



**HOW THE U.S. MARINES BROUGHT
RAMBO AND BONO TOGETHER THROUGH RESEARCH
(AND WHY)**

**2012 JAY CHIAT AWARDS
RESEARCH INNOVATIONS CATEGORY**

SUMMARY

No one imagines a return of the draft but, the truth is that the all-volunteer force, (the “legal name” of the U.S. military) continues to be something of an experiment whose success, like that of any commercial marketer’s, is far from guaranteed and depends, (again, as with any marketer) on a steady stream of insight and analysis into both the “market” and wider social trends. Recruitment research has grown more sophisticated over the years driven by industry innovation in such things as sampling and analytic techniques. But its focus on in-category brand differentiation and econometric modeling has ignored an issue that’s recognizable to even casual observers—the military is culturally and demographically separating from the larger society. While this lack of attention isn’t especially surprising—“culture” remains a slippery concept—our client’s staying

relevant demanded a look at things through more of a cultural lens.

“Political-culture” disciplines this unwieldy notion by confining it to attitudes, beliefs and feelings toward the public realm and its institutions, the realm of our client. Our submission describes how research designed with such a lens helped this venerable American brand envision a way to overcome seemingly intractable divisions within the country it faithfully serves.



THE MARKETING CHALLENGE:

The marketing challenge was as it always is, to ensure the Marines remain relevant with a broad cross-section of American youth. This becomes more challenging as the nation copes with a tsunami wave of demographic and, with it perhaps, cultural change. It's desired that recruiting results reflect the "face of the nation" with all its growing diversity, as there is tangible strength in diversity itself, and intangible value in a public institution's being and appearing to be "of the people."

RE-IMAGINING THE PROBLEM:

The Marines have one of the most-recognized and durable brands in American history. Today however, the brand isn't the problem.

At the end of the day, the Marines "sell" prestige in a patriotic, military context—and do it well. Opinion polls like those conducted over many years by Gallup show Americans of every generation are quite consistent in believing the Marines to be the "most elite", the "most prestigious branch" of service and within its "category" that's no doubt true. What they do not make plain is the migration of prestige from the military to other life options, notably college but, also to another service category which is community and global-based. If the Millennials are, as is sometimes said, the second coming of the GIs, the last great "service generation", the service they aspire to is of a different sort. The definition of service and view of its prestige is changing from serving the Nation in armed struggles with other nation-states, Rambo's context if you will, to helping, mainly people of color, in communities at home and abroad—Bono's context.

If the Marine Corps is admirable, it's AmeriCorps and the Peace Corps that are aspirational.



Rosie the Riveter appeared in advertising during WWII.



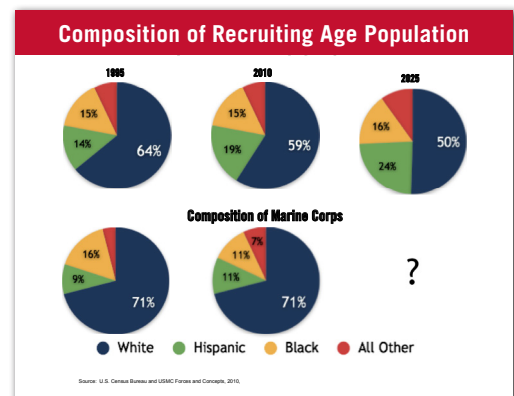
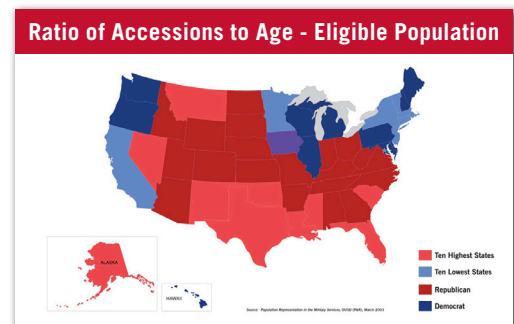
AmeriCorps Recruiting Poster

KEY INSIGHT: RAMBO'S RED, BONO'S BLUE

This shift in the definition of aspirational service however, has a definite skew which is observed in the changing demographics of military recruits, especially those enlisting in the ground forces, (the Army and Marines). The maps at right give a side-by-side comparison of voting in the 2004 Presidential election—the fitful competition between John Kerry and George W. Bush which famously gave rise to public recognition of a “red/blue” divide—and where recruits came from. The maps show a near perfect overlay of Presidential party politics and military recruitment with “red” states producing the most recruits (“accessions”) on a per 1,000 basis of eligible youth and “blue” states producing the least—leading unavoidably to the hypothesis that enlisting is partly conditioned by political beliefs.

