
The Elite Media and the Military-Civilian Culture Gap

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Scholars have periodically discussed a gap between the military and civilian cultures.¹ One facet of that gap is the divergence in the views of military officers and civilian journalists (news executives, editors, and reporters) about the military and about how the civilian media cover military affairs.² There are four areas of differing views.

First is the coverage of news in general by the press: in a recent comparative survey, only 20 percent of officers, compared to 47 percent of journalists, were willing to characterize the coverage by the national newspapers they read most often as excellent.³

Second is confidence in the military: 89 percent of the officers had a "great deal of confidence" in the military, contrasted with 38 percent of the journalists.⁴

The difference between officers and journalists is proportionately greater in the third area—coverage of military issues by the press. Only 7 percent of the officers compared to 26 percent of the journalists, had a great deal of confidence in such coverage.⁵

Fourth, with respect to reporting various aspects of military activities and life, 60 percent of the officers, but a scant 8 percent of the journalists, agreed that "military leaders should be allowed to use the news media to deceive the enemy (thereby deceiving the American public);"⁶ and 77 percent of reporters, but only 31 percent of military officers, agreed that a reporter should publish documents showing that

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ARMED FORCES & SOCIETY, Vol. 27, No. 2, Winter 2001, pp. 183-204.

"federal government officials and military leaders misled the public about a military operation."⁷ In a similar vein, 52 percent of journalists versus 10 percent of officers would report evidence "that the married commander of a local military base is having an affair with the well-known operator of a restaurant."⁸ It is no wonder that 40 percent of the military, compared to only 5 percent of the journalists, agreed that the "news media are more interested in negative stories of wrongdoing or scandals than in telling positive stories about victories or efficient operations."⁹

In general, "officers believe the media are 'very interested' in scandalous stories, but only 'somewhat interested' in technical or organizational policy stories."¹⁰ This is understandable; after all, the military are the watchdogs and the media are supposed to watch the watchdogs.

What has been missing is a detailed empirical study of whether the civilian and military media convey distinctively different depictions of, perspectives on, and opinions about the military's attitudes and actions, as well as about the supposed gap itself. For what people derive, learn, and think about these subjects can differ significantly depending on their news diet. Our purpose, then, is to compare and contrast the depictions of military culture by the civilian and military media.¹¹

Methodology

Such an ambitious study requires limits. Since we are particularly concerned about the views of policymakers and those who could influence or are interested in public policy, it is logical to begin by limiting our research on the civilian side to elite media: specifically to the obvious choices of *The New York Times* (NYT), national paper of record, and *The Washington Post* (WP) as the capital's leading newspaper, with a record of covering (and scrutinizing) the bureaucracy. To these we added *The Washington Times* (WT) to find out whether a conservative ideological stance produces coverage of and opinions about military affairs different from that of the mainstream newspapers and the military press.¹²

We then selected military publications whose content is as comparable as possible to civilian newspapers—those that provide general news stories, editorials, and commentaries about the military and its culture.¹³ We ultimately decided to analyze three publications about the military with a range of topics roughly comparable to that of the civilian newspapers in our study. All are published weekly or monthly, but

because their subject is the military, they contain approximately the same amount of military content as the daily civilian newspapers accumulate over the same time period.

The first publication, *Proceedings of the US Naval Institute* (hereafter, *Proceedings*), is a monthly from the military that primarily provides its readers with newsworthy commentaries about the Navy, Coast Guard, and Marines, as well as about the Department of Defense and the Pentagon in general. *Proceedings* is mainly comprised of opinion pieces rather than news stories about the same subjects in the other publications.

The other two publications are issued by private organizations. *Armed Forces Journal International* (AFJI) is published monthly by an editorial board comprised primarily of high-ranking military officers. AFJI is read by members of the military elite and civilians interested in military affairs and is written by staff writers and guest contributors, many of whom are members of Congress or of the legislative staff.

Army Times is a weekly publication with a paid subscription of approximately 84,000. Published by Gannett, Inc., it is one of a set of newspapers designed to provide news about the military to armed services personnel. Others are *Marine Navy Times*, *Navy Times*, and *Air Force Times*. There is much content overlap among them. Consequently, readers in every branch of the armed services are presented with similar and consistent views. We chose to analyze the *Army Times* because it has the highest circulation of these newspapers: its availability to military personnel in military offices and base exchanges domestically and abroad actually gives it a circulation much larger than its paid subscriptions.

In analyzing our six publications, we faced daunting questions about time period, content analysis categories, code design, and coding. The time period was the easiest to decide. We limited it to the last six months of 1998: recent enough to be timely, short enough to be manageable, and long enough not to be distorted by any single dramatic event. This period was also virtually devoid of significant military involvement in foreign conflicts, thus enabling us to include pieces about the military directly rather than about its execution of President Clinton's foreign policy decisions.

Because our study is limited to the American military, we set aside all articles about foreign militaries and arms deals involving any foreign country. We then took all of the articles on (1) strategy and doctrine, and (2) technology, contracts, and the domestic arms industry (plus the few obituaries of military personnel) and counted them to show their frequency, but, because our focus is on military culture, we did not code them.

That left us with all the articles about or related to some aspect of military culture. We placed them in the following categories:

Organization, Administration, Disruptions. Changes in internal policies and basic procedures (i.e., "Uniform Prices Down 8.9%/Soldiers Will Get Better Deals on Required Items"¹⁴ and "Air Force to Shed Cold War Structure and Reorganize Units"¹⁵).

