

George W. Bush *in* From Baghdad with Love:  
The Exploitation of Masculinity in Marketing the War in Iraq to the  
American Public

Lisa Fuller  
JUPS Thesis  
April 5, 2005

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## Introduction

On March 19, 2003, President George W. Bush looked through a camera and into the eyes of the American people gravely declaring, “American and coalition forces are in the early stages of military operations to disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger.”<sup>1</sup> These purported motives justified America in disregarding the sovereignty of a nation, risking the lives of thousand of soldiers, destroying Iraqi infrastructure, and killing thousands of Iraqi citizens. Yet, a sense of pride accompanied fear for many American families as they sent their sons and daughters to fight a war half-way across the world. The majority of the American public believed that the sacrifice was necessary in order to promote national and global security and free an oppressed people.

In retrospect, Bush’s strategy to generate sufficient public support to begin a war was largely based on a public relations campaign that exalted American masculinity to distort the reality of the political situation. Using pre-existing gender biases the Bush administration developed a marketing strategy, the product being war, and the consumer being the American public. The true motives for invasion were under-examined because Bush and the media successfully generated enthusiasm among the American people for a war. Using gendered norms in this manner- to generate war propaganda- has been a historical pattern, and one that is unsettlingly repetitive.

However, conceptions of masculinity have socially evolved and now hold a unique position in a supposedly equal society, more subtly affecting social and political relations. Thus, examining the ways that gender norms act in contemporary American

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<sup>1</sup> The White House, “Operation Iraqi Freedom: President Bush Address the Nation,” 19 March 2003, available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030319-17.html>; Internet; Accessed 24 March 2005.

society is important to understanding why a gendered marketing strategy was successful at blindsiding the United States. It is particularly an interesting question to understand how a country that prides itself in a tradition of democracy and self-determination is manipulated through media and the soft-power of social constructions. Whereas an authoritarian government can impose its will on citizens with little pretense, the government and media had to understand and influence the desires, fears and insecurities of the American citizenry in order to achieve its goals. The Bush administration and media were enormously successful at manipulating conceptions of gender to the point that Bush was able to win re-election and maintain support to keep troops in Iraq even when his exaggerations and untruths were exposed. Yet, by understanding how masculinity was used as a marketing tool, the American public can ensure that it engages in a legitimate decision-making process before supporting future foreign policies.

War has always been a masculine arena, where all main players are predominantly male. In fact, war is often viewed as the epitome of masculinity, where characteristics traditionally associated with masculinity (strength, aggression, courage) become most apparent. Males are almost always the political actors making the decisions about going to war and how it should be conducted. Additionally, men are the ones who play out the war on the ground, largely dominating the military throughout history. This phenomenon may not initially strike us as strange, as it has been a historical constant. However, if one imagines a war where all of the active players are women, it would seem to suggest something inherent in femininity that makes women turn to war. Hilary Charlesworth and Christine Chinkin make precisely this point for the example of September 11<sup>th</sup>. They propose that:

if all the hijackers were women, and all the intelligence gatherers and analysts and White House Decision makers and world leaders were women...such a scenario would inevitably lead to an analysis of the events explicitly based on sex. It would be assumed first that the hijackings and the response to them were connected to femaleness in some defining way.<sup>2</sup>

A similar principle can be applied to war in general. The fact that men consistently play almost all of the major roles in war leads us to question what it is about how masculinity is constructed in different cultures that leads mostly men to participate in war. From the fictional imaginings of *Lysistrata* to the rape camps in Bosnia-Herzegovina during the 1990s, masculinity and war have had a complicated and confused relationship throughout history.

The ongoing war on and current occupation of Iraq has shown that relationship to be as relevant as ever. In the media and political discourse leading up to and surrounding the war, masculine themes were prominent. Masculine constructs of the notion of security and war were largely used to rally support for the war and to justify the initial invasion. The themes of defending the “homeland” and ‘rescuing’ Arab women from the veil, for instance, are loaded with gendered implications and continually appear as justifications for the war. Much of the discourse was used to inspire fear into Americans and in doing so inspired a sense of (a largely masculine) notion of heroism and a duty to fight to protect the homeland.

The opportunity of men to be heroes and saviors, to protect their country, to show their unbridled patriotism and to demonstrate the hegemonic power of the United States provided a substitute for legitimate motives for war. Additionally, the Bush administration’s motives for war were cloaked in a commercialized excitement for the

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<sup>2</sup> Hilary Charlesworth and Christine Chinkin, “Sex Gender, and September 11,” *The American Journal of International Law*, 96 (2002): 602.

glory of war, causing the American public to overlook the horrors inevitably result from war.

This gendered marketing strategy affected how the war was conducted as well. As in previous wars, sexual assault and human rights abuses perpetrated by soldiers were common. Additionally, domestic violence, already a common problem in the military sharply increased in frequency when the war started.<sup>3</sup> The links between sexual assault, domestic violence and gendered human rights abuses and war also show how masculine identities are augmented during war.

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<sup>3</sup> Catherine Lutz, "Living Room Terrorists: Rates of Domestic Violence are Three to Five Times Higher Among Military Couples than among Civilian Ones," *The Women's Review of Books*, 21(17 February 2004): 1.

## Chapter 1: War and Masculinity: A Long Standing Marriage

War continues to ravage the world today despite the spread of democracy, capitalism and international organization, all of which have been cited by various political theorists as advances towards global peace. Moreover, a staggering majority of participants in war are men; currently 97% of soldiers in standing armies in the world are male.<sup>4</sup> Moreover most policy leaders around the world- the ones making the decisions about participation in war- are also men. Despite the atrocities that never fail to accompany war, the masculinized idealization of it continues to encourage it. As one general put it, “Let war cease altogether and a nation will become effeminate.”<sup>5</sup> Yet despite an almost constant historical relationship between men and war, the connection is largely socially constructed.

### Masculinity and Biology

Often, biological differences are sighted as the cause of gender disparities, especially in war. Yet, the biological evidence to show men are more prone to violence than women is minimal. In the 1986 Seville Statement on Violence, for example, aggression researchers concluded “that humans have no innate tendencies toward aggression, violence and war.”<sup>6</sup> This conclusion was later endorsed by the American Psychological Association. Joshua Goldstein confirms that, “none of the gender differences arising from biology is sufficient to explain the puzzle of gendered war

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<sup>4</sup> Joshua Goldstein, *How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Cambridge: University Press, 2003), 10.

<sup>5</sup> Norman Dixon, *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence* (London: Trinity Press, 1976): 125.

<sup>6</sup> Goldstein, 135.

roles.”<sup>7</sup> The evaluation of biological differences, including genetic code, cognitive abilities, differences in size and strength, and hormonal disparities could only explain a small degree of increased aggressiveness in males. It does not by any means explain the large and consistent domination of men in war roles. In particular, “the widely held notion that testosterone levels cause aggression has weak empirical support. The idea that men’s higher testosterone levels cause boys to be more aggressive than girls in early childhood is wrong.”<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, an incidence in history of an entirely female combat unit, in the Dahomey Kingdom of West Africa in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries show that if properly conditioned, women can be just as aggressive in war as men.<sup>9</sup> According to Simone de Beauvoir, the Dahomey demonstrate that “woman has shared in warfare- and with no less ferocity and cruelty than man.”<sup>10</sup> Conversely, therefore, this example proves that there is nothing innate about males that would necessitate their dominating military activities.

### **Social and Cultural Constructions of Masculinity**

Because biology cannot explain the prevalence of men in war, cultural and psychological factors that men are generally exposed to must be evaluated. While biology is not responsible for male aggression, it may explain why they may be more susceptible to cultural and psychological influences that induce violence. Goldstein explains:

Biologically based aspects of boyhood- before puberty- include a propensity for rough and tumble play...keen attention to competitive status hierarchies, slightly heightened spatial abilities, and slightly reduced verbal and perhaps interpersonal abilities. If you combine these with gendered training for violence against

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>10</sup> Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Picador, 1988), 93.

outsiders, you get war. If however, you combine them with training to adhere to the rule, you get sports.<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately, the prominent constructions of masculinity often include motivations to participate or support war. In studying the pressures that men are subject to in contemporary America, Susan Faludi concludes that “everywhere men look...they are told that there is no alternative: they must be at the helm.”<sup>12</sup> Culture gives men the responsibility of being leaders, which extends to international relations. Moreover, despite the rise of feminist and gender equality movements,

the images produced by culture...still promote the model of a...man who dominates the world. If anything, such images have been inflated as superstars prevail, again and again, on athletic courts, the battlefields and the cityscapes of giants.<sup>13</sup>

Men, of course, are not the only ones who subscribe to this image and thus are not solely responsible for the perpetuation of gendered stereotypes. Women are equally complicit in reinforcing the image of man as dominator as well. In particular, women reinforce this role as continuing to play a submissive role in social relationships. In war, therefore, men are fighting for their “dependents- woman and children to fight the mission for, to rescue from the enemy and to homestead with on a conquered (but still insecure) frontier.”<sup>14</sup> No one is innocent of subscribing to such gendered myths that are so pervasive that we often view gendered constructions as ‘natural’ and unavoidable. These constructions, moreover, extend to including the decisions political leaders make, especially involving security. Mariam Miedzian confirms that “many of the values of the masculine mystique, such as toughness, dominance, repression of empathy, extreme

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<sup>11</sup> Goldstein, 411.

