. (Fade to Black)

SCRIPT FOR "DEAR DAD"

(A 30-Second Television Commercial)

VIDEO: Opening shot is of an individual (Main Character), sitting at a desk, under a bright lamp that illuminates mostly the desk, wearing a brown "T" shirt writing a letter.

AUDIO: Main Character is thinking (Audience hears) "Dear Dad, We made our toughest jump yet--at dawn."

VIDEO: Cut to inside of a military aircraft. Main character is now seated inside of the plane. There is a look of concern on his face and other men in the plane preparing to jump. We see most of the soldiers and an individual who seems to be directing the activities.

AUDIO: Main character's thoughts continue to be heard by the audience. "I was kind of nervous--we all were." "And then I remembered when you told me that real courage was putting your fears aside and doing your job."

VIDEO: The word "Character" appears on the screen for about 2 seconds in white letters against a black background.

AUDIO: Sound of trumpet as word appears on the screen, fades away in reverberation.

VIDEO: Main character and other soldiers on plane stand up together. Cut to shot of soldiers' feet as they move to the door of the aircraft. Cut to soldiers inside of aircraft as they exit the door. Cut to shot outside of the airplane as we see parachutes opening as each man jumps out.

AUDIO: Main character's thoughts continue--"You see Dad, here in the army the things I am learning will help me get the most out of life and the best from myself."

VIDEO: The word "Maturity" is flashed on the screen in the same manner as the word "Character" previously with the same sounds.

VIDEO: Soldiers are landing on the ground and working together on getting a howitzer ready to be fired. We see shots of soldiers pulling on things together, putting fuses on the noses of projectiles and the cannon being fired.

AUDIO: Main Character continues--"Dad,. we were really something today. I know you'd be proud."

VIDEO: The word "Teamwork" is flashed on the screen in the same manner as the previous words.

AUDIO: The theme song for these commercials is sung--"Be all that you can be. Get an edge on life in the army."

VIDEO: An 800 number that tells how to get more information about the army is superimposed on the screen as the soldiers continue to fire the cannon.

AUDIO: Theme for army continues . . .

VIDEO: Commercial ends after theme is over and telephone number has been on the screen. (Fade to Black)

APPENDIX F

COMMENTS BY FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS

This appendix is an extensive overview of the focus group sessions. It is not a verbatim transcript, as comments were given that were not pertinent to the research. Only the information required to understand the development of the survey questionnaire has been provided. All comments pertaining to message perceptions by the focus group sessions have been included. Those perceptions that were found in both sessions were used to develop the questionnaire. The sessions were conducted in the same format for each group. The "Basic Excellence" commercial was examined first, and "Dear Dad" second. The capital "M" in front of a comment represents the moderator, who was the same individual for both sessions. Direct quotes are presented in quotation marks, other comments are paraphrased as closely as possible.

SESSION ONE: "BASIC EXCELLENCE"

M What are your comments after viewing the commercial?

 "I noticed that there was minimal negative impact."

 No real violence, not like it would be in the army.

M Do you mean like in combat?

 "Yeah, like in combat."

 "The drill sergeant did not seem real, that's not the way they really are."

M Do you mean he was portrayed unrealistically?

"Yeah."

This was a "candy coated" look at the army.

It looked physically challenging, but things must be more complicated than this in the army.

Teamwork seemed apparent.

"Where's the war?"

It's easy to find out about the army.

"Uniforms were perfect, they looked too good."

"I think this commercial is supposed to appeal to people who are vulnerable. This commercial is for people who are less smarter than normal guys, that don't have anything else to do."

M What do you mean by vulnerable?

Easily persuaded. No direction to go.

"We were at war with Vietnam, and now we see them (the drill sergeant) running our army."

The army is not truly represented by this commercial.

"This doesn't look like it will lead to a high paying civilian job."

"They try to fool you by showing you one day in the life of a soldier, it's not always this way."

"It appears that anyone can accomplish what the army wants you to do, but everyone can't."

"The sergeant in charge was unrealistic, they're a lot meaner than that."

"The Asian DI made me think of World War II."

"This commercial seemed cheaply made, intended for someone who is in need of a job, not as smart as other people."

There is no war or fighting, which is what the army is really about.

"What they showed you didn't seem worth the effort for what you get out of it. What kind of civilian job can you get from doing this?"

"I felt pride in accomplishment from watching the commercial. It showed teamwork."

SESSION ONE: "DEAR DAD"

The notion of adventure building came to mind.

"The words saying 'get an edge on life' or something, and the pictures of people shooting bombs is hypocritical."

