

Fall 2015

The ethical implications of the military's product placement and brand integration in popular entertainment

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THE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE MILITARY'S PRODUCT PLACEMENT
AND BRAND INTEGRATION IN POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT

by

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B.A., Western Illinois University, 2007

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Masters of Science

Department of Mass Communications and Media Arts
In the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
December, 2015

RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

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Masters of Science

in the field of Media Science and Professional Media Management

Approved by:

William Freivogel, Chair

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
10/28/2015

AN ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH PAPER OF

Zane Ecklund, for the Masters of Science degree in Media Science and Professional Media Management, presented on 10/27/2015, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: THE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE MILITARY'S PRODUCT PLACEMENT
AND BRAND INTEGRATION IN POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Prof. William Freivogel

The military relies heavily on advertising. National defense is itself a product that is marketed to the American taxpayer who not only funds the Pentagon but fights its battles. Recruiting is crucial to maintaining the all-volunteer force created in 1973 when the draft was abolished. While plenty of individuals readily sign up others need more encouragement. As of 2014, 1,412,674 people served on active duty in the U.S. military (<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/military/military-careers.htm> 2014), and while this number may appear impressive it reflects only a tiny part of the population. This paper will examine in depth how the U.S. military uses product placement and product integration in popular entertainment to recruit soldiers. The paper describes the symbiotic relationship between Hollywood and the Pentagon under which the military provides funding and military equipment for military films that encourage young people to volunteer for services and portray the military in a positive light. The paper also examines the ethical issues raised by the use of taxpayer dollars to fund favorable media representations often targeted at audiences far too young to make a rational decision about joining the military. The paper concludes by showing that the military's propaganda efforts in Hollywood are an important part of the militarization of society that makes foreign military entanglements attractive to the American people.

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CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

The military has been in a partnership with Hollywood "since Hollywood was first built from the Los Angeles canyons and desert," said Todd Breasseale, an Army liaison officer (Tarabay 2014). Lawrence Suid, a military and film scholar, has been writing about the relationship between the two entities since 1975 and describes it as a mutual exploitation (Tarabay 2014). Using military assets subsidizes the cost of production and adds authenticity. The 2012 film *Battleship*, for example, had a budget of \$209 million with the support of the Navy. Without the Navy's assistance providing props, extras, and technical expertise the financial burden might have been too much for Universal Pictures (Kang, 2013, p.2). The military gets the benefit of positive publicity, which benefits recruiting and public perception.

The military and Hollywood began to collaborate around 1910 and most of the efforts centered on expositions such as airshows (Suid as cited in Tarabay 2014) The relationship began to transform in 1927 with the release of the movie *Wings*. *Wings* is the story of two pilots who compete for the affections of a girl during World War I. Suid described "Wings" as "the yardstick against which all future combat spectaculars have had to be measured in terms of authenticity of combat and scope of production" (Boggs and Pollard, 2007, p.57). "Wings" (Tarabay 2014). He wrote that the movie:

Featured over 3,000 infantrymen as extras, plus military pilots and planes from the U.S. Air Force, and it starred Clara Bow, The original "it" girl, as the love interest two men fight over, enlisting in an effort to become combat pilots to win her affection. It won the first Oscar for Best Picture.

Wings' use of military aircraft is a typical example of the U.S. military's contribution to a Hollywood production. Getting a ship or an airplane is a little more difficult than just dialing up the Pentagon and asking for one though. In an interview with *Mother Jones* magazine, David Robb, author of *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies*, outlined the process detailing how a studio goes about procuring military assistance (Fleischer, 2004, p.2):

The first thing you do is send in a request for assistance, telling them what you want pretty specifically – ships, tanks, planes, bases, forts, submarines, troops, -- and when you want this material available. Then you have to send five copies of the script to the Pentagon, and they give it to the affected service branches – Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard. Then you wait and see if they like your script or not. If they like it, they'll help you; if they don't, they won't.

The man in charge of negotiating the release of military assets to a production is Phil Strub. Strub is the Pentagon's Director of Entertainment Media, and has been the Pentagon's Hollywood liaison officer for over 25 years with his name appearing in the credits of more than 50 films (Riesman 2012, Tarabay 2014). Every branch of the military has liaisons who are stationed in Hollywood. The liaisons are service members whose tour of duty is to "study film and television scripts producers have sent them in the hope the Department of Defense will help them with their project," (Tarabay 2014). Once a project gets the green light the project is assigned a military adviser. The adviser is also a service member whose job is to make sure a film is shot in the way a studio agreed upon to meet the military's requirement for assistance. For 2012's *Battle L.A.*, Lt. Col. Jason Johnson was assigned as the Marine adviser because the film's

plot focused on 2nd Battalion 5th Marines fighting off an alien invasion. In a nutshell Johnson's job was to "protect the image of the Marine Corps" (Sauer, 2011).