<sup>12</sup> Susan Faludi, *Stiffed*. (London: Vintage, 1999): 10.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 417.

competitiveness...underlie the thinking and policy decisions of many of our political leaders.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, men are more likely to ‘jump the gun’ on going to war in order to prove their masculinity, whether consciously or unconsciously. Culture teaches them that asserting their strength fulfils their responsibility for providing security. Ironically, violence and war is what threatens the security of the protectors (men) and the protected (women and children) alike. The fact that women are “more likely to find alternatives to violence in resolving conflicts”<sup>16</sup> shows that men dominating the military and political arenas places them in more danger.

### **The Psychology of Masculinity**

Just as constructions of masculinity promote war, war relies heavily on these constructions of masculinity. Especially in the military, war is very difficult to tolerate and takes heavy psychological tolls on its participants. Masculinity is constructed in such a way that men feel it necessary that they participate, making it easier to exploit them for militaristic purposes. A similar phenomenon occurred during the industrial revolution when companies “exploited men’s health and labor and in an industrial context broke the backs and spirits of factory workers and destroyed the lungs of miners” because Western society “defined manhood by character, by the inner qualities of stoicism, integrity, reliability, the ability to shoulder burdens, the willingness to put others first, the desire to provide and sacrifice.”<sup>17</sup> In the same way, men have to be intensely socialized in order to go to war; society teaches them that protecting their homefront must be achieved through self-sacrifice.

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<sup>15</sup> Mariam Miedzian, *Boys will be Boys: Breaking the Link Between Masculinity and Violence* (New York: Anchor, 1991): 8.

<sup>16</sup> Goldstein, 42.

<sup>17</sup> Faludi, 38.

Despite these societal messages, however, boys:

Are not innately ‘tougher’ than girls. They do not have fewer emotions or attachments, or feel less pain. It is obvious from the huge effort that cultures make to mold ‘tough’ boys that this is not an easy or natural task. When we raise boys within contemporary gender norms, especially when we push boys to toughen up, we pass along authorized forms of masculinity suited to the war system.<sup>18</sup>

These constructions of masculinity not only make it possible to exploit men, it motivates men to submit themselves to the horrific degrees of risk and violence prevalent in war.

Yet, in reality, war, quite naturally does a great deal of psychological damage to men.

According to Goldstein:

Any sane person, male or female, who is surrounded by the terrifying and surreal sights and sounds of battle instinctually wants to run away to hunker down and freeze up, and certainly not to charge into even greater danger to kill and maim other people. Contrary to the idea that war thrills men, expresses innate masculinity, or gives men a fulfilling occupation, all evidence indicates that war is something that societies impose on men who most often need to be dragged kicking and screaming into it, constantly brainwashed and disciplined once there, and rewarded and honored afterwards.<sup>19</sup>

The psychological data, furthermore, proves that despite this intense socialization, men are still not emotionally suited for war. A large percentage of soldiers are psychologically damaged in war, often seriously enough to render them militarily useless as well as leading to a lifelong struggle with emotional problems. It is estimated that “the number of psychiatric casualties in every war in this century...have exceeded the number of soldiers killed by hostile fire by 100%.”<sup>20</sup> Post traumatic stress disorder, or shell shock, has consistently affected soldiers, no matter how strong the attempts to desensitize them from the horrors of war.

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<sup>18</sup> Goldstein, 288.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>20</sup> Richard A. Gabriel, *No More Heroes: Madness and Psychiatry in War* (New York: Hill & Wang 1987): 245.

In reality, this process is only a continuation of the ways young boys are socialized at a young age. According to psychologist William Pollack, attempts to socialize little boys as masculine are often damaging in the same way. In order to “toughen up,” boys are often forced to separate from their mother too early and then:

are made to feel ashamed of their feelings, especially of weakness, vulnerability, fear and despair. The use of shame to control boys is pervasive. Boys are made to feel shame over and over, to be independent, keep emotions in check. A boy is told that ‘big boys don’t cry.’<sup>21</sup>

In order to produce the warrior, men are taught from the beginning that they must not show any vulnerability. In effect, “defense is one of the areas in which public policy is most likely to be skewed by deep psychological forces...war is life’s most abhorrent activity, but also one that, through the millennia, has been, in many eyes, the ultimate manifestation of masculinity.”<sup>22</sup> For intense socialization cannot be for nothing. War acts as the arena where men can demonstrate the ‘toughness’ that has been cultivated among them their entire lives.

In contemporary warfare, however, physical strength is now often unnecessary due to a heavy reliance on computerization and advanced technology. Yet, men have still found ways to assert their masculinity despite these adaptations. In nuclear strategic discourse, for example, Carol Cohn found:

Strong currents of homoerotic excitement, heterosexual domination, the drive toward competency and mastery, the pleasures of membership in an elite privileged group...and the thrilling power of becoming Death, the shatterer of worlds.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> William Pollack, *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood* (New York: Random House, 1998): 62.

<sup>22</sup> Glenn Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections of Men in Battle* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959): 102.

<sup>23</sup> Carol Cohn, “Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals,” *Signs*, 12 (Summer 1987): 692.

More than just a show of brute strength, war becomes the epitomic symbol of masculinity, representing sexual conquest and power. War, therefore remains its archaic symbol of masculinity, whether or not any traditionally masculine attributes are necessary to participate in it.

### **Military Culture and Masculinity**

Military culture is one of the most striking and brutal examples of gendered expectations in war. It is often perceived as a vicious environment where no weakness or emotion is tolerated. Ironically, Faludi found that the military is often a sanctuary for men in which they can receive nurturing to satisfy their emotional needs without threatening their masculine identity. As already exemplified, men are often taken away from their emotional supports too early and “virtually every adolescent male rite of passage...is structured to help young men with the imperative of breaking from a mother’s protective realm.”<sup>24</sup> The example of soldiers interactions at Citadel, a traditionally male-only military school, shows how the military can provide one such refuge while simultaneously affirming a male identity. According to Faludi, “the Citadel was a stage set for warfare in which the real action went on behind the scenes” where cadets took care of each other and “could be mothered, and just as important, they could be mothers.”<sup>25</sup> Ironically, because the military is the epitome of masculinity, it often provides a safe shelter for men to express traits that would otherwise be deemed feminine. For if men are in the military, their manliness is less likely to be questioned. Moreover, with few women present, men are forced to take on nurturing roles. Such aspects of the military can provide one possible attraction for joining it.

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<sup>24</sup> Faludi., 129.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 130.

Faludi also attributes the exclusion of women to this phenomenon, as men fear the female gaze that might judge them inadequately masculine. Only with women-“the Other,” -present do men have to be exclusively masculine. Without women to judge themselves against, men are freer to act without associating with gender. Similarly, in wartime, “combat units...are essentially all male families, each ideally a circle of brothers melded together by a commanding father figure who cares about their welfare and shares the risks and sacrifices of battle.”<sup>26</sup> War becomes, therefore, both a hell and a haven for men. In both cases, it is essentially masculine and thus men often resist sharing this space with women.

Despite evidence of a softer side in military culture, military officials constantly reinforce masculine toughness among their inferior. Mark Gerzon found in studying the American military, for example, that:

Epithets of drill instructors...’faggot,’ pussy, or simply ‘woman’ left no doubt that not becoming a soldier meant not being a man. This method takes advantage of the fluid character of adolescent recruits’ psychic structures- preaching with a fanatical zeal the cut of masculine violence.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, while the military may, at least in some cases, be unexpectedly nurturing, it does so while reinforcing a rigid symbiosis between toughness and masculinity.

While men may need an exclusive space free of the female gaze, excluding female leadership and perspective is harmful to the military. Barbara Ehrenreich points to the development of the gun in the sixteenth century as the cause of a “democratizing trend” in warfare; That is, “the gun- easy to carry and dependent for its lethal force on

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 322.

<sup>27</sup> Mark Gerzon, *A Choice of Heroes: The Changing Face of American Manhood* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982):32.

chemical rather than muscular energy- is potentially within the reach of all.”<sup>28</sup> Since then, military technology and the international relations system have made the machismo that once may have been crucial to cultural survival much less useful.

Yet, the continued expectation of a man to be courageous, dutiful and self-sacrificing remains as a relic of a time when they characteristics were key to survival. Nevertheless, these archaic conceptions have begun to be challenged in America which has resulted, simultaneously and paradoxically in wider acceptability of masculine roles and in a crisis of masculinity. This social context allowed the Bush administration to market the war in Iraq as a way for American society to reclaim traditional masculine identities.

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<sup>28</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich, *Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War* (London: Virago 1997): 63.

