

# Eliciting Compassion Through Military Advertising and Its Impact on Parents' Willingness to Talk about Enlistment and Provide Comfort to Their Children

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## Compassion and Comforting Behavior

Compassion has received attention from researchers across a number of disciplines, including psychology, communication, and social marketing (Kanov, Maitlis, Worline, Dutton, Frost, & Lilius, 2004; Forbus & Snyder, 2013; Snyder & Cistulli, 2009; Solomon, 1998). It is distinct from empathy because compassion requires action. Empathy refers to connecting with emotions being experienced by others, feeling for them, and even taking on the emotions of others (Miller, 2007; Snyder, 2007). Compassion is also a social emotion, but instead of simply connecting with others' feelings of distress, those who feel compassion take steps to reduce the others' distress (Frost, Dutton, Worline, & Wilson, 2000). In other words, empathy requires one to feel for others while compassion requires one to act. According to Clark (1997), compassion comprises the three stages of noticing, feeling, and responding. First, one must *notice* another's pain. Upon noticing the pain, one must go through emotional contagion to take on the other's *feeling* of distress (Forbus & Snyder, 2013; Kanov et al., 2004). Finally, one must *respond* by taking steps to ameliorate the other's distress.

Comforting behaviors include, "communicative attempts to alleviate the emotional distress of another (Burlison & Goldsmith, 1998, p. 246). According to Bippus (2001), there are five types of comforting behaviors that effectively ameliorate distress – other orientation, refraining from general negativity, different perspective, problem solving, and relating. In taking an "other" orientation, one focuses his or her communication on the other's feelings and demonstrates deep caring for the distressed other. When one refrains from general negativity, he or she avoids saying anything that might upset the distressed other. The behaviors related to the different perspective dimension of comforting include comments to help the distressed other reappraise the situation by seeing it from a new perspective. When exhibiting the problem solving dimension, the comforter helps the distressed other generate possible solutions to his or her problem. Finally, the relating dimension characterizes communicative behaviors designed to help the distressed other see that the comforter can understand and relate to the problem and also see that the other's problem is not unique (Forbus & Snyder, 2013).

## Military Advertising Directed at Parents

Military recruitment has generally been on the decline since the early 1990s (St. Onge, 2010). In response, the Military has spent increasing sums of money on advertising. In fact, between 1999 and 2007, the four main branches of the U.S. Military increased advertising spending by 150% (Dertouzos, 2009). Advertising is a cost-effective tool for recruiting, but other environmental factors influence people's decisions about enlistment because Military service comes with a number of dangers and unknowns. Recruits, undoubtedly, have many questions about enlistment and life in the Military. Deciding to join the Armed Services is a major life decision for many young adults. And today's young adults, often referred to as Millennials, are highly connected to their parents and rely on them heavily when making important decisions. According to the Pew Research Center (2007), 80 percent of

Millennials speak to their parents daily, 73 percent see their parents one time per week, and 50 percent see their parents daily. In addition, Millennials are more likely to, “turn to their families – primarily their mothers – for advice: 64% said they turn to family, compared to 54% of Gen Xers...” (A Portrait of “Generation Next”, 2007). Howe and Strauss (2000) argued that generational differences – such as the role of parents in decision making – will require advertisers to use new and novel approaches when targeting Millennials. One novel approach would be to influence Millennials through ads targeting their parents.

Given what we know about Millennials and their parents, it is no surprise that the Military has focused much of its recent advertising on parents. In fact, the U.S. military has a website - called Today's Military - that includes extensive informational materials for parents (todayismilitary.com, 2014). The site acknowledges the role of parents in helping their children make enlistment decisions. In this sense, the Military is talking directly to parents about their distress and their children's anxiety about making an enlistment decision. In the present study, we are interested in whether Military advertising targeted at parents elicits compassion for their child's distress, and if so, whether that compassion triggers communicative behaviors to alleviate the child's distress. In particular, do ads designed to elicit compassion for recruits' distress prompt comforting behaviors in parents?

Can advertising elicit comforting behaviors by triggering compassion? Some ads have attempted to do so. For instance, a boost.org ad about preventing high school dropout rates features President Obama saying, “Unfortunately, nearly 30 percent of U.S. high school graduates aren't making it to graduation. And every one of us - every parent, every friend, every neighbor - has the responsibility to provide the support and encouragement they need to make it through.” Military advertising that asks parents to be supportive of their children may be able to help those parents notice and feel for their children's distress. Do those ads also compel parents to provide comfort to their children?