Retention, Readiness, and Retirement. Troops who are overworked because they supposedly have too much to do in too little time; retirement and veteran benefits; the gap between civilian and military pay scales (e.g., "The Budget Do-Si-Do: A Frontline Observer Breaks Down the Highly Ritualized Dance Between Lawmakers and the Pentagon Over Military Spending"¹⁶ and "Senators Scold Military Chiefs; Top Officers Accused of Failing to Warn Soon Enough of Readiness Decline"¹⁷).

Military Values and Morals, Superiority, and Leadership. The need to maintain and improve superior values of leadership, integrity, and discipline in the military; the decline of civilian values, and criticism of violators of the military code of justice (e.g., "Cultural Demolition in the Military"¹⁸ and "Obligations of the Citizen-Soldier"¹⁹).

Education, Training, and Discipline. Military academies (such as Virginia Military Institute) and colleges; disciplinary regulations; basic training; subsequent specialized training (e.g., "The Failure of the Inter-Deployment Training Cycle"²⁰ and "At Military Schools, a Stricter Definition of Learning; Academies Gain Students as Parents Seek More Discipline"²¹).

Military and the Media. Stories about the controversial CNN report on the alleged use by the U.S. military of chemical weapons in Cambodia (e.g., "Getting CNN Back on Track: The Issue of Accountability"²² and "CNN, Arnett Are Hard Hit by Major Retraction"²³).

Sex, Promiscuity, Adultery in the Military. Adultery charges against Army Major General David Hale; the ban on pornographic magazines and movies at military exchanges (e.g., "Adultery Still Unacceptable In Proposed Pentagon Rules; No Officer-Enlisted Fraternization Allowed in Any Service"²⁴ and "Until Death Do Us Part?"²⁵).

Women in the Military. The ability of women to fight in combat; controversy of single-sex training (i.e., "Women in Arms Say No Thanks to Combat; Army Study Shows Few Would Volunteer"²⁶ and "Drafting Women Would Double Eligibility Rolls"²⁷).

Gays in the Military. Don't ask, don't tell policy (e.g., "Homosexuals Must Be Given Chance to Prove Their Fitness for Duty"²⁸ and "Court Rejects Appeal of Discharged Gay Flier"²⁹).

A breakdown of categories is shown in Table 1.

Table 1**Percentages of All Coded Articles by Subject**

	<i>NYT</i>	<i>WP</i>	<i>WT</i>	<i>AFJI</i>	Proceed.	<i>AT</i>
Organiz.	35	35	7	5	11	20
Retention	22	19	30	38	44	38
Values	14	15	27	48	33	16
Education	3	16	2	5	5	2
Media	7	5	11	5	2	1
Adultery	13	7	11	-	2	10
Women	1	4	9	-	4	12
Gays	5	>1	2	-	-	2

Note: Percentages are approximate; totals may not equal 100.

We started the coding process by dividing all the pieces into two different types. First and most obviously was news. Second was opinion, consisting of editorials, op-eds, and commentaries. We coded each news story for its prominence/size,³⁰ provider,³¹ source, and attitude. Attitude referred to how we thought military public relations officers would respond to a piece—as expressing a positive, neutral (neither positive nor negative), ambiguous (both positive and negative), or negative attitude or perspective about the military. An editorial in *AFJI* supporting the military's request for an increased budget was coded as positive. Exemplifying neutrality was a short AP story in *The New York Times* announcing that the Pentagon had made changes in its guidelines and procedures dealing with adultery in the military. An example of ambiguity was a story from *The Washington Times* that identified a problem (retention in this case), and showed how, given more money, the military had the ability and will to rectify it. A series of investigative articles written by Dana Priest for *The Washington Post* was negative because they exposed how the U.S. military trained foreign soldiers and turned a blind eye to their execution of human rights abuses in those countries.

Because this study specifically focuses on the military-civilian culture gap, we were also curious to see the extent to which the publications discussed the gap. Although there was not much direct reference to the gap, there was extensive coverage of dissatisfaction

with the morals and values of civilian leaders, particularly President Clinton as commander in chief. A second emphasis was on the importance of the military in maintaining its superior values, morals, and traditions that cannot and should not be threatened.

In order to verify the validity of the results, both intracoder and intercoder reliability tests were performed. Intracoding was done by the original coder, who recoded ten random pieces to compare to the first set of results. Someone who was not involved in the study and did not participate in the design of the coding rules conducted the intercoder test. This individual also coded ten random pieces to compare to the results of the original coder. Intracoding proved 96 percent reliable, with all possible coding choices identical except for one source; intercoding resulted in 92.5 percent reliability, with one subject, three attitudes, and three sources coded differently.

Findings

There were some superficial similarities among our six publications, starting with the fact that a prominent category in all the publications is Retention, Readiness, Retirement.³² These were stories and commentaries about the military's problems in retaining personnel, low troop morale, lack of combat readiness, and the concomitant need for substantial increases in the defense budget. Articles about Organization, Administration, Disruptions and Military Values and Morals, Superiority, Leadership were also relatively common. In contrast, the percentages of stories were low for Education, Training, and Discipline and Military and the Media, with the exception of one outlet for each subject.