## **Chapter II: Masculinity as a Marketing Tool: Selling the War in Iraq to the American People**

### **War Propaganda: An American Tradition**

Much of the discourse that the Bush administration and the media used was meant to inspire fear into Americans and in doing so inspired a sense of (a largely masculine) heroism and a duty to fight to protect the homeland. Thus propagators of the war in Iraq utilized popular culture's sense of masculine ideals to garner support- militarily, popularly and financially-for an invasion. Edward Herman summarizes the Bush administrations techniques:

The first aim of official propaganda was to sell it to the public. This was accomplished by the three gambits: demonization, claims regarding the demon's possession of weapons that threaten US national security, and the failed diplomacy and inspections gambit.<sup>29</sup>

Ultimately, the propaganda system operated from a framework that promoted "the right of the United States to aggress, occupy, and decide who are good and bad Iraqis."<sup>30</sup>

However, such techniques were not new or unique. The American government has a long history of using marketing techniques that appeal to gendered norms in order to garner support for war. During World War I, the Wilson administration, for example, "established a government propaganda commission, called the Creel Commission, which succeeded within six months, in turning a pacifist population into a hysterical, war-mongering population which wanted to destroy everything German, tear the Germans

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<sup>29</sup> Edward Herman, "Normalizing Godfatherly Aggression," in *Tell Me Lies: Propaganda and Media Distortion in the Attack on Iraq*, ed. David Miller (Sterling: Pluto, 2004), 177.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

limb from limb, go to war and save the world.”<sup>31</sup> Such techniques are needed because usually the public is predisposed to stay out of wars. So, in order to garner support “you have to frighten them.”<sup>32</sup> According to Chomsky, “over the last ten years, every year or two, some major monster is constructed that we have to defend ourselves.”<sup>33</sup> Even the war on terror was not a new concept. It was simply “redeclared from the Reagan Administration who did same thing,”<sup>34</sup> also with help of Donald Rumsfeld.

The techniques that Bush administration used are common in capitalistic democracies where consent, to use Chomsky’s term, is “manufactured.” A “specialized class,” defined by Chomsky as those “who analyze, execute, make decision and run things in the political, economic and ideological systems”<sup>35</sup> make use of the media to serve their own interests. Whereas a totalitarian regime would simply impose policies, policymakers in the United States has historically used a much more subtle techniques in order to pass their policies with the added benefit of public support.

Again, in the case of the war in Iraq, public opinion was carefully manipulated through formulas that were quite literally developed to sell. Despite a lack of evidence the Bush administration effectively convinced Americans that the war in Iraq was the best way to achieve national security and that the Iraqi people would be liberated in the process. In fact, the Bush administration relied on “familiar PR strategies” where “the message is developed to resonate with targeted audiences through the use of focus groups and other types of market research and media monitoring.”<sup>36</sup> The media and the

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<sup>31</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Media Control* (New York: Seven Stories, 2002): 12.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>36</sup> Laura Miller, et al., “War is Sell,” in *Tell Me Lies: Propaganda and Media Distortion in the Attack on Iraq*, ed. David Miller (Sterling: Pluto, 2004), 44.

administration worked in conjunction with each other to achieve this goal. Such a strategy was successful because the American “media are a corporate monopoly”<sup>37</sup> with whom the economic interests of the Bush Administration are closely linked.

The distortion of information in the media can most starkly be observed “in cable television networks like Fox [where] we see the ultimate marriage of news and PR to create a flow of guileful propaganda capable of creating a virtual world that is so well packaged and presented that most people have a difficult time understanding how false its representations actually are.”<sup>38</sup> While some degree of media bias is inevitable, any pretense of objectivity has all but been destroyed as all mainstream American media has consolidated into one corporate point of view due to “a series of global mergers...that consolidated media ownership into ever fewer hands” in the 1990s resulting in increased “competition between proliferating commercialized media.” Corporate consolidation has causes news providers “to replace news with entertainment, to generate tabloidization of news, and to pursue profits and sensationalism rather than public enlightenment and democracy.”<sup>39</sup>

Even the Bush Administration occasionally admitted to using the media to market the war. As White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card put it, when questioned about the timing of the campaign to sell the war, “from a marketing point of view, you don’t introduce a new product in August.”<sup>40</sup> The Bush administration encouraged the creation of and used private entities that closely resembled public relations firms in order

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<sup>37</sup> Chomsky, 29.

<sup>38</sup> Orville Schell, “Preface,” in *Now they Tell Us: The American Press and Iraq*, ed. Michael Massing (New York: New York Review Books, 2004): xvi.

<sup>39</sup> Douglas Kellner, *Media Spectacle and the Crisis of Democracy* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2005): 230.

<sup>40</sup> Ben Fritz, et al., *All the President’s Spin: George W. Bush, The Media and The Truth* (New York: Touchstone, 2004): 42.

to create their public relations strategy. The Committee for the Liberation of Iraq (CLI) sat “at the centre of the PR campaign.” The CLI claimed to be neutral, using “humanitarian buzzwords on its website and striv[ing] for a bipartisan look.” However, on closer inspection, “its leadership and affiliations are decidedly right wing, militaristic and very much in step with the Bush administration”. While CLI claims to be “an independent entity.” Yet, according to President Reagan’s former Secretary of State, George Schultz, who also happens to chair the CLI’s advisory board the Committee, CLI “gets a lot of impetus from the White House.”<sup>41</sup> One project, for example, which CLI and the White House collaborated on, was the sponsorship of media training to Iraqi dissidents<sup>42</sup> in order to ensure that anything that they said to the press was in line with Bush propaganda. However, the Bush administration took its marketing strategy farther than that, eventually producing its own self-promoting news reports:

Under the Bush administration, the federal government has aggressively used a well-established tool of public relations: the prepackaged, ready-to-serve news report... Many were subsequently broadcast on local stations across the country without any acknowledgement of the government's role in their production.<sup>43</sup>

The Bush administration could (and did) therefore send any message it wanted to the American public under the guise of an objective media.

These techniques were necessary not only to show political solidarity and give the Bush Administration a strong mandate, but also so that it could gain congressional support to finance the Iraq war. In his 2002 State of the Union address, Bush called for “wildly increasing military spending, [and] a jump in homeland security spending” to the point that he was willing to create “a more than \$100 billion budget deficit for 2002, an

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<sup>41</sup> Chomsky, 48.

<sup>42</sup> Miller et. al, 46.

<sup>43</sup> David Barstow and Robin Stein, “Under Bush, an Era of Prepackaged News,” *The New York Times*, 13 March 2005, sec 1, p. 1.

\$80 billion for 2003, and a projected \$5 trillion plus deficit by 2008.”<sup>44</sup> Without public support, congress would not have passed the legislation that funded the war.

### **An American Empire**

The role of the United States in the global community also reinforces the American ideal of masculinity and justified the war in Iraq. America has unarguably become the world’s foremost economic superpower and has partly built its power from a neo-imperialistic foreign policy. As Chalmers Johnson argues:

The new American empire has been a long time in the making. Its roots go back to the early nineteenth century, when the United States declared all of Latin America its sphere of influence and built enlarged its own territory at the expense of the indigenous people of North America, as well as British, French and Spanish colonialists and neighboring Mexico.<sup>45</sup>

More recently, the United States “massive military forces [are] deployed around the world” in the name of “maintain[ing] stability”, or to guarantee “mutual security,” or promote a liberal world order based on free elections and American style ‘open markets.’”<sup>46</sup> Before the war in Iraq had even started, the United States was “the only nation that polices the world through five global military commands, maintains more than a million men and women at arms in four continents, deploys carrier groups on watch in every ocean...drives the wheels of global trade and commerce, and fills the hearts and minds of an entire planet with its dreams and desires.”<sup>47</sup>

However, since September 11<sup>th</sup>, the United States’ imperialistic tendencies have taken an even more dramatic turn as “the attacks produced a dangerous change in the thinking of some of our leaders, who because to see our republic as a genuine empire, a

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<sup>44</sup> Kellner, 48.

<sup>45</sup> Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004), 2.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Ignatieff, “The Burden,” *New York Times Magazine*, 5 January 2003, 32.

new Rome, the greatest colossus in history, no longer bound by international law.”<sup>48</sup> In essence, the initial global sympathy generated by September 11<sup>th</sup> provided an excuse to further promote American self-interests abroad. The Bush administration took its policies so far that shortly after the attacks the rest of the world feared that the United States was becoming an unrestrained “military juggernaut intent on world domination.”<sup>49</sup>

Historically, the idea of empire has been closely linked to masculinity as “there is no more important symbol of the heroism, potency, mythology and mystery of the male public domain than the idea of empire. A point reinforced by the fact that the empire builders of history appear to have universally been men.”<sup>50</sup> In this tradition, American imperialist culture is a cultural framework that glorifies male violence and machismo. In particular, “the USA presents its domination of other sovereign states as grounded in a benevolent paternalism which takes into account the interests of other nations and their peoples”<sup>51</sup> which justifies aggressive foreign policy, on the ground that intervention is done in the best interest of the target nation. In the case of Iraq, the message was that the Bush administration was stepping in to save the Iraqi people from an evil dictatorship.

The nature of imperialism has thus shifted since colonial times, and with it has come a shift in the masculine characteristics associated with the empire-builder. While initially empire-building was associated with “dreams of conquest and accompanying physical endurance,” neo-imperial times have “witnessed the emergence of a new kind of male empire-builder, a man who seeks to make his mark on and change the world

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<sup>48</sup> Johnson, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>50</sup> Stephen M. Whitehead, *Men and Masculinities* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 120.