### **Military Advertising, Branding, and Attitudes**

Military advertising research has taken a number of paths since the United States' transition to the all-volunteer Armed Forces in 1974. Some researchers have focused their efforts on content analyzing recruiting materials for themes employed over time. Early research in that area revealed the importance of both extrinsic rewards, such as job training (Shyles & Ross, 1984) and intrinsic rewards, including status differentials between elite Military units and others (Padilla & Laner, 2002). Another line of inquiry has examined consumer perceptions related to Military ads. That research concluded that perceptions can be influenced by the current political climate (Keck & Mueller, 1994). Miller, Clinton and Camey (2007) determined that preferences for military recruitment slogans can be discriminated by individual motivators (e.g. Maslow's Hierarchy) and manifest needs (e.g. achievement, autonomy, etc.), indicating target characteristics should be considered in the design of recruitment ads and slogans.

Another stream of research has concluded that Military advertising is a cost-effective means of increasing the number of people who enlist (e.g. Dertouzos, 2009; Dertouzos & Garber, 2006; Epps, 1973; Morey & McCann, 1980). These studies also demonstrate that advertising is a very cost-effective tool for generating new recruits (Dertouzos, 2009; Warner, Simon & Payne, 2003). However, Hanssens and Levien (1983) concluded that, in keeping with a hierarchy-of-effects model, advertising is best used to influence antecedents of the decision to enlist such as interest generation, which leads to enlistment inquiries. This thinking has led to consideration of potential recruits' attitudes and intention as enlistment precursors. Cistulli, Snyder, and Jacobs (in press) argued that this stream of research mirrors much of attitude toward ad (Aad), attitude toward brand (Abrand) and purchase intention (PI) research found in the classic advertising literature.

They have argued that not only is the U.S. Military a brand, but the branches have all worked to build their own unique brand identities (Cistulli, Snyder, & Jacobs, 2012; in press). Moreover, their results have conformed to the Aad—>Abrand—>PI advertising model, where attitude toward the brand is essentially a proxy for attitude toward the military and where purchase intention is essentially a proxy for willingness to communicate with important others about enlistment.

Mackenzie, Lutz, & Belch (1986) suggested that shaping consumers' Aad is an important way to understand their behavior. In fact, most of the literature in the area has attempted to support the link between ad attitudes and brand attitudes (Batra & Ray, 1985; Burke & Edell, 1986). Marketing and advertising scholars have suggested that ads are seen as having an effect on brand attitudes by creating positive attitudes towards the ad itself (Mackenzie, Lutz, & Belch, 1986).

The participants in Cistulli, Snyder, and Jacob's (2012; in press) studies reported that after being either exposed to a Military ad or asked to recall a Military ad, participants' attitudes toward the ad influenced their attitude toward the Military brand. Brand attitudes, in turn, influenced participants' communication behaviors related to enlistment.

The present study seeks to extend this line of research. Although potential recruits may be influenced by Military ads to talk with family and friends about enlistment, we want to know how ads targeted at parents of potential recruits will influence their attitudes and communicative behaviors. In particular, we forward the following hypotheses and research question:

RQ1: Will exposure to an ad targeting parents be related to parents' attitude toward the ad?

RQ2: Will exposure to an ad targeting parents be related to parents' attitude toward the military?

RQ3: Will exposure to an ad targeting parents be related to the parents' reported use of comforting behavior when discussing military enlistment with their children?

H1: Parents' attitude toward the ad will be positively related to their attitude toward the military.

H2: Parents' attitude toward the military will be positively related with their willingness to discuss enlistment with their children.

RQ4: Will attitude toward the ad influence parents' use of comforting behaviors when discussing enlistment with their children?

RQ5: Will attitude toward the military influence parents' use of comforting behaviors when discussing enlistment with their children?

## **Methods**

We recruited U.S. citizens with at least one child between the ages of 17 and 25. Participants completed an online survey using Amazon's Mechanical Turk tool (<https://www.mturk.com/mturk/welcome>). This tool provides people the opportunity to complete human intelligence tasks (HITs) for compensation. The survey acted as a HIT, and the participants chose whether to complete the survey.