There are three criteria for assistance outlined in Department of Defense Instruction (DODINST) Number 5410.16 (July 31, 2015). The first requirement is an accurate portrayal of the military. "Presents a reasonably realistic depiction of the Military Services and the DOD, including Service members, civilian personnel, events, missions, assets, and policies," (DODINST 5410.16).

This criterion left the door open to assist with a science fiction work such as *Battleship* so long as certain parameters were met. The movie was obviously not a historical piece as the world has never been attacked by aliens. However, the film portrayed naval life accurately as far as the Pentagon was concerned. Actors in the film wore their uniforms properly, recognized rank, and acted out their duties as real sailors would.

The second criterion "Is informational and considered likely to contribute to public understanding of the Military Services and the DoD" (DODINST 5410.16). *Battleship* referenced real naval vessels such as the USS John Paul Jones and the USS Sampson. The bi-annual Rim of the Pacific Exercise, which is a joint naval exercise between partner nations, was integral to the film's plot. The Navy ultimately decided *Battleship* "positively represents our service and our Sailors" and "accurately portrays the Navy" (Kang 2013).

Third, the military encourages the idea that a production "May benefit Military Service recruiting and retention programs" (DODINST 5410.16). The Navy felt *Battleship* would have a positive impact on recruiting. Inkoo Kang, references a Navy memo she procured while writing an article for Movieline.com that focused on the film's recruiting potential (Kang 2013):

Do we believe that [the movie] could have a positive impact on recruiting? *Battleship* will certainly continue to be a conversation starter that carries our 'brand' to many Americans who aren't familiar with their Navy.

Battle L.A. also fulfilled criteria for support by acting as a recruiting tool. The film debuted at Camp Pendleton where it was introduced with a rousing speech by the film's star Aaron Eckhart. "This is a movie about Marines...kicking ass. When people see this movie, we want to make sure that they love the Marines," said Eckhart (Sauer, 2011).

Something interesting to note is a few movies that have been supported about *Battle L.A.* as a recruiting tool is the film features several Marines dying but that is OK within the right context (Sauer 2011):

It might seem counter intuitive that possible death would be in any way an acceptable part of a recruiting tool, but it turns out that a far less acceptable recruiting tool is depicting fear of possible death.

Black Hawk Down worked in the same way. The film, based on the book written by Mark Bowden, tells the story of a bungled operation in Somalia that saw 18 American service members killed, and 73 wounded (Bowden 1997). The film depicts service members acting honorably while facing adversity. Mark Golembesky, a Marine who served in Afghanistan, commented on why the film was a good match for the Pentagon when interviewed in a 2012 article for TheAwl.com(Sauer, 2012):

Hands down I would have to say that *Black Hawk Down* is the only military movie that has come close in presenting the chaos and complexity of emotions that is associated with modern day combat. Because *Black Hawk Down* was based on actual events and true

perspective from the men fighting on the ground, it speaks to people in a way that words can't.

No discussion of military films is complete without mention 1986's *Top Gun*. The Navy made a huge effort to capitalize off the recruiting potential of *Top Gun*. Mark Evje, a reporter for the Los Angeles Times, documented the phenomenon during the summer *Top Gun* was released. Curiosity about naval aviation reached such a fevered pitch that in some places recruiters set up tables outside of movie theaters to answer questions. Lt. Cmdr. Laura Marlowe, who oversaw officer recruiting in Arizona, San Diego, Riverside and San Bernadino could not say for sure that *Top Gun* made anyone join because the Navy recruiters did not keep track but it certainly gave potential recruits something to think about (Evje, 1986):

They couldn't specifically say it was a direct result of *Top Gun*, but they suspect it probably had a lot to do with it because when they would talk to applicants, about 90 percent said they had seen the movie. Maybe it hadn't made them call in, but they'd been thinking about (joining the Navy) and this was just the kicker that put them over the line.

An article by David Sirota appearing in the Washington Post 25 years after the film's release contains an interesting insight into the film's impact. In addition to piling up \$344 million in box office receipts, the film helped to positively change the public's perception of the military during the post-Vietnam-era (2011).