<sup>51</sup> Slavoj Zizek, *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle* (New York: Verso, 2004), 14.

through his drive, energy, self-discipline, but most importantly through his financial acumen.”<sup>52</sup>

In particular, Iraq’s oil resources made it an essential piece of American empire and served as the financial incentive that these empire builders sought. The Bush Administration’s intention to develop a foreign policy that would allow America to gain control of Iraqi oil resources is evident from 2001 when the Vice-President developed the ‘Cheney Report’ - which called “for a major increase in US engagement in regions such as the Persian Gulf in order to secure future petroleum supplies.”<sup>53</sup> The report was partly based on former Secretary of State James Baker’s analysis that “Saddam Hussein has also demonstrated a willingness to use the oil weapon and to use his own export program to manipulate oil markets.”<sup>54</sup> Controlling oil markets was a critical goal of the Bush Administration because of its close ties with the oil industry and because oil-related corporations largely funded Bush’s political campaigns: “oil-industry-related executives and lobbyists filled many of the top posts in the Bush administration. Vice President Dick Cheney came directly from the top post at Halliburton, the world’s second largest oil drilling service company. Bush’s chief of staff, Andrew Card, was the chief lobbying for General Motors. His National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice, served as board member of Chevron.”<sup>55</sup> It is no surprise then that “the first order of business for US troops upon entering Iraq was to secure the extensive oil field and refiners, making sure the infrastructure went directly into American hands. American corporations (eg Bechtel,

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<sup>52</sup> Whitehead, 122.

<sup>53</sup> The Research Unit for Political Economy, *Behind the Invasion of Iraq* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2003), 53.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>55</sup> Roger Burbach, and Jim Tarbell, *Imperial Overstretch: George W. Bush & the Hubris of Empire* (New York: Zed, 2004), 42.

Halliburton) would be in the forefront of rebuilding, protecting and exploiting the Iraqi oil fields.”<sup>56</sup> The Bush Administration’s economic interests utilized the imperialistic framework and extended it through the war in Iraq, thus seeking to maximize political power and economic prowess. It was not the damage of nuclear or biological weapons that the Bush administration feared, but economic damage to the imperial structure. However, admitting these motives to the American public, the majority of which does not identify with the interests of the oil industry, would have proved detrimental to political goals. Thus, the Bush administration needed a marketing strategy in order to determine what aspects of American culture could be exploited so that American people would support their government’s foreign policy.

## **Marketing Strategies**

### **Heroism**

One of the ways that the marketing strategy of the Iraq war operated was to exploit cultural norms is by insisting that war in Iraq would enhance American values. The American educational system indoctrinates whole population with “values and interests of private power and the state corporate nexus that represents it.”<sup>57</sup> Many of these values were dictated by notions of masculinity which placed a responsibility on men to play the part of the hero, the fighter, to be courageous and to use violence for the greater good of humanity. As Stephen Whitehead explains, “despite its inherent flaws, the image and mythology of man leaving home to engage in a heroic project maintains a

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<sup>56</sup> Carl Boggs, *Imperial Delusions: American Militarism and Endless War* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 62.

<sup>57</sup> Chomsky, 19.

resounding presence in most societies.”<sup>58</sup> This socialization can clearly be seen in America where public images of men, such as in movies, video games and even fairy tales. The same storyline of the prince or superhero rescuing the damsel in distress is retold countless times in a variety of mediums. Prince Charming rescues Cinderella and James Bond saves his current romantic interest. In the real world, “the state claims that offering of protection through the use of legitimate force as its defining function. But for the most part only men are allowed to use that force; only men are allowed to be protectors.”<sup>59</sup> Early socialization of gender norms allows the state to easily propagate this gendered structure of international relations.

Often, according to Whitehead, “the male hero does not appear to choose his heroic project, but rather has it forced upon him by the compelling need to do his duty as a man- the ‘protector of woman.’”<sup>60</sup> American men are sent a romanticized and unrealistic message that it is their obligation to protect their homeland and their family. The support of soldiers going to war, as well as the willingness of thousands of soldiers to risk their lives shows that this cultural construct is thus alive and well today. Ironically however, women inevitably end up in a more dangerous position as a result of war and militarism: “women become widespread victims of combat, atrocities are visited on civilian populations, homes and neighborhoods are destroyed, people are dislocated, prostitution spreads along with sex trafficking, rape, torture and domestic violence.”<sup>61</sup> The juxtaposition of the protector/protected roles in war is thus a dangerous myth, with

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<sup>58</sup> Whitehead, 45.

<sup>59</sup> Judith Hicks Steihm, “The Protected, The Protector, The Defender,” *Women’s Studies International. Forum*, 5 1(982): 367.

<sup>60</sup> Whitehead, 119.

<sup>61</sup> Boggs, 146.

the supposed protector transforming into the dangerous aggressor and the supposed protected placed in the position of the victim.

Despite this falsehood, marketing experts used the changing and unstable conception of masculinity to generate support for the war. As feminism has increasingly called for equality of the genders, the masculine identity has become threatened. Often, feminism is scene by opponents as “trying to wrest men’s natural power and control from their grasp.”<sup>62</sup> In reality, feminism has questioned the idea of natural gender roles. Consequently, the idea of men as the authoritative and controlling sex is no longer as socially acceptable as in past generations.

If genders are constructed in relation to each other, and the construction of femininity has begun to be challenged, then constructions of masculinity are necessarily challenged. Women have defied the notion that being female necessarily means that one is submissive, weak and in need of male protection. This challenge inherently questions notions of manhood as well; men can no longer construct their gender around being the dominant figure, the protector and the symbol of strength if they have no one to dominate or protect. One response has been a backlash in American culture resulting in an emphasis on militarism in order to “reinforces a wide range of conventional social and sexual values.”<sup>63</sup> Through war, the closest approximation to an exclusively masculine sphere, men have a way to reclaim this identity. As Carl Boggs explains, “warfare has routinely provided an opportunity for men, as warrior protagonist to rebuild psyches beset with some combination of anxiety, crisis, defeat and impotence.”<sup>64</sup> Besieged by the fear of a threatened nation and the continuing assault on traditional masculine roles, many

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<sup>62</sup> Faludi, 14.

<sup>63</sup> Boggs, 146.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 144.

American men seized the opportunity of war to reclaim their identity, to show that strength and courage were still necessary. In fact, Paul Rutherford argues that:

The key purpose of fighting Iraq was to display machismo. America attacked because Washington knew it could win easily. That swift victory was designed to overcome the slights and blows suffered by the embattled egos of the country's white males.<sup>65</sup>

While these male sense of identity was already in a historically precarious position, September 11<sup>th</sup> further threatened American males self conception, that they were members of the most powerful nation.

### **The Exploitation of Fear**

The timing of the assault on Iraq made the job of war marketers even easier. In particular, the Bush Administration played on the fear generated by September 11<sup>th</sup> and convinced the American public that the best way to regain a sense of security was through war. The feelings of helplessness and vulnerability that September 11<sup>th</sup> caused in the American people, due to the perceived randomness of the events, particularly threatened American men who felt that they had failed to protect their country and thus needed to reclaim their masculine identity. As Susan Faludi writes, "the very paradigm of modern masculinity...is all about being master of your universe."<sup>66</sup> Once this notion is threatened men must compensate in order to reclaim their gendered identity. That is, the declaration and fighting of war provided a means for the American man to feel that he was still part of the dominant gender in the most powerful country in the world. Faludi continues that "the man in crisis need only picture himself a monarch, pump up, armor

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<sup>65</sup>Paul Rutherford, *Weapons of Mass Persuasion: Marketing the War Against Iraq* (Toronto: University of Toronto 2004), 170.

<sup>66</sup>Faludi, 14.

himself, go up against the enemy and prove that he is in control.”<sup>67</sup> Therefore, men were willing to fight and more citizens were willing to allow their friends and family members to risk their lives and go to war.

However, the fear generated by September 11<sup>th</sup> was not sufficient for the Bush administration and they began to generate propaganda that would exacerbate the sense of fear. Despite a complete lack of evidence, Bush argued that Iraq had the potential and desire to attack the United States with weapons of mass destruction. This assertion was at the center of this marketing strategy. Rutherford explains that in propagating the threat of WMD:

important Orwellian complements were also applied: namely, suppressing inconvenient evidence, avoiding experts who would challenge the party line, failing to call attention to criticize the shifting claims and stream of lies and refusing to discuss and analyze either the supposed threat to US national security.<sup>68</sup>

Bush’s speeches are repeatedly indicative of this technique. On October 7, 2002 Bush gave a typical speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars with vague and exaggerated language. He claimed that “Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction are controlled by a murderous tyrant....The same tyrant has tried to dominate the Middle East....Confronting the threat posed by Iraq is crucial to winning the war on terror.”<sup>69</sup> The mere choice of words alone- ‘murderous tyrant’ and ‘dominate,’ for example, reek of aggression and are meant to inspire belligerent reactions. Bush was attempting, as he continues to do, to appeal to a notion of masculinity that socializes (mainly) men to believe that it is their obligation to confront such enemies, under the threat of losing their gendered identity.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>68</sup> Rutherford, 177.

<sup>69</sup> “President Outlines Iraq Threat” in *Hoodwinked: The Documents that Reveal How Bush Sold Us a War* ed. John Prados. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), 128.

According to Rob Okun, "Mr. Bush and others have tapped into a conspicuous national craving for "comfort foods" rhetoric, such as "root out the evildoers" and "you can run but you can't hide." Evidently our national conscience has been lulled back into old refrains where "might equals right".<sup>70</sup> In a time of national fear, American culture was particularly vulnerable to re-emphasizing a simplistic form of masculinity. Bush's rhetoric, which emphasized the strength and heroism of soldiers reassured the American public that it was capable of self-defense and world domination. Before September 11<sup>th</sup>, Americans were under the illusion that because their country was the global hegemon, it was immune to foreign attacks. America perceived itself as impenetrable and invincible. Once September 11<sup>th</sup> destroyed this notion, the identity of the American man, which was likened to this national identity was also threatened.