The army was portrayed more realistically.

"The word 'character' did not seem right with jumping out of airplanes, how can that build character? These traits can be developed elsewhere."

M Where do you mean by elsewhere?

Doing sports or something.

It seems that this guy has something he has to prove to his dad to make him feel wanted or loved.

"The shot at the end from the wheat field reminded me of defending the homeland."

It seems he has something to prove to his dad, that this was some kind of requirement to gain his love or approval.

"I got a sense of teamwork from watching the soldiers at the end."

"I thought the words weren't exactly matching with the training, I thought of confidence building and overcoming fear, not character building."

This seemed more like what you would expect the army to be like.

"I can't see the value of jumping out of planes and shooting cannons. What kind of job could I get in the civilian world?"

(End of comments from Session One)

SESSION TWO: "BASIC EXCELLENCE"

"I don't think the army's that way."

"The sergeant is way too nice. They're trying to fool you. He'd be screaming and cussing if this was real."

"The uniforms look too good, it's unrealistic."

"This commercial is for the odd man out in life, the guys who don't have any direction or purpose. You know, guys who are duped easily."

M What do you mean by duped?

The guy who falls for this commercial, you know--not quite up to par with the rest of us.

"I'm not impressed with what I see at all. You've got to be an idiot to do this."

"I like the haircuts."

No racial prejudice is noticeable, it seems everyone is well represented.

"They say that this will make you better, but I thought of how? It might make you physically stronger, but not better. This is for a guy who's easily persuaded. It's not going to get him a good job."

SESSION TWO: "DEAR DAD"

The words on the screen didn't seem to match up with the events going on.

"It seemed like he was trying to prove something to his father, to make him happy."

This commercial seems geared toward the parents, to try and sell them on what an exciting and worthwhile job the army is.

The idea of teamwork seemed evident in this commercial.

This seemed more like what the army is like, much more truthful than the first commercial.

"This is more like what I would expect the army to be like."

"I wouldn't join the army if they expected me to jump out of airplanes."

"The word 'character' seemed out of place. How does this build character?"

The guy is smoking, it made me feel that the people they're looking for are kind of "anti-intellectuals."

"What kind of job will this get me?"

(End of comments from Session Two)

APPENDIX G

COMMENTS FROM SAMPLE POPULATION

COMMENTS FROM RESPONDENTS TO QUESTIONNAIRE 1

The following written comments were provided by various respondents to the commercial "Basic Excellence." Each comment is preceded by the age, race, and education level of the individual who provided the comment. All comments are recorded exactly as received. No corrections to grammar or spelling have been made.

22, Asia, some college--"The commercial made the army glamorous, fun, and adventurous. It only showed the exciting things."

22, white, some college--"It only gives the 'good' side of the army, not the boring day to day things or all the political red tape."

20, White, some college--"People who lack self confidence and direction would see this commercial and think, 'Yeah, that's for me, I can do something.' The commercial depicts military life and training as no easy task, but with perserverance, military life can be rewarding. The background of the commercial suggests patriotism to a sect of the population who've military relatives. The music adds to the scenery of people in order and adds to the feeling of the commercial. It says in all come join the armed forces. It's rewarding, exciting, and something to be proud of."

21, black, some college--"I feel that the armed forces is a good way to complete your education if not any other."

21, White, some college--"Yes, the army will get you to push yourself beyond your faults. Dumb commercial in my opinion. Don't try to promote losers by showing 'em on T.V."

21, Black, some college--"The commercial was depicted on self achievement which is personifies actual qualities of discipline anchievement. Very good. Needs a support seen."

21, Black, some college--"The commercial is about be all you can be. That means strive for the goal that the U.S. Army have to give to you."

21, White, some college--"The spot seems to give the idea that if you don't feel that you have a place in society and are going nowhere. There is a place for you in the army. They will make a better man out of you and they care. You can do it, kid, in the army. Yeah, right."

19, White, some college--"I don't like the macho 'superhero' image prevalent in these commercials. I feel there should be more respect to the viewer, and not a 'well he's doing it, so why not jump on the bandwagon' theme."

22, Hispanic, some college--"It look like fun but in real life it has work. I think this commercial should be honest and fair to its watcher public."

22, White, some college--"I think this commercial is directed toward the guy that thinks of himself less than his peer's, almost 'clumsy' with low self-esteem and believes the army will make him more in touch with his self confidence."

20, Asian, some college--"Possitiveness. There always a way I go if a couldn't a normal jobs."

22, White, some college--"I got a feeling of dislike, but that stopped once the cadet crossed the course."