Once participants selected our survey in M-Turk, they were directed to a website that included the study's information sheet. If they agreed to continue in the study, they were asked if they were U.S. citizens and if they have at least one child between the ages of 17 and 25. If they answered yes to both questions, they were directed to another webpage.

The study included two conditions. In the first condition (ad condition), the webpage featured an advertisement for the U.S. Military. In particular, the advertisement was for the Army National Guard (see Figure 1 below). The advertisement was a letter from a parent to a child and contained voiceovers of parents talking about how they have always believed in their children, how they supported their decision to join the National Guard, and how they were proud of their children for serving. The advertisement closes with the line “Love, Mom and Dad.”



Figure 1. Screenshot of Army National Guard Ad Used in Present Study

In the other condition (recall condition), the webpage asked participants to try to recall a military advertisement they had seen recently. Then, participants were asked to complete a survey that included questions about their demographics, their attitudes toward the ad, their attitudes toward the military, and their communication behaviors with their child about deciding whether to enlist in the military. After completing the survey, the participants were compensated \$.50 (fifty cents) for their work.

## Measures

**Attitude toward the Ad.** Participants rated their overall impression of the ad using a semantic-differential scale developed by Donthu (1998). The five-point scale ( $\alpha = .93$ ) read as follows to members of the experimental condition: “To me, the advertisement I just saw was \_\_\_\_\_.” The items were: unappealing/appealing, unbelievable/believable, unimpressive/impressive, unattractive/attractive, uninformative/informative, unclear/clear, non-eyecatching/eyecatching, unlikely/likely, unconvincing/convincing, dislike/like. For the control condition, the language was changed to reflect recall and appeared as follows: “To me, military ads I have seen were \_\_\_\_\_.”

**Attitude toward the Military.** Participants rated their overall impression of the armed forces using a five-point semantic differential derived from Donthu (1998). The six items ( $\alpha = .91$ ) were as follows: unappealing/appealing, unbelievable/believable, unimpressive/impressive, unattractive/attractive, unexciting/exciting, and not likeable/likeable.

**Enlistment Discussion.** Participants answered three questions about discussing enlistment in the U.S. armed forces. The questions were: “I would discuss with my child his or her options for enlisting in the Armed Forces”, “To learn more about the Armed Forces, I would encourage my child to visit a recruiter before making a decision about enlisting in the Armed Forces”, and “I am likely to recommend that my child consult recruiting materials about the Armed Forces”.

**Comforting.** The comforting scale comprises five specific behaviors that are particularly effective in alleviating others' distress (Bippus, 2001; Forbus & Snyder, 2013). The Bippus (2001) items were modified to fit the context of this study.

The first behavior, other orientation, was assessed using the following items: "I will stay centered on my child's thoughts and feelings", "I will reveal my concern", "I will focus on my child's thoughts and feelings." These 4 items yielded an acceptable reliability ( $\alpha = .75$ ).

The second behavior, problem solving, was assessed using the following items: "I will be helpful in coming up with solutions to my child's enlistment decision", "I will help my child make an enlistment decision", "I will provide good advice." These items were reliable ( $\alpha = .75$ ).

The third behavior, relating, was assessed using the following, reliable items ( $r = .48$ ): "I will show my child that I can relate to his or her situation", "I will let my child know that I have faced similar issues."

The fourth behavior, refraining from negativity, was assessed using the following items ( $\alpha = .70$ ): "I will judge my child's decision", "I will not show support for my child's decision", "I will make my child feel accepted", "I will come off as indifferent about my child's decision."

The final comforting behavior, different perspective, was assessed using the following items: "I will help my child step back and look at his or her feelings in a different light", "I will help my child change his or her perspective on enlisting." The alpha coefficient was unacceptably low for these items ( $\alpha = .53$ ). Therefore, this dimension was dropped from further analysis.

## Results

Research Question 1 explored whether exposure to an ad targeting parents was related to parents' attitude toward the ad? We ran a t-test to look at differences between the ad exposure condition ( $m = 3.07$ ) and the ad recall condition ( $m = 2.97$ ). There was no significant difference ( $t = 1.6$ ,  $df = 328$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Therefore, in response to research question 1, the data indicated that exposure to ads targeting parents did not influence the parents' attitudes toward the ad, compared to an ad that the parents were asked to recall.