Surprisingly, even combining the three coded categories of Sex, Promiscuity, Adultery, Women in the Military, and Gays in the Military resulted in relatively low scores: 19 percent for *The New York Times*, 12 percent for *The Washington Post*, 6 percent for *Proceedings*, and none at all for *AFJL*. Only *The Washington Times* (22 %) and *Army Times* (24%) had a somewhat higher number of such stories. And even the last two publications joined the other four in having barely any articles on gays in the military. Not only were there relatively few pieces about these controversial issues; most of them were neutral or ambiguous rather than positive or negative.

In editorials and commentaries, the subjects of Retention, Readiness, Retirement and Military Values and Morals, Superiority, Leadership were the two most frequently discussed. On the other hand, with the exception of one commentary in *Proceedings*, there were no editorials

or commentaries about women in the military in any of the outlets.

The most important finding is the absence of negative news stories and editorials. At the least, the ratio is approximately 2 to 1 of positive versus negative stories, and much wider for most of the publications, as shown in Tables 2 and 3.

Underlying these similarities in the distribution and number of articles by category, there are fascinating and significant differences among the publications, as documented below.

The New York Times

The most important finding for the *NYT* is that it had significantly fewer (169, of which 76 were coded for this study), shorter, and less prominent stories than the other civilian newspapers. This may be

Table 2

Percentages of Attitudes - Coded News Stories

	<i>NYT</i>	<i>WP</i>	<i>WT</i>	<i>AFJI</i>	<i>Proceed.</i>	<i>AT</i>
Positive	11	41	22	83	57	28
Neutral	47	18	14	8	14	34
Negative	6	12	3	-	-	2
Ambig.	36	29	62	8	29	35

Note: Percentages are approximate; totals may not equal 100.

Table 3

Percentages of Attitudes - Coded Editorials

	<i>NYT</i>	<i>WP</i>	<i>WT</i>	<i>AFJI</i>	<i>Proceed.</i>	<i>AT</i>
Positive	-	57	34	75	51	59
Neutral	-	-	3	-	-	3
Negative	50	29	11	-	-	7
Ambig.	50	14	51	25	49	31

Note: Percentages are approximate; totals may not equal 100.

attributable in part to the location of the *NYT* in New York City, where the Pentagon is not a local story. Also, while the *NYT* contained a large number of military stories, many of them were not about the American military. Focusing so heavily on such foreign affairs issues, the *NYT* left less space for news about the American military compared to the Washington newspapers.

Given the penchant of *NYT* stories to include criticism of the military, it is no surprise that only 11 percent of them were positive. Moreover, many of these were positive only by default; they did not praise the military, but rather were stories that the military would be pleased to see appearing in the media (e.g., CNN apologizing to the military and public for giving misinformation).

It is surprising, however, that only 6 percent of the *NYT* stories were negative. Rather, the vast majority of the paper's stories were neutral (47%) or ambiguous (36%), without much comment, observation, or judgment. Neutrality resulted from the *NYT*'s reliance on wire services (27%), which try to provide stories that are essentially factual and devoid of comment.

The *NYT*'s critical viewpoint of the military was most evident in its editorials, which made it clear that the military had enough money and did not need any more. The focus was on what the Pentagon had, not what it did not, and the military should spend it more efficiently. According to an editorial headlined "The Insatiable Pentagon": "lost in the noise [of the increased military budget] was any recognition that an annual Pentagon budget of \$271 billion should be more than sufficient to keep American forces in fighting trim, provided it is spent in rational ways. . . . [I]t is dispiriting to find the Pentagon asserting that it needs ever larger budgets to insure that American forces can quickly and effectively deal with potential threats. . . . [T]he Pentagon has never figured out how to allocate money where it is really needed or to reduce waste and duplication. . . ."³³ The contention is that readiness is not nearly the crisis that the military claims it to be. An op-ed piece argued that "the Pentagon's equipment is aging, but not for lack of money. It is aging because the Pentagon is buying the wrong weapons."³⁴

Most of the pieces made only indirect reference to a military-civilian culture gap. When expressed, the view, either explicit or implicit, was one of doubt that a gap existed and that, even if there was one, it was exaggerated. One news story began, "More and more these days, there is talk about the cultural chasm between the military and the rest of society, what most people consider the 'real world.' Some people want

to narrow that divide, as though it is something new, and bad.”³⁵ Another story observed that “some in Washington have darkly warned that the accusations against the President have somehow underscored a growing and dangerous gap between the unbending values of the military and the more tolerant views of society in general.”³⁶

The Washington Post

The *WP* had roughly the same distribution of news stories and editorials on the military as the *NYT*. But it had far more articles (291 compared to 169). One reason was that its regular feature column, entitled “Military Matters,” summarizes newsworthy information about various aspects of the military. In addition, given the proximity of the Pentagon, a number of articles about the military appeared in the paper’s metro section, the “Federal Page,” and the “Federal Diary.”

The staff writers’ attitudes toward the military appeared to range from empathetic to sympathetic to benign. Thus, 41 percent of the *WP* news stories were positive, compared to 11 percent for the *NYT*. Typical of the articles written by the *WP* staff writers was attribution of problems in the military to civilian leaders who cut the budget: “throughout the military, there is mounting evidence of erosion in America’s combat strength and troop morale. A decade of downsizing and reduced post-Cold War defense spending has coincided with a sharp jump in the number of troop deployments to Bosnia, the Middle East, and elsewhere, straining the armed forces in ways unseen since the last wave of defense budget cuts after the Vietnam War.”³⁷

Fifty-seven percent of opinion pieces in the *WP* were positive. The editors made it clear that they favored increased defense funding and generally supported the military as an institution. Examples of such editorials included statements such as: “We think the military needs more money than it is currently getting,”³⁸ “It goes without saying that the military deserves just compensation,”³⁹ and praise for the Pentagon continuing to provide blankets to homeless shelters in Washington, against Congressional recommendation to end the program.