We also observed that demographics of Marine Corps joiners are moving in the opposite direction of the unprecedentedly diverse Millennial generations or at least failing to catch up, (chart at right). The Marines are getting “Whiter” relative to the population as a whole.

All of this began to paint a picture of two service and political cultures: the “blood and soil” patriot culture of the racially homogeneous “heartland” from which recruits increasingly come, and the community service/”global citizen” culture of the diverse, cosmopolitan coasts from which they don’t -- the service cultures of Senator McCain and President Obama, as it were, the latter of who’s is ascendant with contemporary youth.



THE RESEARCH QUESTION:

Can Rambo and Bono Both Fit Within the Brand? Can McCain and Obama?



As our rough analysis pointed to the influence of political-culture on a young person's decision to join, it became apparent that we would have to find a way of bridging this political-cultural divide. Doing so would require a strategic idea and insights of the sort that the military recruitment

research community has failed to provide. We entertained bids from a wide variety of research suppliers from traditional marketing research companies, to political pollsters, to ethnographers but found the traditional brand, political and cultural lenses were too narrow for a problem of this sort.

After an exhaustive search we finally settled on a small research firm in Cambridge, MA specializing in youth attitudes in the civic space. Experimenting with a brand like the Marines however, is not something one does lightly, so the research effort was exhaustive in that it left no stone unturned in pursuit of its objectives, consisting of 26 focus groups with Millennials and parents held all over the country and a large-sample quantitative survey, (n=10,000) with an error rate of under 1.5 percent.

The research assignment had two main objectives:

Test the strategic idea that there was exploitable alignment between the Marines' current missions which today run the gamut from traditional war-fighting to militarized humanitarian assistance and "service" contemporary youth are interested in.

See if this alignment can be exploited without either alienating "the base", or diminishing the Marines' "elite warrior" brand.

Here's what we found.



A NATION OF TRIBES

Segmentation analysis surfaced seven political-cultural “clusters” and confirmed that the heart of the brand’s franchise – the base -- as measured by favorability and enlistment intent are conservative White Southerners (many of whom self-describe as Evangelicals) and secondarily, Hispanics of Mexican lineage, who resemble conservative White Southerners in terms of their political-cultural beliefs.

“HARD POWER”, “SOFT POWER”

In order to understand how Millennials viewed the current mission of the AVF and in particular the new missions of the Marine Corps, and how these views reflected the diverse set of challenges that the military is currently confronting, we conducted a factor analysis analyzing three sets of questions from the survey.

The first set of questions featured images that depicted various aspects of American life and various roles of the military. For example, images of George W. Bush atop the rubble on 9/11, a same sex wedding, a Marine in combat and a Marine interacting with children in Iraq, were shown. The second set

Segmentation Analysis

16-24 year-old Millennial population fits into 7 cluster:



Methodology: Role of the Military

- Each individual’s scores on the two indices were then combined. In addition to individual scores, the mean scores for various demographic and segmentation groups were then created and plotted (see following pages) in order to analyze the way that these groups viewed issues related to roles of the Military.