The same rules that apply to the silver screen also apply to television, even if assistance is required only for a single episode of a series. *NCIS*, based on the Department of the Navy's criminal investigative service (although not produced with any Navy affiliation), has received assistance on several occasions, and the show's producers have eagerly acquiesced to the military's requirements. One episode even featured Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus who

“suggested the show’s producers dedicate an episode to the Navy’s efforts to combat sexual assault with a promo card at the end of the show, which they did” (Tarabay, 2014).

When the military is not assisting a production it is creating its own production. In 2012 the Pentagon released the film *Act of Valor*. *Act of Valor* is the story of Navy SEALs uncovering a plot involving jihadists smuggled into the United States through border tunnels with plans to carry out a devastating terror attack. What set *Act of Valor* apart from other action films with similar premises is that cast members were active duty SEALs. The film was made “with an unprecedented amount of cooperation between U.S. Armed forces and filmmakers (Sauer, 2012 b.).

Act of Valor came about as part of the Department of Defense’s plan to bolster the ranks of special forces operatives. Modern conflicts require a force that is less cumbersome and emphasizes smaller forces of highly trained special operators and other resources that focus on cyberspace and intelligence. Rear Adm. Denny Moynihan, who works with the Navy Office of Intelligence in Washington, explained that approximately every four years the Navy evaluates itself and determines what assets need shoring up in the near future (Anderson, 2012, p.2):

What is it that you need to be moving forward, and where do you think you are? For the Navy and the SEAL community it was, ‘Hey, you need 500 more Seals’ and that launched a series of initiatives to try and attract more people. This film was one of those initiatives.

The man who visualized the idea of using real SEALs was Capt. Duncan Smith. Smith was a SEAL who left the Navy and started an adventure racing school before entering the world of sports commentary and film. His work garnered critical acclaim including an Emmy before September 11th inspired Smith’s return to active duty. After Smith served four overseas deployments the Navy assigned him to an outreach program. Part of his mission was to find

qualified recruits for naval special warfare. Smith targeted endurance athletes as prime recruits and sent SEAL recruiters to events such as endurance races, but he felt a film would be the ideal way to introduce the public to the SEAL way of life (McHugh 2011):

A short story wouldn't get it across. It's not a Rambo lifestyle. It's brotherhood within a team, followed by teamwork with other parts of our armed forces. Only an extended piece would show that. A feature film could do it, but the Navy doesn't know how to make one. We need a studio that gets it.

The Navy picked Bandito Brothers Production to make the movie. Before working on *Act of Valor*, Bandito Brothers produced a recruiting video about the Navy's Special Warfare Combatant Craft-Crewman (SWCC-pronounced swick) who support SEALs during operations. The nature of SEALs' work is clandestine but the filmmakers received unprecedented access to their operations. Director Scott Waugh thought this created a much more immersing experience (McHugh 2011):

Just the way these guys stood holding their M4s (compact machine guns) was something you can't teach to an actor. There are so many subtleties in the way the SEALs move or talk, they do a little magic for the camera all the time.

Aside from allowing access, the Navy had a hands-off approach to the film's production, aside from making sure nothing top-secret was released to the public (Sauer 2014 b):

Showing real SEAL life without revealing too much was the big trick. No one wanted to hand a playbook to the Taliban or al Qaeda. The Navy's solution was a rigorous review, scrubbing out any classified or sensitive actions or views of weapons that might tip off an enemy. Sometimes, out-of-date procedures were substituted.

The film however was a hit. When it opened in February 2012 it brought in \$24.7 million during its opening weekend.

Other successful forays by the military into creating its own content have included video games. Arguably video games have never been more popular, something that has not gone unnoticed by the Pentagon. *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, a first-person military themed shooter was released Nov. 10, 2009 and generated \$310 million in sales by the next day. (Singer, 2010, p.2) Comparatively James Cameron's blockbuster *Avatar* raked in \$27 million its first day in theaters (Singer, 2010, p.2). These numbers are a tad skewed because a movie ticket costs less than a video game but these figures show how the size of an audience that could be reached by messages placed in games. In 2009 70,000 Americans joined the Army and 4.7 million played games online (Singer, 2010, p.2).