Reintroducing traditional notions of masculinity through militarism was a means to compensate for this national anxiety. The War in Iraq gave American men (and some women) the opportunity to be soldiers and thus to become the epitomic symbol of maleness and reclaim this identity. Those who stayed at home were also reassured by the symbolic assertion that America had the ability to demonstrate militaristic might.

The overwhelming consensus today, however, is that "on the most basic level the Bush administration oversold the certainty of its intelligence knowledge from the outset of the Iraq affair."<sup>71</sup> In one speech, for example, Bush claimed that "Saddam Hussein has gone to elaborate length spent enormous sums, taken great risk to build and keep weapons of mass destruction. But why? The only possible explanation, the only possible

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<sup>70</sup> Rob Okun, "The War to Define Manhood," *Voice Male*, Summer 2002, 2.

<sup>71</sup> John Prados, ed. *Hoodwinked: The Documents that Reveal How Bush Sold us a War* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), 134.

use he could have for those weapons is to dominate, intimidate or attack.”<sup>72</sup> Ironically, the United States has spent enormous sums to develop weapons of mass destruction, but claims that those weapons are merely for self defense and global order. Bush’s rhetoric leaves no room for dissent; he interprets (largely false) evidence for the listener so that facts are construed in the manner he sees fit.

The propaganda made use of imagery to appeal to the American imagination as well. On November 12, Army General Tommy Franks, the head of US Central Command, said that a failure to confront Saddam could result in “the sight of the first mushroom cloud on one of the major population centers of the planet. Such a powerful image had obvious resonance with the public.”<sup>73</sup> Instead of presenting evidence to and allowing the American people to form their own opinions, the Bush administration used marketing techniques to create a convenient national consensus.

In truth, CIA director George Tenet actually concluded that US plans to attack Iraq would actually make the US less safe because “should Saddam conclude that a US-led attacked could no longer be deterred, he probably would become much less constrained in adopting terrorist actions.”<sup>74</sup> Thus, the Bush administration cannot even claim ignorance as an excuse. They blatantly distorted the truth to appeal to the American public’s fear.

### **Patriotism**

Additionally, an appeal to patriotism was used to stigmatize any person that did not buy into the political objectives of the Bush administration. Chomsky terms this technique, which was developed by the business community, the “Mohawk Valley formula.” It uses

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<sup>72</sup> “President Outlines Iraq Threat,” 175.

<sup>73</sup> Fritz, et al., 154.

<sup>74</sup> Prados, 115.

media to manipulate public opinion by generating support for “vapid, empty concepts like Americanism. Who can be against that? Or harmony. Who can be against that? Or, as in the Persian Gulf War, “Support our troops.” Who can be against that.”<sup>75</sup> These exact catch phrases were resurrected for the second war in Iraq. The implication being that if one did not support the war, he/she was unpatriotic and unsupportive of the men and women who were risking their lives to purportedly protect the United States. Only the replying slogan from the peace activist community- “Support Our Troops-Bring them Home”- left room for a more sophisticated message- that it was possible to oppose the war effort while being sympathetic to the plight of soldiers.

This example shows how enormous social pressure was placed on Americans to support the war effort. Those who did not buy into this logic were stigmatized as unpatriotic and threatening the homeland. Bush’s stigmatization of foreign countries applied to citizens as well: “I put out a doctrine that said either you’re with us or you’re with the enemy. That doctrine still stands today.”<sup>76</sup> This technique was necessary so that the Bush administration could establish soft power on the domestic front and which was essential because:

Institutional power cannot last very long in the absence of supporting belief systems...In the case of US military power, the war economy and empire, patriotic ideology furnished the main legitimating values, myths and attitudes to be instilled in the general population.<sup>77</sup>

Members of the media were stigmatized as unpatriotic and unsupportive of American troops if they criticized the war and therefore they “steered clear of discussing international law and the UN charter- it is inconvenient and by patriotic assumption they

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<sup>75</sup> Chomsky, 25.

<sup>76</sup> President Outlines Iraq Threat,” 175.

<sup>77</sup> Boggs, 94.

make it inapplicable to the good and benevolent US whose leaders were simply protecting US national security and bringing liberty to the Iraqis.<sup>78</sup> The Bush administration's emphasis on patriotism allowed for public support for controversial unilateral foreign policy.

Patriotism is closely connected to the sense of duty to protect the homeland- a sense of duty that is inherent to manhood: "unless a man has patriotism of the most exalted kind, a high sense of duty and an undoubting faith in the righteousness of our cause to lean back upon in his hour of trial, he has a poor support."<sup>79</sup> Because patriotism is constructed as a masculine norm, fighting in war becomes a noble and unjudgeable act. Anyone who failed to support this notion was not only a traitor, but on a more personal level, was challenging the heroic sacrifices of young men willing to risk their lives, presumably for the sake of their country.

### **Demonization of the Enemy**

Bush was further able to exploit this fear by painting a picture of Sadaam Hussein as a monster. As Rutherford argues, Bush demonized Saddam as a "a homicidal dictator who is addicted to weapons of mass destruction."<sup>80</sup> This made any authentic understanding of Iraqi political motives impossible. By understanding the Iraqi situation, diplomacy or other nonviolent techniques might have been employed to avoid war. But Bush painted Sadaam as an irrational monster that could only be dealt with using physical aggression. In one speech, Bush gave a characteristically simplistic view of Saddam, characterizing him as pure evil:

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<sup>78</sup> Rutherford, 180.

<sup>79</sup> Thomas E. Rodgers, "Billy Yank and G.I. Joe: An Exploratory Essay on the Sociopolitical Dimensions of Soldier Motivation," *The Journal of Military History*, 69 (January 2005): 93.

<sup>80</sup> The White House, "President Presses Congress for Action on Defense Appropriations Bill," 27 September 2002, available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/10/20021007-8.html>; internet; accessed 14 December 2004.

Everybody is precious. Not to the enemy. They have hijacked a great religion, and murdered -- murdered innocent people, and could care less. And that's who we're fighting, and they're out there. So we've got to do everything we can to protect the homeland.<sup>81</sup>

While Saddam Hussein was certainly responsible for human rights abuses, Bush eliminated any other political options by dehumanizing him. Moreover, similar types of human rights abuses were taking place worldwide, but the Bush Administration made portrayed Sadaam Hussein as the world's worst tyrant: "Saddam Hussein was publicized as the super-terrorist, the butcher of Baghdad, the man who would gas his own people."<sup>82</sup> This distinction was necessary because the United States only bothers to intervene if it will facilitate its own interests. For example, Saudi Arabia is frequently criticized by Human Rights Watch as a human rights abuser, but because the United States has allied with the Saudis on oil interests, little criticism (let alone intervention) is ever geared towards Saudi Arabia.<sup>83</sup> In order to overcome this contradiction, Bush had to portray Sadaam as an extreme and powerful example of a violent dictator: "it was US propaganda which created what it was now desublimating in the first place: the demonic Saddam as the larger-than life figure of Evil- it was US propaganda that elevated Saddam, that miserable local thug, into a monstrous sublime figure of Evil."<sup>84</sup> In order for Bush to be elevated to the status of heroic figure, he needed to be counterbalanced by an antihero of the same magnitude. If Bush was merely waging a war against a pitiful leader, defeat would do nothing for the American ego. The truth was that Saddam's military power had been weakened by the Gulf war and the bombing campaign and economic sanctions that

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<sup>81</sup> "President Presses Congress for Action on Defense Appropriations Bill"

<sup>82</sup> Burbach and Tarbell, 32.

<sup>83</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Saudi Arabia," 13 January 2005, available from <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2005/01/13/saudia9810.htm>; Internet; accessed 1 April 2005.

<sup>84</sup> Zizek, 64.

followed. In reality, his political and military prowess was not sufficient to match up to a hegemonic threat.

Moreover, in this speech, Bush groups together “the enemy”- which lumped together Saddam Hussein, the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorists, and Al Qaeda. No distinction between political motives or responsibility is made. Similarly, the Bush administration “denounced an ‘axis of evil...that was composed of Iraq, Iran and North Korea’”<sup>85</sup> thereby falsely suggesting that these three nations were united in threatening the United States. The media jumped on reinforced Bush’s use of buzz words and also oversimplified political relations by grouping all of America’s enemies. By using “the very notion of an “axis of evil” the Bush administration “open[ed] the way to arbitrary military intervention.”<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, the Bush administration implied “a link between the September 11 attacks and Iraq, which its own evidence did not support.”<sup>87</sup> By promoting the idea that there was a conspiracy of evil-doers who oppose the United States, Bush augmented American fear. Yet no conspiracy ever existed. More than simply stereotyping the enemy then, Bush blatantly lied to achieve his political objectives.

Moreover, the images of Saddam endlessly repeated on American television screens before the war, i.e Saddam firing a rifle into the air, “made him into some kind of Iraqi Charlton Heston- the president not only of Iraq, but also of the Iraqi Rifle Association.”<sup>88</sup> The media juxtaposed Sadaam’s image to Bush’s. If Bush was the compassionate conservative, the tough but understated savior, Saddam was the aggressive

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<sup>85</sup> Rutherford, 27.

<sup>86</sup> Kellner, 48.

<sup>87</sup> Fritz et al., 145.

<sup>88</sup> Zizek, 2.

madman. If Bush was James Bond, Saddam was the quintessential bad guy. All images reflect masculine gender popularized in mainstream media. According to the media representation, Bush's strength was subtle- he did not have to flaunt his strength (as Saddam did) because Saddam was the one prone to unreasonable aggressive outburst whereas Bush was the reasonable one.