Hard Power Variables

- Importance of a member of the Military being “tough”
- Importance of a member of the Military being “a warrior”
- Supportive of responding forcefully when attacked
- Believes photo of Marine in combat speaks to what is right about America
- Supportive of fighting GWOT
- Importance of defending an ally or sovereign nation that asks for assistance in response to being attacked

Soft Power Variables

- Supportive of helping people when persecuted
- Supportive of responding to natural disasters around the world
- Supportive of protecting citizens of other nations to ensure democratic ideals and values can flourish
- Importance of member of the Military being “diplomatic”
- Importance of member of the Military being a “humanitarian”
- Believes photo of Marine with children speaks to what is right about America



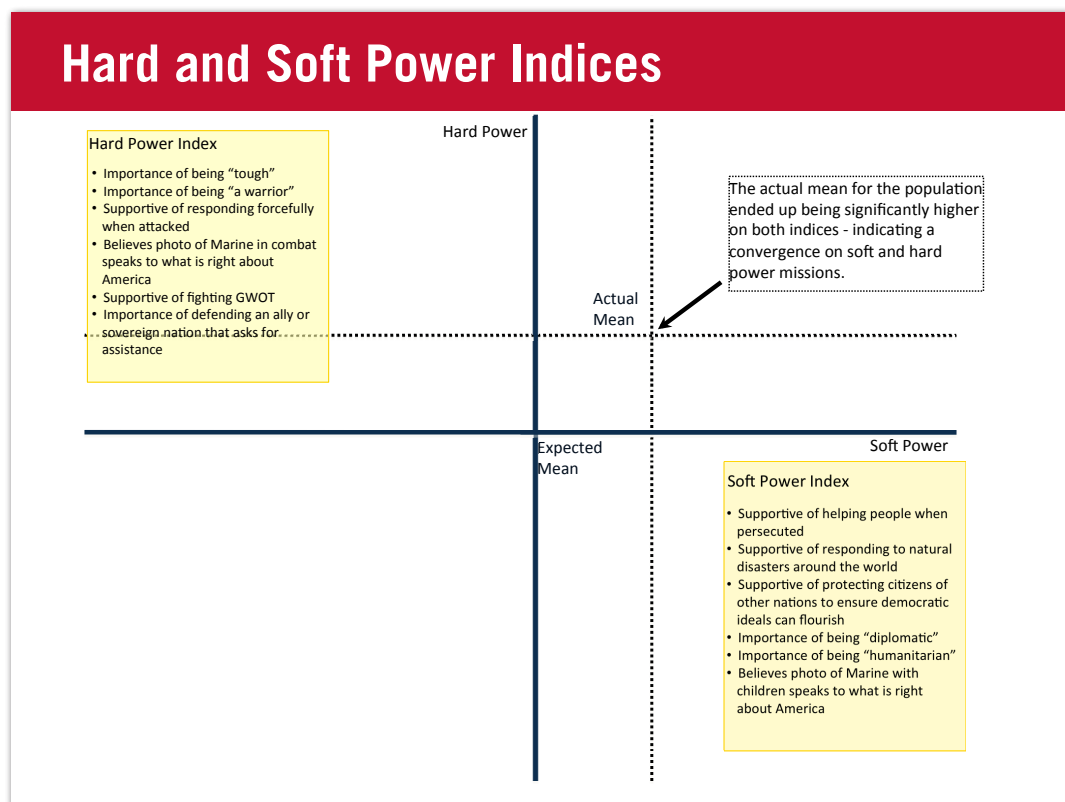
MARINES

featured questions about what the role of the military should be. A wide variety of missions, from pure humanitarian work (“soft power”, so-called) to engaging in preemptive military actions (“hard power”) were tested. Finally, respondents were asked about attributes that members of the military should have—ranging from diplomatic skills to “being a warrior.”