The Army entered the field of electronic entertainment with the release of *America's Army*, a free game produced by the Army and released in 2002(White 2005, p.2). The game was the brainchild of Col. Casey Wardynski, director of the Army's office of economic and manpower analysis, and the goal was to reflect Army life accurately (White 2005, p.2):

We want kids to come into the Army and feel like they've already been there. Its designed to give them an inside view of the very fundamentals of being a soldier, it's also designed to give them a sense of self-efficacy, that they can do it. You don't have to think about what it would look like – you can see what it looks like.

The game begins when a player downloads the software and creates a virtual soldier. Once the player creates a soldier, he or she goes through in-game basic training learning skills such as infantry tactics, combat first aid, and airborne techniques. In addition to developing the basic skill set for the game, initial training is designed to give the player traditional military

values (Singer, 2010, p.93). For instance, if a player makes a mistake such as killing fellow soldiers, his or her avatar will be virtually incarcerated in a Fort Leavenworth prison cell.

Once a player completes the game's basic training, he or she can join other players online. *America's Army* champions a team approach to combat and what the Army refers to as an "honor system." Players who buck the trend and go on Rambo-esque campaigns will not survive long. Players receive bonuses for playing by established rules of war and providing medical attention to comrades wounded in action. "A game is like a team effort, and the Army is very much a team effort. By playing an online, multi-player game, you can get the feel of being in the Army," said Wardynski (White, 2005, p. 2). The emphasis on being a team is so strong that *America's Army* uses a technique known as paradigm swapping. Teams competing against each other both represent the Army, but in the virtual world appear to one another as enemy forces (Derby, 2014, p.21).

America's Army has been so successful it exceeded the Army's goals for recruiting. Between 2002 and 2005 the game hosted 5.4 million users registered to play the game (White, 2005). Within its first five years, nine million people have played *America's Army*, accumulating 160 million hours of playing time online (Singer, 2010, p. 93). In 2003 one-fifth of the U.S. Military Academy's freshman class reported playing the game, and in 2008 a study conducted at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology revealed that (Singer, 2010, p. 93):

30 percent of all Americans age 16 to 24 had a more positive impression of the Army because of the game and, even more amazingly, the game had more impact on recruits than all other forms of Army advertising combined.

The Army also combined gaming with its recruiting centers with significant success. In 2008 the Army opened the U.S. Army Experience Center in a Philadelphia shopping mall. The

center housed 60 gaming computers, 19 Xbox consoles, and a smattering of other interactive military exhibits (Hurdle 2009). Between August 2008 and January 2009, the center signed up 33 active duty soldiers and five reservists, which is roughly equivalent to the output of the five traditional recruiting centers it replaced (Hurdle 2009). First Sgt. Randy Jennings described the center's mission as not only being about recruiting but educating individuals who wanted to join the Army. "We want them to know that being in the Army isn't just about carrying weapons and busting down doors. About 80 percent of soldiers are not involved in direct combat roles," said Jennings (Hurdle 2009).

CHAPTER 2

CRITICISMS OF THE MILITARY'S RECRUITING

Product placement and product integration are undeniably successful techniques for getting out an advertiser's message, but not without its share of criticism.

The military has final script approval before assistance is granted to a production and between 1991 and 2002 “approximately a third of major films that depict the US military have direct cooperation and script rewrites by the Pentagon” (Alford as cited in Sauer, 2012, p.3). The military, like any company promoting its brand, wants its product to be shown in the best possible light, but sometimes the Pentagon's rigid approach clashes with reality.

The 2012's *The Avengers* demonstrated this. The production was allowed to use National Guard Humvees in a scene but in another scene aircraft resembling F-22 Raptors and F-35 Joint Strike Fighters had to be inserted digitally. The Pentagon's reluctance to offer more assistance centered on controversy surrounding the fictional agency S.H.I.E.L.D. In the Marvel comics, universe S.H.I.E.L.D is an international intelligence body whose affiliation with the United States government is ambiguous, which was unacceptable to Phil Strub. “We couldn't reconcile the unreality of this international organization and our place in it. To whom did S.H.I.E.L.D answer? Did we work for S.H.I.E.L.D? We hit that roadblock and decided we couldn't do anything,” said Strub (Ackerman, 2012).

While the military is not shy about wanting to protect its images, it seems silly to nitpick about realism in a movie about an alien invasion fought off by a Norse God, a man wearing a weaponized suit, and a radiation fueled colossus.