There is a certain irony to the administrations demonization of Saddam Hussein. They repeatedly argued that invading Iraq was necessary because Saddam possessed weapons of mass destruction. In reality, the evidence that pointed to Iraqi possession of weapons of mass destruction was weak and unsubstantiated: "Bush chose to invade Iraq, lied about its alleged 'weapons of mass destruction' and its immanent threat to the United States and lied about Iraqi compliance with UN mandates for weapons inspections."<sup>89</sup> Any indication that Saddam might have given that he did pose a militaristic threat was not due to his desire to attack, but because of his own fear: "Saddam might have wanted to pretend to weapons of mass destruction, that is, leverage the fears that ambiguity about his weapons created abroad, as a way to deter enemies."<sup>90</sup> Saddam's fears were much more substantiated than America's. Iraq was the state that was threatened by the most powerful state which unquestionably had nuclear weapons and had shown a historical willingness to invade states to further its own interests.

In fact, using Bush's criteria, America is the most dangerous rogue nation of all in that it "has refused participation in every major treaty to control or eliminate such weapons. The US is a rogue nation in terms of development of weapons of mass

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<sup>89</sup> Kellner, 150.

<sup>90</sup> Prados, 186.

destruction and the blocking of treaties that could lead to their elimination.”<sup>91</sup> However, by creating fear in the American public, the Bush administration successfully evaded a critical eye to its own policies, inspired fear, and justified invasion in the name of international security and stability.

### **Captivity Narratives and the Obligation to Save**

Bush repeatedly told the American people that one of the main motivations for invading Iraq was the altruistic desire to ‘liberate’ the Iraqi people. In fact, the entire military operation was named “Operation Iraqi Freedom” (both by the media and the Pentagon<sup>92</sup>) implying that the main objective of the war was to free an oppressed people. In particular, he emphasized the weakness of Iraqi women and children who needed to be saved from the tyranny of Sadaam Hussein by the enlightened United States. For example, in one address to the American people Bush claimed that Sadaam is “a dictator who tortures and rapes women -- has women raped in order to make a point, who kills, stifles decent through murder.”<sup>93</sup> He reiterated this portrayal of Iraq as an oppressive hell for the most vulnerable citizens, saying that, “On Saddam Hussein's orders, opponents have been decapitated, wives and mothers of political opponents have been systematically raped as a method of intimidation, and political prisoners have been forced to watch their own children being tortured.”<sup>94</sup> Consequently, he argued, it was America’s responsibility to save them: “Like other generations of Americans, we will meet the responsibility of defending human liberty against violence and aggression.”<sup>95</sup> Bush’s words glorify America as a historically good-willed nation whose supremacy is used in a

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<sup>91</sup> Kellner, 56-57.

<sup>92</sup> Faisal Bodi, “Al Jazeera’s War,” in *Tell Me Lies: Propaganda and Media Distortion in the Attack on Iraq*, ed. David Miller (Sterling: Pluto, 2004), 245

<sup>93</sup> “President Presses Congress for Action on Defense Appropriations Bill”

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

beneficent manner. Bush implied that American supremacy is actually in the best interest of people around the world, that America's foreign policy benefited the lives of people abroad. Just as the heroic figure frees the captive victim from the villain, America was freeing the Iraqi people from Sadaam Hussein.

The appeal of the liberation narrative was that it created a "sequence of outrage/pity/empathy/relief" in the American people and made them feel as if the motives for invasion were "clear cut and dignified. Such humanitarian feelings are free from ambivalence and guilt which attach to the fierce emotions such as anger, disgust, horror, aggression, hatred, patriotism, triumphalism which are routines marshaled in war coverage."<sup>96</sup> The American people therefore had no reason to feel guilty when death and destruction resulted from war, because American motives were pure and altruistic and, in the long term, Bush suggested, the lives of the Iraqi people would be bettered. He molded the story of the war in Afghanistan as a tale of a freeing enslaved women and children and claimed the same would be true in Iraq:

we cried when we heard the stories about the Taliban not letting young girls go to school. It broke our heart, but it also made us joyous when we realized upholding the doctrine that said, if you harbor a terrorists, you're just as guilty as the terrorists, not only allowed the United States to keep its word, but we freed people. We freed people from the clutches of the barbaric Taliban regime.<sup>97</sup>

The media complied with this portrayal of the war and focused "on signs of celebrations of the 'liberated' Iraqis."<sup>98</sup> However, in many cases the media quite literally constructed stories of liberation, often which had little basis. For example, the image "of the pulling

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<sup>96</sup> Patricia Holland, "Little Ali and Other Rescued Children," in *Tell Me Lies: Propaganda and Media Distortion in the Attack on Iraq*, ed. David Miller (Sterling: Pluto, 2004), 186.

<sup>97</sup> "President Presses Congress for Action on Defense Appropriations Bill"

<sup>98</sup> Herman, 182.

down of the statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad's Firdos Square"<sup>99</sup> was endlessly repeated on American TV screens. It was implied that America had driven out the evil dictator and now the grateful Iraqi people were joyfully reclaiming their country. However, the truth was that the entire event was "organized by the US military, whose machinery actually pulled the statue down, and that only a tiny crowd was participating."<sup>100</sup> The story was created to pump up the ego of America, create a sense of pride in their foreign policy, and make America feel better about the sacrifices they had made in war.

This story is in line with the mythology of the American male hero where the "hero does not appear to choose his heroic project, but rather has it forced upon him by the compelling need to do his duty as a man- the 'protector of woman.'<sup>101</sup> Bush was reluctant to risk the lives American troops, he did not want war and violence, but he was forced to do so for the sake of the Iraqi women and children. It was the moral duty of the American people to save the beleaguered people, just as it would be for the mythical hero. If America failed to go to war, Bush and the military suggested, it would be a cowardly nation who was shirking from responsibility. Moreover, the sacrifice of the American people had paid off and now a grateful Iraqi people would forever be in debt to America- or so the American people were led to believe.

The media and military also constructed an anglicized version of captivity using Private Jessica Lynch. If the American public could not identify the plight of a different nation and a different race, they would certainly identify with the story of Lynch, who "was young, nineteen years old, attractive, blonde, and a woman, an American

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>101</sup> Whitehead, 119.

victim.”<sup>102</sup> In short, she was the “all-American teen.”<sup>103</sup> The story the media told was that Private Lynch was captured by the Iraqi enemy and was being held captive until American troops had courageously rescued her.

Yet, the story “was not true...Her extensive injuries were likely the result of the crash of her Humvee. She had been well treated by doctors and nurses. The special forces did not need to storm anything since the Iraqi military had deserted the site a day before.”<sup>104</sup> Kellner concurs, stating that “the US media broadcast footage of the dramatic rescue, obviously staged like a reality TV show.”<sup>105</sup> Another interpretation was that the situation resembled a scene in “action movies starring Sylvester Stallone or Jackie Chan.”<sup>106</sup> The Jessica Lynch story was a microcosm, containing all of the marketing techniques used in the Iraq war came together to provide the American public with a simplified story about the heroism of American troops in Iraq. Regardless of the truth the military and media insisted on telling the story of how a damsel in distress was “saved by the heroics of her comrades, in short a natural for a retelling of that old yarn, the captivity narrative, that harked back to the legends of Indian wars.”<sup>107</sup> Jessica Lynch was therefore merely a tool to “demonstrate the fortitude and skill of America’s fighting men.

Moreover, while the story was supposedly geared around Jessica Lynch, the impact of the captivity narrative is that the “woman is the other that necessary exists in order to allow man to assume the central role.”<sup>108</sup> The story, then, was not about Jessica

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<sup>102</sup> Rutherford, 68.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 68-69.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>107</sup> Amy Goodman and David Goodman, *The Exception to the Rulers: Exposing Oily Politicians, War Profiteers and the Media Who Love Them* (New York: Hyperion, 2004), 270.

<sup>108</sup> Whitehead, 119.

Lynch at all. It was about Bush and the American military and how their violence was justified and moral. The marketing techniques were successful in getting the desired message across to the American people. Opinion polls show that American support for the war improved directly following Jessica Lynch's "rescue".

### Chapter 3: Shoot the Messenger: Media Coverage of the War

While the Bush administration was intent on convincing the American public that invasion of Iraq was a moral responsibility and critical for national security, the propaganda would not have been nearly as successful if the media had not so readily complied. The media acted as the vehicle to carry the Bush administrations' propaganda and usually failed to investigate and criticize the information it was fed. The corporate monopoly of media made any attempts at objective coverage of the war implausible. Because of the Bush's entangled corporate interests and largely corporate-friendly policies, during his administration the:

media tends to be lap dogs, failing to investigate in any depth the scandals of Bush and Cheney, their bogus claims about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and destructive consequences of their domestic and foreign policies.... media have largely abandoned their role as the 'fourth estate' or watch dogs.<sup>109</sup>

During the first three weeks of the Iraq war, all of the major news networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, FOX and PBS ) overwhelmingly used pro-war and military sources . While 64% of the sources were unequivocally pro-war, only 10% provided the opposing point of view.<sup>110</sup> At times, as previously mentioned, news networks even aired "prepackaged" news segments that were produced by the Bush administration, never notifying the public that what they were viewing was not legitimate news coverage.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, the media worked in conjunction with the Bush administration, developing new and creative methods to engage the interest and support of the American people. The Pentagon decided to 'embed' journalists inside the military in what David Miller calls "the greatest

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<sup>109</sup> Kellner, 230

<sup>110</sup> Goodman, 168.