The *WP* contained few articles directly focused on the military-civilian culture gap. When it was mentioned in articles such as those about military retention problems, the focus was specific: the pay gap between civilians and military personnel. Thus, an article about the effects of not having a military draft described how the Pentagon was making positive efforts to train military public relations officials who hoped to improve the “growing gap in understanding between the

nation's military and civilian worlds that has made the public affairs training at Fort Meade increasingly important."⁴⁰

The Washington Times

At 292, the *WT* had roughly the same number of articles about the military as the *WP*. However, because 27 percent of them were opinion pieces (editorials, columns, op-eds), it had significantly fewer news stories than its Washington rival. Many of its news stories were contained in a regular feature called "Inside the Ring," which reported on a wide range of military issues, including the first Army-Navy women's flag football game and a military court case about sexual assault.⁴¹ The *WT* devoted much more attention (22%) than the other civilian newspapers (19% *NYT*; 11% *WP*) to scandal, sex, and gender. What this meant was that the *WT* focused far more than its competitors on issues then besetting the military.

At 3 percent, the *WT* had the lowest percentage of negative stories of the civilian newspapers. Moreover, the *WT* was not critical of the military as an institution, but rather was against actions by military personnel or decisions made by DoD officials that threatened the conservative culture of the military. The inclusion of women in combat and basic training was one such issue, and the *WT* seemed determined to keep women out of military conflict. Predictably, given its pro-military stance, the *WT* had twice the percentage of positive news stories (22) than the *NYT* (11). Yet the *WT* had only half the percentage of positive stories as its Washington rival, the *Washington Post*. Instead, it had the highest percentage of ambiguous stories (62%) of all the publications. What made the stories ambiguous was the "problem-blame-solution" format of most articles. Stories would recognize that there was a problem that was negative for the military, such as retention or readiness. But the blame was attributed not to oversights and policies made by the JCS or other high-ranking military leaders, who were depicted as doing the best job they could with what they had and who were aware of the problems. For example, Army Chief of Staff Dennis Reimer was quoted as officially acknowledging that "training is suffering. And bases have been neglected. And soldiers need to be paid more and given a better retirement system. . . . [T]here exist warning signs that need to be heeded."⁴² Instead blame was laid almost exclusively on President Clinton or Congress, usually for denying the military adequate funds. As for the solutions, there were frequent invocations of the

military fixing, changing, or improving rules, policies, and so on to better deal with the problems. Above all, the solution urged was increased funding.

In comparison to the other civilian newspapers, the *WT* had double the coverage of the military-civilian culture gap. Its general view was that military values are vital and should be preserved. The military culture is rightly conservative, observing high standards, morals, and values; any further trend to make the military more like civilian culture would be detrimental to the institution's very existence.

Criticism of the civilian culture, assertions of the gap, and support for the military occurred primarily in the newspapers' defense of members of the armed services chastised for public criticism of President Clinton's affair. According to the *WT*, it was very difficult for military personnel to respect Clinton, when his values and morals represented not the military culture he commanded as commander in chief, but the supposedly debased civilian society. According to one piece: Bill Clinton's "conduct as commander-in-chief sets an example for the thousands in uniform who must obey the rules. . . . [W]hy aren't Americans calling for Clinton's resignation? Perhaps the nexus between honesty and effective leadership has been lost on most. At the basic squad level, a soldier must have trust in what their squad leader is telling them. Soldiers will very quickly see through a leader's attempt to B.S. them."⁴³

Military personnel are supposed to follow the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), and thus not criticize Clinton in any way. Yet, according to the *WT*, not only were they finding it difficult to avoid engaging in such criticism, but they were frustrated with the double standard that exists: the much stricter standards and rules for military personnel, but none for the president, the commander in chief of the armed forces. Thus, the *WT* published several news stories and editorials supporting the right of members of the armed forces to criticize the president, even though doing so violated the UCMJ. The *WT* also called for the president, as commander in chief, to be placed under the same rules as military personnel.

Armed Forces Journal International

At 83 percent, *AFJI* had by far the highest percentage of positive stories of any of the publications. Most of them reported how the military was improving itself, becoming more effective and efficient, and how selected leaders were doing an excellent job of commanding troops. Other stories recounted improvements in technology and strate-

gic approaches that were building a greater military for the twenty-first century. None of the news stories was coded as negative.

When problems in the military were mentioned, such as readiness and retention, it was only as a brief preface to the description of attempts by the military itself to fix or at least rectify them. Solutions and an optimistic outlook were the themes of *AFJI* pieces. Thus, phrases such as the following were common:

- "The Department of Defense has embarked on an aggressive campaign to develop and implement a force health protection strategy for sustaining and preserving the health of the forces."⁴⁴
- "We have taken a number of steps to help retention of our pilots and other flight officers."⁴⁵
- "We are cranking up our pilot training, and we have done just about everything we can do that is fiscally and physically possible."⁴⁶

Commentaries and editorials in *AFJI* supported the military and advocated increased funding for its budget so that the armed forces could survive and prosper. In this way, *AFJI* acted as a conduit for the Pentagon, providing it with positive public relations. As with the *WT*, editorials and commentaries in *AFJI* usually placed the blame for problems the military faced on Clinton and/or Congress for being incapable of providing sufficient resources for immediate national security concerns.⁴⁷ Congress was also criticized for wasting money on the military that was not needed for a specific project.