Other productions have incurred more serious repercussions without military aid. In 1994 the Pentagon refused to offer assistance to the film *Countermeasures* which starred Sigourney

Weaver as a Navy psychiatrist who uncovers a crime ring onboard an aircraft carrier during the first Gulf War. Weaver's character was treating a patient who was participating in a scheme shipping weapons to Iran. When the Pentagon reviewed the script for assistance it declined commenting "There's no reason for us to denigrate the White House or remind the public of the Iran-Contra affair" (Alford, 2012, p10).

The Pentagon's response does not deny any wrong doing by the Reagan administration. Instead it attempts to sweep a scandal under the rug. Ultimately the Pentagon's refusal to provide assistance led to the production failing to get off the ground.

Jeff Fleischer interviewed David Robb, author of *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies* for *Mother Jones* magazine. During the interview Robb discussed the military's willingness to break its own rules about historical accuracy to avoid embarrassment. He cited the HBO film *The Tuskegee Airmen*. Historically a general on the base opposed the black airmen, while a white congressman championed their cause. The Army took umbrage and insisted the general look like a hero. According to Robb, the film's producers wrote to Phil Strub, head of the Pentagon's film office, and addressed changes being made to the film (Fleischer, 2004, p.5):

The following changes are in the works and will soon be fully executed by the writer. It is our intention to reverse the characterization of General Stevenson and Senator Powell, making the senator the source of bigotry. General Stevenson will be revealed as someone who is loyal to the Tuskegee Airmen.

Product placement can also "corrupt any artistic work that did not set out to be a commercial in the first place" (Wenner, 2004, p.112). Product placement also causes productions to suffer because "companies seek to protect the public goodwill towards their brands,

placements, almost without exception, show usage in a positive light" (Wenner, 2004, p. 112).

For instance a bar fight in a commercial film scene might have a broken bottle used as a weapon but the bottle would be a generic piece of glass instead of one clearly labeled Bud Light. The military behaves similarly because it has an image it wants to protect while simultaneously drawing attention to itself and its agenda. "There are no bad guys in the military. No fraternization between officers and enlisted troops. No drinking or drugs. No struggles against bigotry. The military and the president can't look bad," said Fleischer (2004, p. 1).

Robert Thompson, Director of Syracuse University's Center for the Study of Popular Television never had to deal with the brass at the Pentagon but he has some legitimate fears about the ideas of product placement and product placement. Thompson shared his thoughts on the matter in a 2002 article for Mediaweek (Stanley, 2002, p.38):

It makes me nervous if creators will be told to integrate a brand into a story because someone's paying for it. Maybe other stories won't be told because they aren't as amenable to product placement. If I'm a writer, the last thing I want is a list of products that I have to integrate into a script. Will we get bad story telling because of these constraints?

Ignoring historical truths can also lend itself to poor storytelling. It is no secret Hollywood has bent the truth in many movies. Suspension of disbelief is crucial to the movie making process, but there is a difference between omitting a detail or two and the blatant mangling of truth.

Another critique of product integration is that it creates sympathetic narratives (Pennington as cited in Wenner, 2004, p.118):

Integrated advertising might also be a slippery slope in which greedy networks and their corporate owners couldn't resist making every show an infomercial, packed with product plugs at the expense of storyline and character development.

The military has a history of crafting sympathetic narratives. The rescue of Private First Class Jessica Lynch is an example. In 2003 anti-U.S. forces ambushed Lynch and her convoy in the Iraqi town of Nasiriyah. The insurgents took Lynch captive and she became the conflict's first prisoner of war. Lynch's capture was legitimately big news, but it was made even bigger the way it was reported by *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*. They reported that Lynch had been captured after fighting Iraq soldiers and receiving gunshot and stab wounds. A US official stated, "She was fighting to the death, and she did not want to be taken alive" (Pew Research Center, 2003). On April 1, 2003 U.S. Special Forces rescued Lynch.

Lynch became a media darling but her story was largely a manipulation of the truth. Over the next few weeks, the story began to change. *The Washington Post* reported on June 17 that Lynch was neither stabbed nor shot, and she never killed enemy combatants because her gun jammed. Additionally the hospital where her televised rescue by Special Forces took place was not guarded. An Iraqi doctor described her rescue as "a big show...there were no bullets or anything like that", and she had been given better care than Iraqi patients (Pew Research Center, 2003)."