For Research Question 2, we asked whether the exposure to an ad targeting parents would be related to parents' attitude toward the military. Again, we ran a t-test to compare means between the ad exposure group ( $m = 3.82$ ) and the ad recall group ( $m = 3.79$ ). In response to the question, the data yielded no significant difference between the groups ( $t = .279$ ,  $df = 328$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

For Research Question 3, we asked whether exposure to an ad targeting parents was related to the parents' reported use of comforting behavior when discussing military enlistment with their children. We ran a series of t-tests, but found no significant differences between the ad exposure group and the ad recall group. Please see Table 1 below for a complete breakdown of the conditions. Seeing an ad encouraging parents to support their children in making an enlistment decision did not have an immediate effect on parents' use of specific comforting behaviors to reduce their children's stress.

**Table 1.**  
**Independent Samples t-tests comparing ad condition and recall condition on comforting dimensions**

	<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>
Orientation	-.64	328	.52
Problem Solve	.44	328	.66
Relate	-.04	328	.97
Refrain from Negativity	-.68	328	.50

The answers to research questions 1-3 suggested that, for the variables of interest to this study, there were no differences between participants in the ad condition and the recall condition. Therefore, we decided to aggregate the data for the remaining analysis.

Hypothesis 1 posited that parents' attitude toward the ad will be positively related to their attitude toward the military. As you can see in Table 2, the data supported this assertion. The findings, which were consistent with extant research, suggest that parents' attitude toward the ad was positively related to their attitude toward the military ( $r = .64, p < .01$ ). Hypothesis 1 is, therefore, supported.

Hypothesis 2 argued that parents' attitude toward the military will be positively related with their willingness to discuss enlistment with their children. As Table 2 below illustrates, there is a strong, positive relationship between attitude toward the military and the willingness to discuss enlistment ( $r = .60, p < .01$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is supported.

**Table 2.**  
**Correlations of Variables of Interest**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
1 AAd	--	.64**	-.49**	.29**	.24**	.16**
2 AMil		--	.60**	.27**	.23**	.25**
3 Discuss			--	-.31**	-.26**	-.27**
4 Orient				--	.57**	.39**
5 Solve					--	.50**
6 Relate						--

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$  (two tailed). AAd = Attitude toward Ad, AMil = Attitude toward military, Discuss = Enlistment discussion, Orient = Orientation, Solve = Problem Solve

**Table 2.*****Correlations of Variables of Interest (Continued)***

<b>Variable</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>
1 AAd	.10	.06	.13*	-.02	.11*	.13*
2 AMil	.13*	.20**	.21**	.13*	.11*	-.04
3 Discuss	-.14*	-.17**	-.23**	-.16**	-.10	-.003
4 Orient	.53**	-.05	.04	-.08	.15**	.14**
5 Solve	.31**	.01	.07	.01	.16**	.07
6 Relate	.21**	.10	.17**	.20**	.06	-.05
7Negative	--	-.12*	-.02	-.11*	.15**	.20**
8 Family		--	.35**	.24**	-.17**	-.10
9 Friend			--	.26**	-.20**	-.19**
10 Serve				--	-.02	-.27**
11 Age					--	.05
12 Gender						--

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$  (two tailed). Negative = Refraining from Negativity, Family = Family member who served, Friend = Friend who served

Research Questions 4 and 5 asked whether parents' attitudes toward the ad and toward the military influences their use of comforting behaviors when discussing enlistment with their children. To explore these questions, we conducted a series of four hierarchical multiple regression equations in two steps using simultaneous entry. In particular, we regressed each of the four factors of comforting onto the following variables in step one: 1) whether the respondent had a family member who was enlisted in the military, 2) whether the respondent had a friend who was enlisted in the military, 3) whether the respondent had ever served in the military, and 4) the respondent's age. In the second step of each of the regression equations, we entered: 1) attitude toward the ad and 2) attitude toward the military as additional predictors of comforting.

The first factor of comforting we examined was other orientation. The multiple regression equation summarized in Table 3 was significant ( $F [2, 313] = 6.76, p < .001$ ) and accounted for approximately 34 percent of the variability in other orientation. Parents who reported having a better attitude toward the ad were more likely to report a willingness to use an other orientation strategy when discussing enlistment with their children. Likewise, those parents who were more favorably disposed toward the military reported a greater willingness to use an other orientation tactic. Therefore, both attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the military influenced parents' willingness to use an other orientation in enlistment discussions. Additionally, parents' age was positively related to other orientation. Older parents reported being more likely to use other orientation.