Like the *WT*, the *AFJI* praised military culture and criticized civilian culture. Its support for the former was evident in pieces about the worth and merit of military service. Pro-military Congressman James V. Hansen (R., UT) referred to "the dedication and sacrifice of those who have bravely answered the call to serve in our nation's uniform."⁴⁸

AFJI also emphasized the invidious gap between the two cultures by condemning politicians for not supporting an increase in funding for a deserving and vital military. Editor John G. Roos attacked Clinton as "the object of little sympathy in military quarters. Perhaps that is because of the disdain for the military that Clinton brought with him to the White House . . . or perhaps it's because most of the men and women who serve in the nation's military forces have long realized what is now

just dawning on most of their fellow Americans” (that civilian leadership was corrupt and untrustworthy).⁴⁹

Proceedings

Like the *WT* and *AFJI*, commentators writing for *Proceedings* acknowledged that challenges faced the Navy, Coast Guard, and Marines. The view was that the branches were facing internal “challenges,” and practical solutions should be implemented to improve the situation. Problems were presented followed by exhortations to do better or assertions of progress or proposed solutions. Most of the opinion pieces followed this pattern, as the following examples illustrate:

- “As in the death by a thousand cuts, each service is being challenged. . . [The military] must develop a long range, comprehensive plan that combines the talent and resources of all the individual services.”⁵⁰
- “As we cut manpower and budgets, but keep our level of commitments largely unchanged, the squeeze is felt very painfully. . . Changing this will not be easy, but it is possible. It will require a conscious effort to buck the system on the parts of our leaders. . . We are making progress. . .”⁵¹
- “For the military . . . the move toward the inclusion of peer and subordinate feedback could offer significant benefits. . . Thus far, each service has attacked the problem separately, because each has different needs, but the salient change advocated here is applicable to all.”⁵²

Opinion pieces also focused on the budget crunch the military had felt in the last few years, and the problems with readiness and retention. *Proceedings* was more optimistic about the future than *AFJI* and the *WT*. Dangers and challenges were viewed as capable of solutions. Unlike the *AFJI* and *WT*, which openly called for Congress to provide an increased budget to the military, the commentaries in *Proceedings* accepted the budgetary constraints. They approached these problems with suggested responses the military branches could make internally, such as reorganization, being more effective and efficient, and offering better training. For example, John Gamboa wrote that the “responsibility for shaping DoD’s RMA [Revolution in Military Affairs] implementation strategy is squarely in the services’ court.”⁵³

This positive outlook compared to that of *AFJ* or *WT* may be due to the fact that *Proceedings* is published by and for military personnel who must be practical, not ideological, in their planning for the present and future effectiveness of the military. The focus is on innovation and change, modernization, and reorganization to take account of budget limitations. The opinion pieces appeared as positive, designed to raise the spirits of military personnel.

More than the other publications, *Proceedings* included a large number of commentaries specifically about the alleged military-civilian culture gap. They agreed on the existence of the military-civilian culture gap, and like the *WT*, supported the former and criticized the latter. What was debated was whether the gap had positive benefits or negative repercussions, and whether it should be fixed or remain.

Overall, the main theme was that the military as an institution possesses and maintains a set of traditions, values, and morals that are superior to civilian culture. These cultural values, also known as "martial values," include "boldness, integrity, honor, courage, commitment, and intrepidity."⁵⁴ Other terms that recurred were loyalty, motivation, discipline, work ethic, duty, sacrifice, teamwork, toughness, truth and honesty, and tradition. The language used by commentators in *Proceedings*, all of them military personnel, to describe the military, its branches, and its members, demonstrated the publication's immense pride in the military and its culture.

In terms of respect for civilian leadership, there were only a few commentaries that contained even one critical statement about Clinton, Congress, or other civilian leaders. Compared to the other outlets, particularly *AFJ* and *WT*, there was only one commentary written about the reaction of the military towards Clinton's extramarital affair. *Proceedings* did, however, criticize civilian culture, as in the following: "Broken homes, single parents, and crowded schools have replaced teachers, ministers, and two-parent families. Teenagers are no longer encouraged to serve their country. . . . Beavis and Butt-head have replaced Mom and Dad as teachers of lessons on authority and respect—or the resistance to both."⁵⁵

Army Times

The overall focus of *Army Times* was not the military as an institution, but military personnel, active and retired, and how issues would affect them. Its stories covered day-to-day events, decisions, and problems that members of the armed forces faced. The most common subject

matter was the pay gap existing between military servicemen and their civilian counterparts. This topic was tied directly to retention problems in the military, early retirement, lack of troop morale, and military readiness problems in general. The subjects of other stories range from ways to reduce body fat to become better soldiers to retirement benefits for reservists.