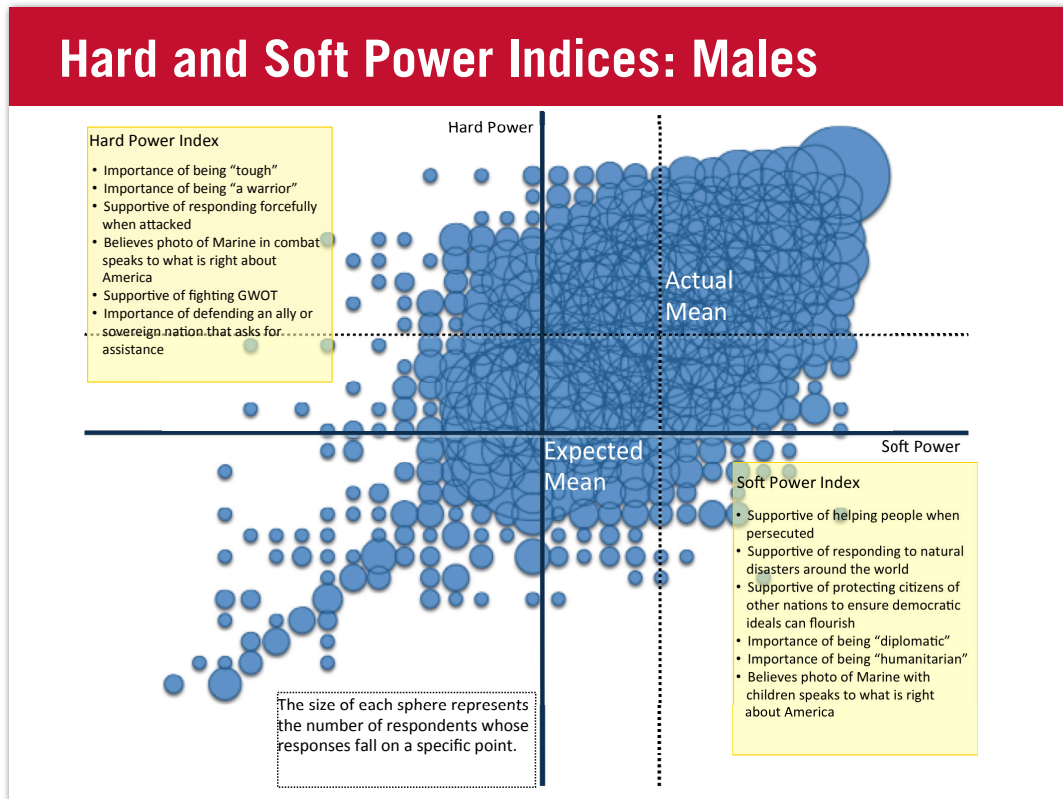
Questions for all three batteries were asked on a 5-point scale and a factor analysis conducted on the variables to understand the interplay of the series of questions. Through the analysis, two factors emerged with 6 variables each which neatly mapped out to the hard and soft power objectives of the military.

RAMBO AND BONO ARE NOT PLAYING A ZERO-SUM GAME

For both indices, the mean score of the population ended up being significantly higher than the expected mean. As a whole, respondents were generally supportive of both hard power and soft power conceptions and missions of the Marines as shown in the chart below.



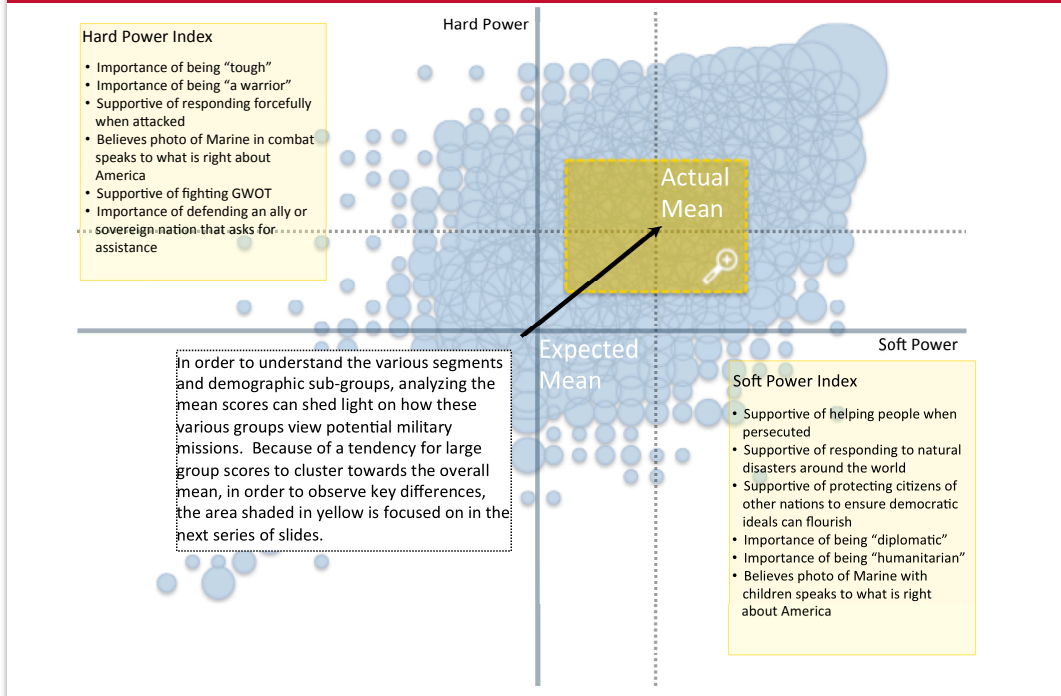
Moreover, the indices proved to converge at the individual respondent level. Very few individuals had high hard power scores and low soft power scores and vice versa. In particular, the most predisposed individuals—those most crucial to the USMC filling its recruiting mission—were most supportive of both hard power and soft power missions.