In his book *Where Men Win Glory*, author Jon Krakauer argues the military purposely manipulated Lynch's story to bolster the war effort, and that her capture was convenient for the Pentagon. The same day Lynch was captured a friendly fire incident took place across town that killed 18 Marines and wounded another 17, and her capture helped deflect attention from it (Krakauer 237):

What is alarming is the scale and sophistication of these recent propaganda efforts, and the unabashedness of their executors. The Bush administration took the ruthless stratagems developed by Karl Rove to impugn its political opponents – stratagems that relied heavily on managing public perception by means of deceit – and used them to promote the Global War on Terror, a name that was itself deliberately intended to help sell the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The film *Act of Valor* undeniably sought to create its own narrative as a movie about the Navy made by the Navy. While the film generated box office revenue, the critical reception told a different story. The plot has been described as simplistic, clichéd, and similar to a video game due to the frequent use of first-person perspective. Abe Sauer, critiqued the film for Theawl.com and described it as propaganda that only succeeded in one respect (2012):

It's a made-to-order reinforcement for a security-obsessed populace that sees danger at every corner, every border, and inside the jacket of every bystander...A plot in which the Russian mafia helps Muslim terrorists smuggle assembly-line manufactured ceramic explosive vests capable of eluding metal detectors through tunnels used by Mexican drug cartels is sure to appeal to the same paranoid crowd targeted by all those LifeLock commercials played at nearly every Rush Limbaugh commercial break.

The narrative of *America's Army* has also met with criticism for the way it portrays life in the military. Jesse Hamilton, a staff sergeant who served in Iraq in 2005 and 2006, says that video games glamourize war and potentially give recruits the wrong idea about the military. Hamilton referred to games as “very deceiving and very far from realistic” (Hurdle 2009). “You can't simulate the loss when you see people getting killed,” said Hamilton (Hurdle 2009).

The violence in *America's Army* is far from realistic. When a player dies there is no trauma or bloodshed and his or her avatar slumps to the ground. Chris Chambers, a retired Army Major who served as deputy director for the game, defended the exclusion of bloodshed as a way to market the game to a younger audience (Schiesel, 2005, p.3):

We have a teen rating that allows 13-year-olds to play, and in order to maintain that rating we have to adhere to certain standards. We don't use blood and gore and violence to entertain. That's not the purpose of our game. But there is a death animation, there is a consequence to pulling the trigger, and we're not sugarcoating that aspect in any way. We want to reach young people to show them what the Army does, and we're obviously proud of that. We can't reach them if we are over the top with violence and other aspects of war that might not be appropriate. It's a choice we made to be able to reach the audience we want.

The inclusion of a death animation does sugarcoat the consequences of a conflict because that's not how things work. In a real combat, blood and gore abound and a game marketed as a simulator does not reflect reality by white-washing the horrors of war. This is especially offensive when the game is admittedly being marketed to 13 year olds.

Critics of the game also complain that it makes combat look clean and easy. In a real combat, blood and gore abound and a game marketed as a simulator does not reflect reality by sanitizing combat. *America's Army* has content that allows the player to play scenarios based on actual events. One example is a 2003 mission that involved special forces soldiers holding off Iraqi infantry supported by artillery, tanks and other heavy weapons. Ultimately the U.S. soldiers prevailed and players will as well if they act appropriately. However, the game's developers

failed to include the air strike that went awry during the mission that fell on friendly forces killing U.S. soldiers and their Kurdish allies (Singer, 2010, p.95).

Not all soldiers engage in combat, but America's Army focuses on the soldiers who do and the effect has not gone unnoticed by recruiters. "Every 17-year old-that comes into my recruiting office has aspirations of being a Marine sniper because they grew up playing *Call of Duty* video games," said Sgt. John (John as cited in Leidman and Rosendale, 2015, p. 23). John continues (John as cited in Leidman and Rosendale, 2015, p.26):

I have to explain it to [the recruits], that these are video games; this is not reality...that is not what warfare is...it has created a false sense of what war is. Kids think they know what [fighting] in Afghanistan is because they have played it on *Medal of Honor* games.

When it comes to recruiting the Army knows what sells and it most definitely is not a game focusing on repairing Humvees and handling logistics.

The Army openly admits it is targeting younger players, which is disturbing. . Eighteen is the minimum age of enlistment (17 with a parent's permission), but Chambers specifically mentions that violence is curbed so younger audiences can access the game. The military has also targeted children in schools. After the Army, Wardynski became the superintendent of schools in Huntsville, Ala. During his tenure Wardynski partnered with the Army's Cyber Command "to restructure the curriculum of Huntsville's middle schools and high schools to train students to wage and defend against cyberwar" (Mead, 2013). Corey Mead, an assistant professor of English at City University of New York, discussed what the potential fallout of this type of practice could mean for today's youth in an editorial for *Time*:

...as state and federal budgets are slashed in response to the collapsed economy and as the military strains to find cyber-qualified personnel, our schools and the military will

undoubtedly join in an ever closer relationship. But this interweaving of military technology, ideology and money poses a potential risk to students everywhere and should be critically examined by parents and educators alike. A military career is not a game. More to the point, the stealth recruitment and militarization of young minds is not a game, and it should not be treated as such by school officials in charge of guiding our children's future.