Next to the *NYT*, *Army Times* had the highest percentage of neutral news stories (34%). Even when issues were controversial, such as the censorship of "sexually explicit" materials in armed forces stores, the articles were often bland and factual, devoid of preference: for example, a "board of six men and two women is reviewing all questionable materials, as required by the 1996 Military Honor and Decency Act."⁵⁶

The overall editorial theme of the *Army Times* was more people, fewer missions, and better pay and benefits for members of the military. It was the only military publication to express any negative opinions, such as a "Back Talk" criticism of the military for its UCMJ rule threatening soldiers who spoke against President Clinton. Even so, 59 percent of the *Army Times'* editorials were positive. The *Army Times* agreed that the military needed more money, but also believed that the military was progressing and conditions were improving for servicemen and women. In "The Budget Could Have Been A Lot Worse," the editors wrote that even though the bill "has no blockbuster new personnel provisions. . . it does have a host of small things that, taken together, lead one to believe that Congress does understand the stresses of military life, the retention problems facing the services and the need to put money not just into hardware, but into attracting, training and keeping good people."⁵⁷

The *Army Times* made no mention of any military-culture gap, real or imagined. The only related position that the paper held is that the military should not tolerate adultery. One possible reason for the dearth of pieces about the gap was the paper's main objective of providing useful, practical, and often positive information to members of the armed forces, not ideological debates that could be viewed as impractical and unworthy of discussion. In an editorial about military personnel's critique of Clinton's affair, the *Army Times* editors wrote, "while such comments and feelings are being expressed by some military people, and indeed the civilian population as well, we get the feeling that soldiers have more important things to talk about in the barracks. . . . What matters most is what matters to most Americans: pay, retirement, housing, adequate health care and a general sense of appreciation for a job well done. . . . Those are the things that the troops really care about."⁵⁸

Conclusions

We do not assume that the elite civilian media and the specialized media for the military are the only, or perhaps even the most significant, sources shaping people's perceptions, information, knowledge, and understanding of the military. Surely, as just one other significant source (aside from advertising), popular culture such as the movies *The General's Daughter*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *The Thin Red Line*, and the 1960s classic *Dr. Strangelove*, television shows such as "Major Dad," and a whole horde of comedies, have influenced how the public and perhaps service personnel feel about and view the military.

However, as we have documented, each of these six publications feeds a constant drip of stories and opinions about the military to members of the civilian and military elite, individuals who, arguably, are more knowledgeable about the military and less influenced by popular culture depictions than ordinary people.

We do not assume any automatic cause-effect correspondence between media contents and readers'/viewers' perceptions of and attitudes towards the military. People do resist and reject media contents.⁵⁹ However, selective exposure is quite common, so that people do tend to depend on media whose perspectives they share or are inclined to accept. They are also likely to grant credibility and believability to contents emanating from these media. Besides, most civilians, unless they have family in the military, are not exposed to military media. Military personnel, in turn, while gaining entertainment and some news from civilian media, are likely to rely on military publications for news about the military and related subjects.

Thus, we can derive seven important findings from our research:

First, the civilian and military news media are less monolithic and more diverse than conventional wisdom and our expectations allow. Indeed, our study has identified differences in content not just between the two but within them.

Second, we have found distinctive perspectives on and attitudes toward the military in different newspapers' coverage of military affairs and issues. The *NYT* is less positive in its depiction of the military than the other civilian publications. On the other hand, the *WP* is surprisingly supportive of the military. The *WT* is very supportive of the military, but in the specific fashion we have documented. It is also closer to military publications than its counterpart civilian newspapers. *AFJI* and *Proceedings* are most supportive of the military, but the attitude in *Army Times* is more ambiguous.

Third, ambiguity is a prominent feature of much of the coverage, but it differs by publication. In particular, the *WT* (62% ambiguous news stories) pursues the “problem-blame-solution” format, and the *Army Times* (35% ambiguous news stories) achieves ambiguity with news that is positive for the military, but negative for members of the armed services or vice versa. In both cases the ambiguity is more positive towards the military than negative.

Fourth, there are hardly any negative depictions of the military, even in the *NYT*. Coverage of elections, the president, and Congress is often critical, “gotcha,” and even hostile—but not of the military.⁶⁰ During the last thirty years, citizens have lost trust in the federal government and many other institutions of American life “to do the right thing.”⁶¹ A conspicuous exception is the military, which went from fifth place in trust in 1971 to first in 1998 (albeit with only 43%). People “have confidence in the military’s ability to perform military tasks.”⁶² They believe that military leaders are dedicated to their mission and are addressing the military’s “problems squarely and honorably.” We believe that positive coverage and a dearth of negative coverage about the military in the elite civilian press have contributed to the military’s favorable standing.

Fifth, our data directly contradict the conventional wisdom that the media are very interested in scandalous stories about sex, promiscuity, adultery, and women and gays in the military at the expense of organization, administration, retention, readiness, and retirement.⁶³

Sixth, in the military publications, particularly in *AFJI* and *Proceedings*, coverage is strongly positive toward the military. But the military that is portrayed so favorably is conservative, Republican, and places a high value on its culture and morality against that of civilian society. This supports Ole Holsti’s findings about the military’s side of the culture gap becoming more conservative as contrasted to the more liberal civilian side.⁶⁴ The military media are, therefore, exacerbating the gap between military and civilian cultures.

Seventh, our findings help explain why people in the military are inclined to take a more dubious view than civilians of coverage about the military in the civilian media. The military publications they read present such a positive view of the military that any other coverage seems negative by comparison. This helps explain why, according to the 1999 Triangle Institute for Strategic Studies survey results, there is a much higher percentage of active duty and reserves/guard respondents (32% each), compared to 15 percent of civilian nonveterans, who believe the media are somewhat hostile toward the military, and that 45 percent of the military respondents believe the media are somewhat

supportive compared to 52 percent of the civilian nonveteran respondents. Of course, the civilian coverage is in no way hostile to the military, so one would have to be deluded to claim that they are "very hostile." Rationality prevails: only 2 percent of the respondents (the same percentage for each group) believe that the mass media are very hostile in their depictions of the military.