If a youth approved of “responding forcefully when attacked” he was also likely to approve of “helping people when persecuted.” The downside risk of pursuing a strategy that incorporated the Bono world view was almost non-existent; but, significant expansion potential existed if that message could be effectively incorporated into creative.

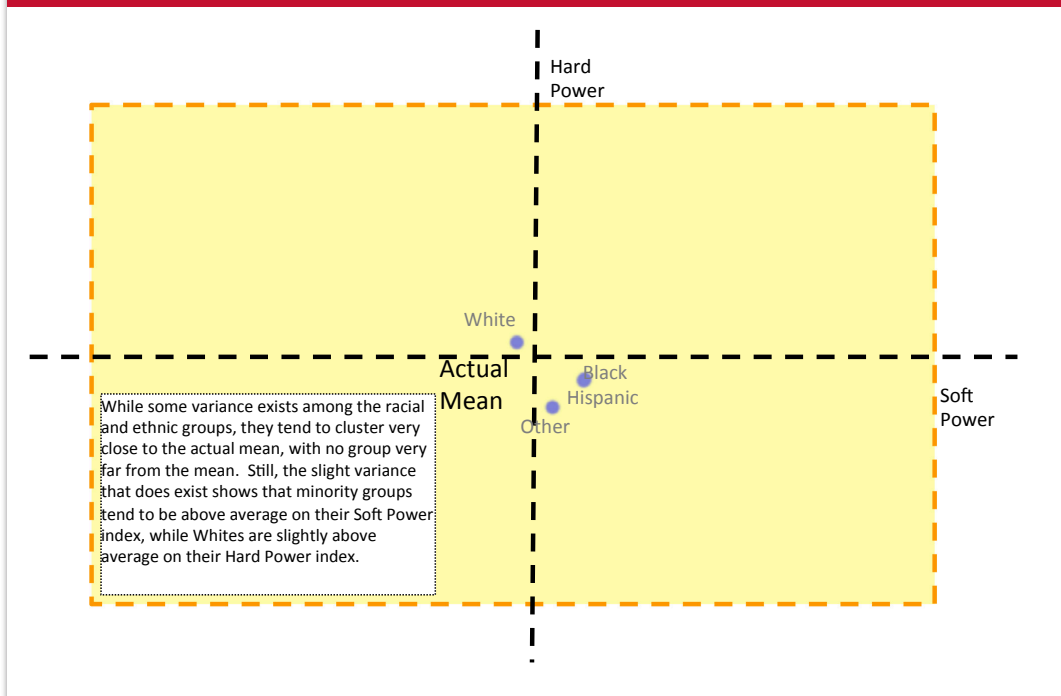
Population mean scores were then compared to understand how various demographic groups and segments mapped out onto the indices. While small differences existed by race, all major racial and ethnic demographic groups clustered close to the population mean as shown in the two charts on the next page.

Hard and Soft Power Indices



The chart directly below focuses on the highlighted area around the Actual Mean shown in the chart above.