22, White, some college--"While I would never personally consider the armed forces, this commercial was much more persuasive than most military commercials I've seen but I'm not sure why I feel that way."

24, White, college graduate--"to many this may seem as a great accomplishment in a trivial task. Many others may percieve this task as part of a social reward that makes a team effort. Discipline is learned here."

22, White, some college--"I think that this might reach a person before graduation from high school but not somebody already in college."

21, White, some college--"The commercial I feel is influence young adults without direction to join the armed services."

22, White, some college--"I think the commercial is targeted to people (I would imagine men) who don't really know what to do in life and the army is the place where you supposedly can work hard until you succeed."

22, White, some college--"This commercial tells me that the army will give you a sense of accomplishment, and some adventure. That's all."

20, White, some college--"Most army commercials give me the impression that the battle of the sexes is over--the women lost! What utter crap. If there is really so wide an audience (that is impressionistic males that have been reared with 'traditional' views toward women--docile, fragile, subservient) then the world is much worse than I have ever imagined. Another impression is that of men joining the army for a direction in life, but not considering the consequences of such a commitment. The men that join this force enter with a field trip impression disregarding that they are learning to dismantle a human being. My general view about the army itself is that it is unfortunately necessary. I suppose that the only valid comment I have is the armie's male superiority trip. By the way--if the superiority comes from muscle mass I know of a few thousand women that could kick almost any drill sergeant's ass."

24, White, higher--"Some goal as to why the person is taking the rope slide down would add more of an air that something was being accomplished."

23, Black, college graduate--"I found the commercial to be targeted at individuals who are faced with few options. It neglected to give an accurate depiction of how the US armed forces can aid an individual in any aspect of life during or after time served."

18, Black, high school graduate--"I seen a very strict leader, yet a leader who wants to see his soldiers do the very best they can do."

18, Black, some college--"I feel that this commercial really gives a good perspective in the armed forces life. You can be all you can be in the forces."

24, Hispanic, higher--"I was against the draft so my feelings are biased."

18, Black, high school graduate--"It's good job! It's rewarding and special benefits."

COMMENTS FROM RESPONDENTS TO QUESTIONNAIRE 2

The following written comments were provided by various respondents to the commercial "Dear Dad." Each comment is preceded by the age, race, and education level of the individual who provided the comment. All comments are recorded exactly as received. No corrections to grammar or spelling have been made.

23, White, some college--"I think that armed forces commercials are w/out a doubt targeted towards high school graduates or drop outs w/ no direction in life."

19, White, some college--"They make it seem easier than it really is."

22, Asian, some college--"The flashing of the word 'corage' on the screen could have some impact on some viewers."

20, White, some college--"Be proud of the armed forces and the fact that you are a part of them. The commercial suggests that after you've gone through the service, you'll remain one of an elite crowd that'll carry you through life, military or civilian."

22, Asian, some college--"The commercial is implying that if you jump from a plane then you will gain maturity, courage, etc. . . ."

21, Black, some college--"This commercial I feel will get a very good respond from a lot of people."

21, Black, some college--"The person that played the role writing to his father, showed the emotion that he is becoming a man now. He shows that he's glad that he made the right choice."

21, Black, college graduate--"This comercial to me shows personal self achieve. integrity. to dig deep down within and find the best. gives good message but yet. Was to be more challenging training, demanding you to achieve. go with a positive standpoint."

22, Hispanic, some college--"This commercial was to the point and pretty honest about the things that someone goes through in the army."

19, White, some college--"Quit glamourising war. Yes, I believe we need military defense, but the army isn't McDonalds. This isn't 'Food, folks, and fun,' its war."

21, White, come college--"The entire Armed Forces television campaign seems to try to give the viewer a feeling of warmth or belonging. I think this could be effective in reaching people who don't have much in their day to day life. But I don't know if it is ethically correct to offer the army as a sort of surrogate family. You can get that from a gang and make more money."

21, White, some college--"Jumping from a plane takes courage or someone yelling in your ear. Firing a cannon for practice and loading ammunition don't seem to be glorified events that would persuade me to join the army."

20, White, some college--"Seems to me the army may be useful to people who would otherwise serve no useful purpose in society, and gives people without goals or ambition something to do while the government uses them for whatever purpose it sees fit & that type of person doesn't mind or have the brains to know the difference."

24, White, higher--"I think this commercial is effective. I do not personally like it because it plays on everyones subconscious thoughts."

23, White, college graduate--"I can see how a young male could be encouraged to join the army when seeing young men jumping out of airplanes. Can be persuading."

20, Black, some college--"They should show positive and negatives of the armed forces."