Notes

1. Lindsay Cohn, "The Evolution of the Civil-Military 'Gap' Debate." Paper prepared for the TISS Project on the Gap Between the Military and Civilian Society, 1999.
2. These data come from Frank Aukofer and William P. Lawrence, *America's Team* (Nashville, TN: The Freedom Forum First Amendment Center, 1995).
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 178.
5. Ibid., 179.
6. Ibid., 180.
7. Ibid., 182.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 183.
10. This finding comes from a Gallup poll conducted by the Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation and the Media and Security Project Cantigny Conference Surveys Final Report (August 1999).
11. A recent relevant work is Stephen P. Aubin, *Distorting Defense: Network News and National Security* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), which indicts the television networks' evening news coverage of national security issues during the 1980s and early 1990s for failing to live up to journalistic standards of fairness, accuracy, and objectivity. Stories lacked context, failed to explain both sides, and were hostile to the Reagan defense buildup. The news focused on "weapons that did not work as advertised, corrupt contractors, and outrageously high defense budgets" (p. 1). The research uses transcripts obtained from the Pentagon's Current News Analysis and Research Service archives. Three main explanations are offered for the inadequate, distorted coverage: the brevity of anchor-only reports ("tells"); the fact that anchors, White House correspondents, and general assignment reporters covered national security more than reporters at the Pentagon and State Department who had the most expertise in the subject; and the attitude and bias, lack of knowledge, and sensationalism of these generalities, the anchors, and the shows' producers. The book can be tendentious, too trusting of the Reagan administration and the military, and its finding that 70 percent of the networks' national security reporting passes the test of good journalistic standards (p. 188) goes underreported. Like some of the Pentagon's weapons, this assault on the media is effective but less deadly than touted.

12. Justifying our choices, the 1999 TISS survey results indicate that 76 percent of the respondents get their information from newspapers. We considered including, but for lack of time decided to omit, news weeklies such as *Time* and *Newsweek*, as well as television news and opinion shows, talk radio (Rush Limbaugh, G. Gordon Liddy), and popular culture. We considered coding several opinion magazines, but they published only nine articles about the military in the six months of our study: five—predictably critical—in *The Nation*, one in the *Atlantic Monthly*, one in *The New Republic*, and two in *The Weekly Standard*—one about Linda Tripp and her employer (the DoD), and the other about the use of ground troops. The fact that only 7 percent of the respondents in the TISS survey reported getting their information about the military from opinion magazines corresponds with the dearth of articles we found.
13. We considered using the *Early Bird*, a daily compilation that “provides DoD leaders with a window into what the media, and by extension, the American public, know about DoD’s mission performance.” Because it is essentially a collection of articles from other news publications—both primary and obscure—that the Armed Forces Information Service (AFIS) deems of interest to military personnel, we chose to exclude it from our study. Lindsay Cohn, “The *Current News Early Bird*.” Paper prepared for the TISS project on the Gap Between the Military and Civilian Society, 1999. The AFIS works directly for the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, and the *Early Bird* staff is made up entirely of civilians. Articles are nearly always published in the *Early Bird* the same day they are being run in their place of origin, although there is sometimes a lag of one day or two.
14. Lisa Daniel, “Uniform Prices Down 8.9%/Soldiers Will Get Better Deals on Required Items,” *Army Times*, 12 October 1998, 3.
15. Associated Press, “Air Force to Shed Cold War Structure and Reorganize Units,” *The New York Times*, 5 August 1998: A16, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>
16. Bill Johnson, “The Budget Do-Si-Do: A Frontline Observer Breaks Down the Highly Ritualized Dance Between Lawmakers and the Pentagon Over Military Spending,” *Armed Forces Journal International* (November 1998): 10.
17. Bradley Graham, “Senators Scold Military Chiefs; Top Officers Accused of Failing to Warn Soon Enough of Readiness Decline,” *The Washington Post*, 30 September 1998, A02, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>
18. Paul Craig Roberts, “Cultural Demolition in the Military,” *The Washington Times*, 20 November 1998, A20, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>
19. John P. Brown, “Obligations of the Citizen-Soldier,” *Proceedings of the U.S. Naval Institute* (July 1998): 50-51.
20. Mark Butler, “The Failure of the Inter-Deployment Training Cycle,” *Proceedings of the U.S. Naval Institute* (September 1998): 123-125.
21. David Nakamura, “At Military Schools, a Stricter Definition of Learning; Academies Gain Students as Parents Seek More Discipline,” *The Washington Post*, 21 September 1998, B01, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>
22. Perry M. Smith, “Getting CNN Back on Track: The Issue of Accountability,” *Armed Forces Journal International* (October 1998): 94.