<sup>111</sup> Barstow and Stein, np.

PR coup of the war.”<sup>112</sup> Through this technique, the perspective of journalists became closely aligned with that of the military, and the perspectives of other players in the war were largely ignored. In addition, the coverage of the war was in ‘real time’ war right along with soldiers. The style of coverage was dramatized and turned into a form of entertainment, rather than merely the news. The coverage contained elements of video games, action movies and reality television. In addition, the American public perceived that the media was accurately portraying the situation in Iraq, when in reality the military had almost exclusive control of the images and messages that it was being sent. These journalistic methods in particular appealed to men who could much more readily identify with the soldiers on TV. Just as video games and action movies are targeted towards a largely male audience, so too was the media coverage of the Iraq war.

**Embedded: Overstepping Professional lines**

The idea, which was “dreamt up by the Pentagon and Donald Rumsfeld” was to have journalists covering the war live and work along side the military. However, in order to get this first hand experience “embeds agreed to ‘give up most of their autonomy’ in exchange for access to the fighting on military terms.”<sup>113</sup> Journalists essentially became part of the military, and thus empathized almost exclusively with military personnel. Michael Massing concluded from interviews with New York Times journalists that journalists “seem embedded with the military not only physically but also mentally.”<sup>114</sup> The perspectives of Iraqi citizens, insurgents, peace activists, and NGO workers were therefore marginalized if not altogether ignored. Yet, “from the Pentagon’s

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<sup>112</sup> David Miller, “The Propaganda Machine,” in *Tell Me Lies: Propaganda and Media Distortion in the Attack on Iraq*, ed. David Miller (Sterling: Pluto, 2004), 89.

<sup>113</sup> Miller, 89.

<sup>114</sup> Michael Massing, *Now They Tell Us: The American Press and Iraq* (New York: New York Review, 2004), 82.

point of view, this one-sided reporting worked like a charm: “Americans and people around the world are seeing firsthand the wonderful dedication and discipline of the coalition forces,” declared Pentagon spokeswoman Victoria Clarke.”<sup>115</sup>

Journalists agreed that their experiences heavily biased them towards the military. According to Rick Leventhal, an embedded correspondent for FOX, “we were dressing like [the military] and we were eating and sleeping with them and we became a part of them.”<sup>116</sup> The effect, according to one general, of having embedded journalists “was like having ‘500 Ernie Pyles.’”<sup>117</sup> The comparisons to Ernie Pyle were numerous. Pyle was a journalist in World War II who “was remembered because his reports had memorialized the ordinary fighting man, especially the lowly infantry. Their hardships, their courage, their heroism.”<sup>118</sup> According to Schechter the coverage of the Iraq war can be described as “Ernie Pyle meets Franz Kafka. What you are seeing is not the war in Iraq...What you are seeing are slices of the war in Iraq.”<sup>119</sup> The soldier is romanticized as a self-sacrificing strongman. The emotional trauma, massacre of civilians and sexual violence that are common components of the military experience were avoided in lieu of a feel-good message about soldiers’ achievements. Thus, the American public only received messages about the heroism and courage of American troops. The aftermath of warfare - the leveled villages, distraught families and traumatized civilians- were ignored as the military moved on to new targets.

## War Games

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<sup>115</sup> Goodman and Goodman, 170.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>118</sup> Rutherford, 73.

<sup>119</sup> Danny Schechter, *Embedded: Weapons of Mass Deception* (Amherst: Prometheus, 2003), 119.

Another consequence of embedding journalists was the creation of “a feeling of thereness that many an action-movie direction would envy...It resembles early generations of video games but with a far more resonant edge. The visual plane is flattened, the voices of reporters crackle, the image breaks up into pixilated squares.”<sup>120</sup> Viewers lived vicariously through the television, giving them a glamorized, sanitized version of the war. The sensation was similar to that of playing a video game. The viewer was the videogame hero, only the excitement was multiplied by the alleged reality of what he was seeing: “the spectacle was thrilling...images of tanks rolling through the desert were stunning- Nintendo of Arabia.”<sup>121</sup> Such media techniques were especially appealing to men who are the targeted audience and dominant consumers of action-style video games; in studying the gendered nature of video games, Nina Huntemann found that 95% of readers of video game magazines are men and 95% of video game creators are men.<sup>122</sup> Just as the major players in action-video games are generally male, so too were the characters that appeared on the news screen: 85% of news sources interviewed in relation to the war were male.<sup>123</sup> Moreover, in video games, Huntemann observes, “violence... is almost always justified; players are rewarded for escalating their violent behavior; vigilante-style justice is favored over due-process.”<sup>124</sup> If the war seemed like a video game to viewers, they were disconnected from the consequences of violence. Not only did the violence seem unreal, but as in video games, it was implicitly justified and necessary. Video games simplify the nature of the situation. There is no other option but

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<sup>120</sup> Rutherford, 86.

<sup>121</sup> Schechter, 119.

<sup>122</sup> Nina B. Huntemann, “Play Like a Man: Masculinity in Video Games,” lecture on-line; Available from <http://www.mediacritica.net/lectures/lectures.html>.

<sup>123</sup> Goodman, 153.

<sup>124</sup> Nina B. Huntemann, “Video Game Violence: It's Not What You Think,” lecture on-line; Available from <http://www.mediacritica.net/lectures/lectures.html>.

to shoot and kill. Video games focus on “the details of warfare technology and tactical strategy, military-themed games show players how we fight wars, but rarely address questions of the moral responsibility and local and global consequences of military action.”<sup>125</sup> The appeal of the video game-war analogy is also clear from the video game market. During the Gulf War, “many young men in America... decided to ‘participate’ in the war by purchasing or downloading video games that are set in Iraq. In *Conflict: Desert Storm*, by Gotham Games, the gamer’s mission is to find and capture (or kill) Saddam Hussein.”<sup>126</sup> Such a video game promotes the idea war is surreal and a game- the glory, heroism, and excitement of war could all be real without any of the misery, fear and heartache of the genuine experience of war. In the video game scenario, and in the news coverage, viewers and players did not have to see the reality: “devastated communities, overcrowded and under equipped hospitals, dead and dying victims of US bomb attacks.”<sup>127</sup>

### ***The Real World: Baghdad***

The hybrid between reality and fantasy was reminiscent of another popular medium: reality TV. The recent unbridled success of reality TV shows provided a model for news networks to follow. The trend “started with entertainment shows such as Big Brother, Survivor and Idols.” But then the media “stumbled across the ultimate reality: war”.<sup>128</sup> In studying the appeal of reality TV Susan Murray and Laura Ouellette argue that such shows “whet our desire for the authentic, [yet] much of our engagement with such texts paradoxically hinges on our awareness that what we are watching is

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<sup>125</sup> Nina B. Huntemann, “Virtual Warfare: Video Games and the New Militarism,” lecture on-line; Available from <http://www.mediacritica.net/lectures/lectures.html>.

<sup>126</sup> Schechter, 221.

<sup>127</sup> Goodman and Goodman, 197.

<sup>128</sup> Schechter, 204.

constructed.”<sup>129</sup> The viewer can identify with the characters because they are portrayed as commonplace, authentic people. However, these ordinary people are placed in extraordinary situations and experience exciting events. Thus, the viewer is drawn into a “real” fantasy world. In effect, reality TV allows a viewer to see himself being reflected in a fantasyland. The coverage of the war in Iraq followed along these lines. Real-time war is “a war brought live and brought constantly into the living rooms and bedrooms of the whole world via television. You could now experience war as it was happening.”<sup>130</sup> Like reality TV, the viewer was there right along with ordinary people, only this time the ‘ordinary people’ were soldiers. Men, in particular could have the experience of fighting for their homeland in the comfort and safety of their own home. In reality “soldiers who kill innocents pay a tremendous personal emotional and spiritual price.”<sup>131</sup>

The effect was no accident: “real-time war was not just the concoction of the Pentagon and the White House...[it] was constructed as well by the media, by technology of instant communications, above all by television networks.”<sup>132</sup> Accurate news reporting was sacrificed for the sake of ratings. New technology and collaboration with the government allowed news networks to design a new and mesmerizing way to depict war.

### **Just Like 007**

Another way that the media coverage was constructed to appeal to an American audience and to make the war more palatable was by constructing the storyline of the war as if it were an action-flick. Sheldon and Rampton suggest that war in Iraq was marketed to the American people, and particularly to men, as if it was a James Bond-style action

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<sup>129</sup> Susan Murray and Laura Ouellette, *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 5.

<sup>130</sup> Rutherford, 78.

<sup>131</sup> Chris Hedges, *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), 88.

<sup>132</sup> Rutherford, 80.

movie. They point to common themes in James Bond movies, which have always attracted a primarily male audience, and discourse surrounding the Iraq war. Such themes include a black and white good/evil dichotomy, a clear villain (Saddam), and a portrayal of a hero (George W.) as compassionate yet strong and resilient.<sup>133</sup> James Bond movies, “attract more men than women” which Rutherford attributes to the creation of the “fantasy world of 007 [where] life was organized by the rule of the phallus, meaning that masculine principle of challenge, command and conquest in which sex and violence were inextricably linked- ‘hot babes and cool weaponry.’”<sup>134</sup>

If “the president was presented as a phallic hero,”<sup>135</sup> then “the escapades in Afghanistan and Iraq had borrowed the justifications embedded in ‘those action-vengeance flicks’ of Steven Seagal and Vin Diesel where the hero has to right a brutal wrong (that was 9/11) with some awesome display of violence.”<sup>136</sup> Thus the war became a fantasy, the American public was desensitized from massive death that accompanied war. Their deaths seemed no more serious than the death of the bad guys in movies. As soon as you turn off the television, as soon as the movie ends, so does the death.