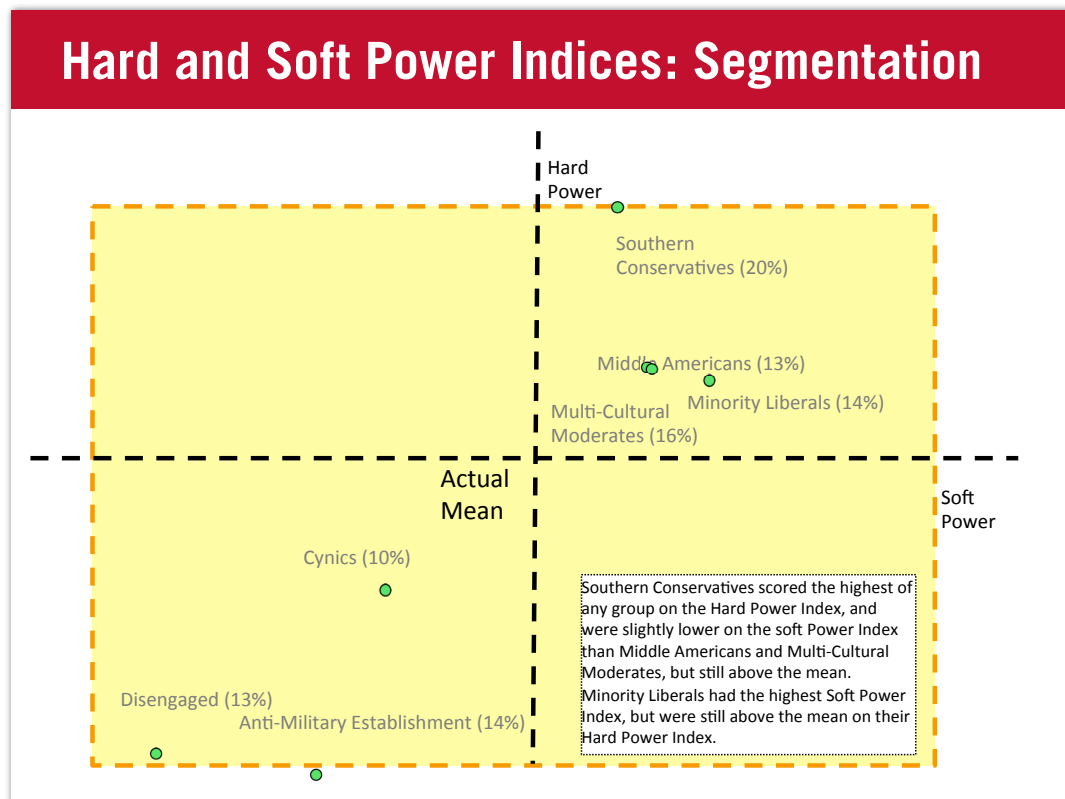
Hard and Soft Power Indices: Race



THE TRIBES CONVERGE

While greater differences existed by political-cultural “tribe”, as expected, they were small differences. While the segments that had, in the recent past, been most likely to join the military—such as “Southern Conservatives” were predictably supportive of hard power missions and conceptions of the force, they were also more supportive than the population as a whole of soft power missions and conceptions.

More importantly, segments emerged—such as Minority Liberals—that were supportive of both hard power and soft power missions, but had thus far shown lower propensity to join the Marines than other segments.



With these segments, soft power missions and conceptions proved to resonate particularly strongly and yet, they were also supportive of hard power missions and conceptions. As such, it became clear that potential existed to develop a messaging strategy that could incorporate both hard power and soft power messages, while at the same time, not alienate the base.

YES THEY CAN! (ALL LIVE TOGETHER, THAT IS)

In sum, our research gave us confidence that the right creative idea could indeed accommodate the various political-cultural tribes while maintaining one of the most revered military brands in history.

The Marines have a saying –“America doesn’t need a Marine Corps, it wants one”. In order for the title “U.S. Marine” to continue to confer prestige on youth who join and ensure that America continues to “want one” the Marines can’t afford to belong to one America but not to the other. Not only can Rambo and McCain, Bono and Obama live within the big brand tent of the Marines, they must.

The creative idea which enabled this living arrangement, so to speak is described in a submission to these awards under Brand Experience.