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**Table 3.*****Regression of other orientation on variables of interest (Step Two)***

<b>Independent Variable</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>B</b>
Family	-.08	.07	-.07
Friend	.05	.07	.04
You	-.12	.08	-.09
Age	.01	.003	.11*
AAd	.16	.06	.18*
AMil	.09	.05	.14*

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*Note.* \*  $p < .05$

The second multiple regression equation, regressed problem solving on attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the military. The equation was statistically significant ( $F [6, 313] = 4.58, p < .001$ ) and explained 28 percent of the variability in problem solving. As you can see in Table 4, both attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the military were positively related to parents' reported willingness to use a problem solving tactic when discussing enlistment with their children. Again, parents' age was positively related to the reported willingness to use a problem solving tactic.

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**Table 4.*****Regression of problem solve on variables of interest (Step Two)***

<b>Independent Variable</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>B</b>
Family	-.02	.08	-.02
Friend	.07	.08	.05
You	-.02	.09	-.10
Age	.01	.00	.12*
AAd	.16	.07	.16*
AMil	.07	.05	.10

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*Note.* \*  $p < .05$

The third multiple regression equation, regressed the relate factor of comforting on attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the military. The equation was statistically significant ( $F [6, 313] = 5.40, p < .001$ ) and explained 31 percent of the variability in problem solving. Table 5 indicates that the parents' attitude toward the military was positively related to their willingness to tell their children they can relate to them when discussing their children's enlistment. However, attitude toward the ad was not related to the relate factor of comforting. Additionally, the results in Table 5 suggest that those parents who reported serving in the military were more likely to use a relate tactic than their counterparts who had not served in the military.

**Table 5.*****Regression of relate on variables of interest (Step Two)***

<b>Independent Variable</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>B</b>
Family	-.02	.10	-.02
Friend	.16	.10	.10
You	.31	.11	.16**
Age	.004	.005	.05
AAd	.04	.09	.03
AMil	.16	.07	.17*

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

The final multiple regression equation, regressed refraining from negativity on attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the military. The equation was statistically significant ( $F [6, 313] = 3.09, p = .006$ ) and explained 24 percent of the variability in problem solving. The results in Table 6 suggest that neither parents' attitude toward the ad nor attitude toward the military shared a significant relationship with refraining from negativity. Parents reported willingness to refrain from negativity while discussing enlistment with their children was unrelated to both their feelings about the ad and their feelings about the military. Interestingly, age was positively related to refraining from negativity.

**Table 6.*****Regression of refraining from negativity on variables of interest (Step Two)***

<b>Independent Variable</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>B</b>
Family	-.17	.09	-.11
Friend	.06	.09	.04
You	-.21	.11	-.11
Age	.01	.01	.12*
AAd	-.01	.08	-.01
AMil	.11	.06	.13

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$

## Discussion

Given the active role that parents of Millennials play in their children's lives, it is of little surprise that the military has focused some of its advertising resources to reach out to parents (e.g., [todaysmilitary.com](http://todaysmilitary.com)). In the present study, we took the first steps toward examining the impact of military ads directed at parents on their communication behaviors with their children about military enlistment. In particular, we wanted to know if military ads directed at parents have an influence on the parents' willingness to use comforting communication when discussing enlistment with their children.

Participants in the present study either watched an Army National Guard ad or were asked to recall a military ad they had seen recently. The results suggest that the immediate impact of the Army National Guard ad was not significantly different than the impact of the recalled ad. Parents exposed to the ad felt no better or worse about the military and did not exhibit different levels of the four factors of

comforting communication explored in the present study. There are a number of explanations for these findings.

First, the ad we used in the study may not have pushed parents strongly enough to provide the specific forms of comfort we examined in this study. For example, the ad did not say “tell you child that you can relate...” Second, military advertising is so pervasive and extensive that parents have difficulty separating out the feelings elicited by a single ad. These parents have been exposed to decades of military advertising and that cumulative effect may be too great to overcome in one exposure to an ad. Third, the ad may have elicited other, unmeasured, supportive behaviors.