Psychologists also criticize the targeting of youths by military recruiters. Swiss philosopher Jean Piaget studied children and learning and concluded that there are four levels of mental development that occur between birth and adolescence. The highest is the formal operational stage which starts around 11 and continues until adulthood. Occurring in this stage are “changes in cognitive functions that allow children to begin to think abstractly and logically, and provide the ability to problem solve in methodical ways” (Piaget as cited in Leidman and Rosendale, 2015, p.24). Piaget claims at this stage teenagers are capable of deductive reasoning and the ability to determine future consequences. But Piaget also believed “not all individuals are capable of exhibiting this upper level cognition, and that children integrate knowledge based on their discrete frames of reference; hence, different outcomes may be constructed from similar action (Leidman and Rosendale, 2015, p.24). Other researchers also believe that “only 35 percent of high school graduates attain the highest levels of formal operations discussed by Piaget” (Kuhn, Langer, Kohlberg & Haan as cited in Leidman and Rosendale, 2015, p.24). This raises ethical questions about military recruiting tactics (Leidman and Rosendale 2015, p.24):

With regard to military recruiting media that target children, is that cognitive development, executive function of the brain and the ability to holistically understand a given situation are formed with age, and perhaps, never fully achieved. Therefore, from

this perspective, the ability needed to make the reasoned judgments that are critical to a four-year enlistment into the military may not be fully-developed, or present at all, in many of today's targeted recruits' age group.

There is also rational choice theory, which argues “that people will make decisions based on utility maximization for their own self-interests” (Homans as stated in Leidman and Rosendale, 2015, p.24). Proponents of the theory believe that a teenaged military recruit has a right to make decisions based on free will and they are able to weigh pros and cons of actions. However, research on the adolescent brain and Piaget's principles argue otherwise (Leidman and Rosendale, 2015, p.24):

Juveniles are not able to rationally balance the implications of such a decision, therefore rendering this theory false when applied to adolescents' enlistment in the military. It would be difficult for anyone, especially a 17 year old child, to realistically calculate the benefits of an enlistment bonus, worth thousands of dollars, to the reality of war and the genuine potential of mortality.

Further studies have also shown that “statistically demonstrate that adolescent brain development is deficient when it comes to making choices that will have lifelong ramifications” (Spano and Viner as cited in Leidman and Rosendale, 2015, p.24).

The necessity of military recruiting is understandable, but are these practices ethical? Aristotle stated “people and their acts, not particular sets of rules, are the moral basis of activity (Patterson and Wilkins, 2008, p.8).” Aristotle believed that the way to behave ethically was to adhere to three principles. First individuals must know through the exercise of practical reasoning what they are doing; second individuals must select the act for its own sake and finally the act must spring from a firm and unchanging character (Patterson and Wilkins, 2008, p.8).

The military would certainly like to think it embodies these principles. The Pentagon knows what it is doing when it comes to advertising as it has become an exact science, and millions of dollars are spent planning recruiting campaigns targeting potential entrants. The act of recruiting through the use of propaganda in film, TV and games has been selected for its own sake as a means to an end since the military is a self-replicating entity. Finally the military undoubtedly sees itself as a firm and unchanging character. Aside from criticism that U.S. foreign policy hinges on being a global police force, discipline is firmly ingrained in the ethos of service. The military also possesses an unchanging character demonstrated by the way it indoctrinates recruits, placing emphasis on history and heritage.

But does that make it right? Aristotle might argue that the military thinks what it is doing is right but that does not necessarily make the act ethical. Just because someone devotes thought to an act, acts deliberately, and fancies himself or herself to be of stringent moral fiber does not mean that the act is good; the actor may be deluding himself or herself as to the virtue of the act. Terror cells and extremist groups have objectives, often times admirable, yet that does not give them an excuse to commit atrocities to achieve them.