23. Joyce Howard Price, "CNN, Arnett Are Hard Hit by Major Retraction," *The Washington Times* 3 July 1998, A9, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>
24. Stephen Barr, "Adultery Still Unacceptable in Proposed Pentagon Rules; No Officer-Enlisted Fraternization Allowed in Any Service," *The Washington Post*, 30 July 1998, A17, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>
25. E. T. Gomulka, "Until Death Do Us Part?" *Proceedings of the U.S. Naval Institute* (November 1998): 49-51.
26. Rowan Scarborough, "Women in Arms Say No Thanks to Combat; Army Study Shows Few Would Volunteer," *The Washington Times*, 29 September 1998, A1, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>
27. Daniel, "Drafting Women Would Double Eligibility Rolls," *Army Times*, 13 July 1998, 8.
28. Nick Adde, "Homosexuals Must Be Given Chance to Prove Their Fitness for Duty," *Army Times*, 3 August 1998, 9.
29. Associated Press, "Court Rejects Appeal of Discharged Gay Flier," *The New York Times*, 20 October 1998, 28, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>
30. A news story was major if it appeared on the front page or was 1000 words or more. A moderate news story was between 500 and 1000 words (unless it was a cover story), and anything else was minor.
31. The provider could be a staff writer, guest writer, wire service (AP, Reuters, AFP), a combination thereof, or not stated.
32. Percentages for coded categories are of the total number of articles coded; articles counted but uncoded are excluded.
33. "The Insatiable Pentagon," *The New York Times*, 1 October 1998, A30, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>
34. Lawrence J. Korb, "Money to Burn at the Pentagon," *The New York Times*, 25 September 1998, A27, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>.
35. David Stout, "The Nation; An Army as Good as Its People, and Vice Versa," *The New York Times*, 26 July 1998, D4, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>
36. Myers, "Scandal Kept in Military Perspective," *The New York Times*, 1 December 1998, A27, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>
37. Graham, "Military Readiness, Morale Show Strain; Budget Contract; Deployments Expand," *The Washington Post*, 13 August 1998, A1, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>
38. ". . . And Military Pensions," *The Washington Post*, 10 October 1998, A22, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>
39. "Wrong on Military Pensions," *The Washington Post*, 29 December 1998, C6, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>
40. Vogel, "At Fort Meade, Military Gears Up Media Machine," *The Washington Post*, 10 October 1998, B3, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>
41. Ernest Blazar, "Inside the Ring," *The Washington Times*, 6 December 1998, A4, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>

42. Blazar, "Inside the Ring," *The Washington Times*, 25 October 1998, A5, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>
43. David G. Bolgiano, "Sex and the Commander-in-Chief," *The Washington Times*, 17 September 1998, A23, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>
44. Diana Beradocco, "Force Health Protection: Tying Gulf War Lessons to Policies for the Future," *Armed Forces Journal International* (December 1998): 28.
45. "Seeking Stability For USAF's Warriors," *Armed Forces Journal International* (November 1998): 29.
46. *Ibid.*, 28.
47. Johnson, "The Budget Do-Si-Do: A Frontline Observer Breaks Down the Highly Ritualized Dance Between Lawmakers and the Pentagon Over Military Spending," *Armed Forces Journal International* (November 1998): 10.
48. Rep. James V. Hansen, "It's Time for New Investment: The Case for Congress to Take the Lead in Significantly Increasing Defense Spending," *Armed Forces Journal International* (October 1998): 12.
49. Roos, "Commander-in-Chief Clinton: The Military Has Already Been Marched Down the Moniker Road," *Armed Forces Journal International* (November 1998): 4.
50. Eric Okerstrom, "No Home on the Range," *Proceedings of the U.S. Naval Institute* (November 1998): 52-55.
51. John T. Natter, Alan Lopez, and Doyle K. Hodges, "Listen to the JOs: Why Retention is a Problem," *Proceedings of the U.S. Naval Institute* (October 1998): 58-62.
52. Owen West, "You Can't Fool the Troops," *Proceedings of the U.S. Naval Institute* (September 1998): 52-54.
53. John Gamboa, "The Cost of Revolution," *Proceedings of the U.S. Naval Institute* (December 1998): 12.
54. Michael Dunaway, "Military Virtue & the Future of the Naval Service," *Proceedings of the U.S. Naval Institute* (December 1998): 76-79.
55. Martha S. Dunne, "Getting Back to Basics," *Proceedings of the U.S. Naval Institute* (September 1998): 101-103.
56. Karen Jowers, "Sexually Explicit Debate Continues/Defense Review of Adult Magazines, Tapes Taking Longer Than Expected," *Army Times*, 14 September 1998, 6.
57. "The Budget Could Have Been a Lot Worse," *Army Times*, 19 October 1998, 37.
58. "What Really Matters," *Army Times*, 14 December 1998, 34.
59. According to the 1999 Cantigny data, less than one half of the public said they wanted to know about *any* of the various types of military stories listed, such as about physical damage (46%) or human casualties (45%), caused by U.S. military action; terrorism in the U.S. (49%); military readiness (48%); or military quality of life (43%). Even fewer (28%) wanted to know about military sex scandals," Cantigny Report, 1.

60. David L. Paletz, *The Media in American Politics* (New York: Longman, 1999), chaps. 10-12; also, Thomas E. Patterson, *Out of Order* (New York: Knopf, 1993).
61. This discussion is based on David C. King and Zachary Karabell, "An American Anomaly: The Evolution of Public Trust in the Military from Tet to Tailhook." Paper presented at the Duke University Political Science Department, 29 January 1999.
62. King and Karabell, 33.
63. Cantigny Report.
64. Ole Holsti, "A Widening Gap Between the U.S. Military and Civilian Society? Some Further Evidence 1998-1999." Paper presented at the TISS Consortium, July 1999.