23, Black, college graduate--"The commercial was a fictitious account of how one can achieve self affirmation by signing away his life to a racist government. It failed to discuss the realities of what one is actually allowed to be, unfortunately this reality is never all that one can be."

18, Black, high school graduate--"I felt that this was a very truthful commercial. I say this because in the armed forces, everyone works as a team and everyone pushes everyone else to do good."

18, Black, some college--"I agree that the guy jumping from the plane is not trying to prove his courage to his father but show his father that he can do it."

24, Hispanic, higher--"My father was in Airborne. I became interested in commercial until cannons came into the commercial because my cousin was killed in Vietnam doing exactly what was pictured in commercial."

20, Black, some college--"Be all that you can be!"

24, White, some college, has served in the armed forces--"Firing a cannon may not help in civilian life but the ideas of teamwork and commitment would."

22, White, some college--"In question #1, I believe he is jumping for himself and his father second."

23, White, some college--"I think armed forces commercials are miss representing what the army is about. They seem to be made for someone at the age of 18-19 yrs. who needs some push. Rather than taking time to live and learn."

24, White, college graduate--"The commercial emphasizes and portrays personal accomplishment well, however it may not be a wholly accurate dramatization of army life."

23, White, college graduate--"It has always been my belief that the arm forces try to attract those who are either insecure or uncertain about life. They do so by glorifying the service in commercials."

24, White, some college--"Many armed forces are an entry way into adulthood for many that are immature to their immediate surroundings. It helps financially and mentally. Some people don't have the background or guidance to push them towards goals and success. Armed forces may be that escapgoat many look towards for that guidance."

24, White, some college--"I feel the commercial portrays the whole expierence of being in the army fun, without any drawbacks."

21, Hispanic, some college--"The commercial seems to call out thoughts people that have no direction in life. The commercial produces a sense of accomplishment that will come if one was to join. However the commercial, seems too good to be true. I doubt very much that the army can solve ones problems. The commercial lacked reality, thats my strongest dislike about it."

24, White, college graduate--"Q. 7 I think the direction and the teamwork it takes to fire a cannon are what help in life not the actual firing of the cannon!"

22, White, some college--"It seems that the soldier is happy to have found a career he's proud of. However, the 'letter' he wrote to his dad makes it sound like he's trying to prove something to his father rather than himself. But I suppose if the army helps him learn then he picked the right pathway. I prefer college"

22, White, college graduate--"It appeals to a masculine audience. Shows a form of bonding of father and son. Also seems to tell the viewer not to think about it, just do it (ignore fears)."

20, White, some college--"Certainly jumping out of a plane means one of two things--courage or stupidity. (But that's simplified) So, maturity doesn't need to take part nor does character unless a part of that character is courageous. Quest. 4 Sure you could become courageous. Sure you could develop more character. Sure you could become more mature. But . . . This commercial doesn't give me any guarantees! Ques. 5 Absolutely! But maturity is less likely to be developed. Neither are intellect nor character. The army and teams seem to be producers of people (in this case men) that can easily be referred to as jocks and soldiers, neither of which gives I secure ideal of intelligence. As a matter of fact the commercial did not give the message that intelligence is necessary to make it in the world. Unfortunately, this is often true. From this commercial I felt these feelings. To join the army you must have an I.Q. below 100, have the social life of a mushroom, and be completely insecure--oh, and either afraid of women or a male chauvinist pig."

ABSTRACT

ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken to determine the perception of unintended messages in two television commercials produced by the United States Army to encourage enlistment.

The methodology implemented in this research was first to conduct a focus group composed of males 18 to 24 years old, the target audience of the commercials. The focus group viewed the commercials and provided input as to the perceptions, or messages, that they felt resulted from viewing the commercials.

This input was then used to develop a questionnaire for each commercial. A survey was then conducted of individuals within the target audience in the San Diego community. The respondents were asked questions about intended and unintended messages after viewing one of the commercials. The respondents were also asked to provide demographic information pertaining to age, race, education, and whether or not they had served in the armed forces. A total sample of 391 respondents was surveyed for the two commercials.

The data provided by the sample yielded significant information which confirmed the existence of

unintended messages within these television commercials. Cross-tabulations of the data also revealed that education was the strongest predictor of the perception of an unintended message associated with the commercials. To a lesser extent, race and age can also be used as predictors. The study also determined that unintended messages perceived by the viewer can be positive, negative, or neutral in nature.

This research was undertaken to provide a greater understanding of the communication process as it pertains to the medium of television. It has also revealed how small differences in demographic characteristics may influence the communication process.