Kant's categorical imperative also is at odds with the military's established practices of recruiting. The categorical imperative asserts "that an individual should act on the premise that the choices one makes for oneself could become universal law" and "that you should act so that you treat humanity always as an end and never as a means only" (Patterson and Wilkins, 2008, p. 9-10). Kant also believed that "ethical theory is based on the notion that it is the act itself, rather than the person who acts, in which moral force resides" (Patterson and Wilkins, 2008, p.10).

Targeting individuals too young to enlist much less possess the cognitive development to make such an important decision cannot be defended as representing universal law.

The categorical imperative has also been simplified as being similar to the Bible's golden rule do unto others as you would have others do unto you (Patterson and Wilkins, 2008, p.10). This interpretation still poses problems for military recruiters assuming they take issue with being deceived. Denying a production assistance because it shares an ugly truth should not be any different than being outraged to find you've been ripped off in a Ponzi scheme, or sold a used car riddled with problems. In the military the omission of important information can have dire consequences such as mission failure or even death. It is no fairer to mislead people before they enlist than after.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSION

Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard, authors of *The Hollywood War Machine: U.S. Militarism and Popular Culture* argue that the United States has grown addicted to war and the march towards further conflict has become a way of life for its citizenry (2007, p.10):

By the 1990s the United States had firmly established itself as an unchallenged superpower backed by the largest war machine ever, with bases in 130 nations, a growing military presence in space, and consumption of more resources than all other major armed forces in the world combined.

Boggs and Pollard also assert this was allowed to happen because “the repetitive fantasies, illusions, myths, and storylines of Hollywood movies can be expected to influence mass audiences in predictable ways, much in the fashion of advertising (2007, p.11).” As scary as it might seem the military relies so heavily on advertising because it is very much like an industry. It possesses a tiered leadership structure and a global market. While the military is subsidized and not profitable it makes a lot of money for others (Boeing, General Dynamics, Raytheon, Etc.) who could almost be thought of as shareholders.

This all leads to the military possessing a wealth of influence especially in regards to manipulating public opinion. As stated previously “approximately a third of major films that depict the US military have direct cooperation and script rewrites by the Pentagon” (Alford as cited in Sauer, 2012, p.3). This does not include the productions that do not even bother seeking assistance since they know they will be turned down. For a nation like the United States that prides itself on a supposed freedom of speech this should be especially alarming.

These ideas are worth exploring and there is certainly plenty of evidence to show there is a deliberate effort to sway opinions in favor of the military that goes beyond traditional recruiting. In 2005 *The Los Angeles Times* released a story about NFL teams receiving money for military tribute during games (Knoblauh, 2015):

From 2011 to 2014, the government paid \$5.4 million to 12 NFL teams, who have used some of the money to pay for costs associated with holding patriotic ceremonies and providing perks to military personnel attending the games.

David Robb claims that Congress has been targeted in an effort to win favor for the military agenda as well. The military has presented a carefully constructed representation of military life to lawmakers in a deliberate effort to manipulate opinion, according to Maj. David Georgi, a soldier who worked as a technical adviser in Hollywood “Obviously, a movie is not always 100 percent factual, so when we get Congress to watch it, they see it in a favorable light, and down the road, this will help with funding,” said Georgi (Robb, 2004. p.27).

The military's propaganda has an agenda to self-perpetuate but it also serves to dehumanize. Potential recruits should be insulted that they are treated like a commodity by an organization coercing them to join. Enemy combatants US forces engage are also dehumanized by their depictions in military sanctioned entertainment. The conflicts and political situations that led to their being at odds with US interests are often never explored. What this does is create the perception their struggles are unimportant and they are less than human.

A positive view of the military should develop organically. Anyone who joins should be doing it out of a sense of duty. Whether it is because they love their country and/or believe in what they are doing. It should not be because their perception of the military has been subtly manipulated over time.

The military's deliberate manipulation of truth and exploitation of potential recruits raises questions about its moral compass. The military already faces an image problem from rampant sexual assault within the ranks and high rates of veteran suicide. Finding qualified recruits is a challenge even under the best of circumstances. Service members pride themselves on honor while their employer creates false narratives manipulating public opinion and forcing anyone who asks assistance to self-censor.

These behaviors might be tolerated by private enterprises, but the military is subsidized by the American taxpayer. Weapons, ships, and installations are public resources. While it is understandable the military would want to be portrayed positively, it should not be able to use movies, TV and video games to lure young people into the military based on a false representation of war.

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Research Paper Title:

The Ethical Implications of the Military's Product Placement and Brand Integration in
Popular Entertainment

Major Professor: William Freivogel