In line with our hypothesis, parents’ attitude toward the military was positively related to their willingness to discuss enlistment. The more they liked the military, the more likely parents were to report a willingness to discuss enlistment with their children. An ad’s ability to influence parents’ feelings about the military can make more parent-child interactions about enlistment take place. Therefore, for military advertising practitioners, the relationships among attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the military, and enlistment discussion are encouraging signs. In this way, military ads have the ability to influence parent-child communication. However, the effects of these ads may not always work in the military’s favor.

We looked more closely at willingness to discuss enlistment and found some counterintuitive correlations in the present data. Willingness to discuss enlistment was negatively related to all four factors of comforting. The more willing parents reported being to discuss enlistment with their children, the less likely they were to use comforting communication tactics. These relationships make it appear as though parents were willing to discuss enlistment but were not willing to alleviate the stress their children were feeling. Additionally, the correlations suggest that those parents who reported having a family member who served, a friend who served, or who had personally served in the military also reported being less willing to discuss enlistment with their children.

On the surface, it looks like these data are saying that if parents have personal connections to the military, they are not as willing to discuss enlistment with their children compared to parents with no personal connections to the military. And those parents who are more willing to discuss military enlistment with their children are not as willing to provide them with comfort. What phenomenon explains these results? Is it possible that parents with such close connections to the military are trying to shield their children from service?

On the one hand, an unwillingness to provide comfort may be seen as a lack of compassion. On the other hand, these parents may not want their children to serve in the military and do not want to make the decision any easier on their children. One possible reason for why parents may not exhibit comforting behaviors is because they do not want their children to serve in the military. Research that was reported around the time of this study’s data collection (late summer 2014) from the Pew Research Center (2014) suggests that support for US involvement in military conflicts was waning. More specifically, a CNN poll showed general support for providing aid to forces fighting ISIS, but a majority of Americans opposed using US troops in Iraq and Syria (CNN, 2014). Parents may be growing increasingly concerned about US military conflicts and may not want their children to be in harm’s way. Therefore, they are less likely to be willing to alleviate their children’s distress about enlistment.

In the present study, we also explored the impact of attitudes toward the ad and attitudes toward the military on the four factors of comforting communication. The results suggest that the cumulative effect

of military advertising does influence parent-child communication through the relationships with the factors of comforting communication.

When parents take an other orientation, they show their children they care deeply for them and focus their comments on the childrens' feelings. The present results suggest that both the parents' attitude toward the ad and the attitude toward the military influenced their willingness to use an other orientation. To the degree that parents like military ads and like the military, they are more likely to be willing to demonstrate an other orientation when discussing enlistment with their children. Interestingly, older parents reported being more willing to use an other orientation when discussing enlistment with their children.

Parents' attitudes toward military advertising increases their willingness to help their children through problems solving. However, their attitude toward the military was not related to the problem solving dimension of comforting. Again, age was a positive predictor of problem solving communication. Older parents were more likely to help their children through problem solving.

Parents who reported serving in the military also reported to be more willing to show their children that they can relate to the distress they feel about enlistment. They have been through the same experience and can identify with their children's distress. In addition, parents who feel better about the military also reported being willing to discuss how they can relate to their children's distress.

Contrary to our hypotheses, neither attitude toward the ad nor attitude toward the military influenced parents' willingness to refrain from negativity. Older parents, however, reported that they were more likely to refrain from negativity when discussing enlistment with their children.

In the end, military advertising does influence parent-child communication about enlistment. However, the effects of advertising on communication are not entirely favorable for military recruiters. Parents' willingness to discuss enlistment with their children is also affected by their own personal connections to the military and their feelings about the military. Ads can affect feelings about the military, but they cannot change parents' personal connections to military service or their desire to protect their children.

### **Limitations**

This study's conclusions must be considered carefully within the context of important limitations. First, the comforting communication items were adapted from their original form. The alpha reliability coefficients were acceptable for four of the dimensions, but were still low enough to be of some concern. Second, the ad featured in the present study did not explicitly ask parents to talk with their children about enlistment or to offer their children any form of comfort. Therefore, the manipulation may have been too weak. Third, this study asked participants about their behavioral intentions and not about their actual behavior. Just as marketing studies measuring purchase intention must be careful about drawing conclusions about actual behaviors, so to must we be careful about our conclusions from the present study.

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