### **“A Bloodless War”**

In order to maintain the illusion that the war was just as real as a movie, television or a video game, media coverage had to be sufficiently sanitized. Sanitization is not new in terms of media coverage of war. For example, the American public continues to have a distorted view of how many people died in Vietnam. On average, people estimate there were 100,000 deaths, whereas the truth is 3 to 4 million.<sup>137</sup> According to MSNBC

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<sup>133</sup> Rampton and Stauber, 19.

<sup>134</sup> Rutherford, 20.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>137</sup> Chomsky, 34.

reporter Ashleigh Banfield, who witnessed the war first-hand, what the viewer saw was “a bloodless war” in which “you didn’t see what happened when the mortars landed. A puff of smoke is not what a mortar looks like when it explodes, believe me.”<sup>138</sup> John Donovan of ABC news concurred, saying that the media coverage “never show(s) you how horrible it really is.”<sup>139</sup> Yet any dissent within the media was censured. When Banfield argued that coverage was “sanitized” she was “taken to the woodshed” and chastised publicly by her bosses.<sup>140</sup> In particular, those who spun the war focused on what a “clean war” took place in Iraq. Thus, the media and military “downplayed the context of bombings and affirm[ed] the idea of precision munitions, high tech warfare to fit Washington’s propaganda. That sanitized the exercise, making it akin to all the explosions which graced, for instance, the Bond movies.”<sup>141</sup> Realizing the extent of their bias, the New York Times released a report that apologized for giving misleading coverage of the war in Iraq. Michael Massing, who compiled evidence for the report blamed the “pack mentality of journalists” all of whom “relied heavily on US military sources.”<sup>142</sup>

Instead of being a forum for free speech, the media turned into a tool of the government where censorship became the rule. Because corporate, military and political interests were intermingled, the ‘free’ press more readily resembled a propaganda machine of a repressive dictatorship. As Amy Goodman poses the question, “why does the corporate media cheerlead for war? One answer lies in the corporations themselves,

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<sup>138</sup> Herman, 181.

<sup>139</sup> Goodman, 178.

<sup>140</sup> Schechter, 244.

<sup>141</sup> Rutherford, 90.

<sup>142</sup> Massing, 89.

the ones that own the major news outlets.”<sup>143</sup> Corporate incentives provided to journalists in Iraq ensured that they “spent their days shuttling between Coalition Media Center and their plush five star hotels... Working late into the night to accommodate editors seven time zones away, they got most of their information...from TV, the Internet, and their colleagues in the field.”<sup>144</sup> David Albright, a nuclear expert used by the New York Times, said that in his experience he “always felt the administration was setting the agenda for what stories should be covered and the news media bought into that rather than take a critical look at the administrations underlying reasons for war.”<sup>145</sup> Consequently, there “were a variety of key omissions- the most obvious, and most often ignored being the US quest for new sources of petroleum.”<sup>146</sup> Even on the home front, the media failed to criticize the Bush administrations distorted portrayal of the political situation. In reaction to the 2002 State of the Union, in which Bush referred to the ‘Axis of Evil’ on five separate occasions,<sup>147</sup> “the US media gushed over Bush’s performance, failing to criticize it.”<sup>148</sup> Journalists consistently failed to get the whole story in favor of appeasing corporate, military and governmental interests.

The amount that the media coverage was skewed becomes apparently when the images and messages sent by mainstream American media to those sent by Al-Jazeera, the most prominent Arab news network. CNN made “the decision not to highlight the horrors of war on the grounds of good taste” and further decided to “sentimentalize the American soldier, [and] how they strove to help Iraqis in trouble.”<sup>149</sup> In contrast “Arab

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<sup>143</sup> Goodman, 152.

<sup>144</sup> Massing, 13.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>146</sup> Boggs, 63.

<sup>147</sup> Kellner, 46

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>149</sup> Rutherford, 99.

TV, and especially Al-Jazeera sold their audiences the supposed reality of dirty war.”<sup>150</sup> Al-Jazeera certainly had its own biases, but it provides an appropriate foil to American coverage: “CNN offered scenes of soldiers holding a baby; but turn to Al-Jazeera and its soldiers killing a baby.”<sup>151</sup> CNN portrayed the war in Iraq as a forum that maintained all of the positive attributes of masculinity in war; it endorsed the idea that inside the war in Iraq there was “a common mission, a clear frontier with the identifiable enemy, a shared brotherhood, and a calling to protect a population of women and children.”<sup>152</sup> Al-Jazeera’s war coverage, in contrast, portrayed a horror movie, a nightmare come to life, an apocalyptic tragedy. In relating the reality of war, journalist Chris Hedges says it is “a world not of heroics and glory but of rape, bombing raids, crime.”<sup>153</sup> Al Jazeera’s coverage, then may have been much closer to the truth.

### **Mission Successful: Trends in Public Support**

Mainstream media American coverage of the war was highly influential in determining the degree of support among the American public in the war. Opinion polls of American support were wildly variable in accordance with what images and messages ran across the television. According to Rutherford, “the yo-yo effect showed first how unrealistic public expectations were of a quick and clean war. Even more, it demonstrated the impact of real-time war on public opinion.”<sup>154</sup> Successful marketing techniques created a fervor for war, which led to a high degree of support (70%) during the first three weeks of war.<sup>155</sup> Yet, despite continued attempts by the media and the Bush

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>152</sup> Faludi, 299.

<sup>153</sup> Hedges, 89.

<sup>154</sup> Rutherford, 155.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 116.

administration to sanitize the war, the reality of war's destruction became apparent. On April 30, 2003, 70% of Americans believed that the "war with Iraq was worth fighting" but by July 10<sup>th</sup>, the numbers had declined to 57%. According to Washington Post journalists Richard Morin and Claudia Deane, the polls suggest that after the initial euphoria associated with war, the American public became disillusioned, "creating an uncertain and volatile political environment."<sup>156</sup>

The effect of Bush's rhetoric is also directly reflected in the polls. On March 9, 2003, 59% of Americans said they would support going to war with Iraq. After Bush's speech on March 17<sup>th</sup>, in which he told Americans that "Iraq has a deep hatred of America and our friends. And it has aided, trained and harbored terrorists, including operatives of al Qaeda."<sup>157</sup> The following day, polls showed that 71% of Americans supported the war.<sup>158</sup> However, perhaps the most notable aspect of opinion polls was the gender gap in support. There was consistently much more support by males than by females. By the end of the war, 56% of men said that they thought "the end results [of the war] had been worth the costs" compared to 35% of women.<sup>159</sup> Such a discrepancy adds credence to the hypothesis that support for the war was largely determined by the military and media's gendered propaganda. Without appealing to notions of masculinity, the Bush

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<sup>156</sup> Richard Morin and Claudia Deane, "Support for Bush Declines as Casualties Mount Iraq," *The Washington Post*, 12 July 2003, (Newspaper on-line); available from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wpdyn?pagename=article&contentId=A45480-2003Jul11&notFound=true>. Accessed 24 March 2005.

<sup>157</sup> The White House, "President Says Saddam Hussein Must Leave Iraq Within 48 Hours," 17 March 2003, available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030317-7.html>; internet; accessed 14 December 2004.

<sup>158</sup> "ABC News Poll: Bush's Speech," *The Washington Post*, 18 March 2003, (Newspaper on-line); available from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/polls/vault/stories/data031803.htm>. Accessed 25 March 2005.

<sup>159</sup> CBS News, "Poll: U.S. Losing Control in Iraq," 10 July 2003, available from <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/07/10/opinion/polls/main562628.shtml>; internet; accessed 25 March 2005.

administration would have had a much more difficult time garnering the necessary public support for the war and support for the war would have been much more consistent among men and women.

## **Chapter 4: American Culture and Exaltation of Masculinity: Why America Listened to the Bush Administration**

The efforts of the Bush Administration relied heavily on aspects of American culture that were in place long before war propaganda began to be developed. American culture was predisposed to supporting war largely due to entrenched masculine values. In addition, these values led America to elect Bush in the first place because of traits that exemplified him as a strong masculine leader.

### **Bush Goes to Hollywood**

In order to understand how America's view of masculinity, it is most useful to look at the symbols of popular culture that entrench and reflect American values. American movies tend to be some of the most revealing documents about prevailing cultural doctrines. The American government, long privy to this fact, has worked with Hollywood in order help shape the belief systems of the public. Matthew Fraser explains: "Hollywood is the most powerful cultural force on the planet. And its historical alliance with Washington is stronger then ever."<sup>160</sup> He documents this alliance back to when the "cinema was born-circa 1900- at precisely the moment America was emerging as a major power on the world stage. And it did not take long for motion pictures to become a mythmaking extension of America's global ambitions."<sup>161</sup> American movies have therefore continually constructed America as a powerful, heroic nation. One can understand the political goals of an era by watching the movies that were produced during that time. In particular, "throughout the Cold War era into the 1990s, Hollywood cinema produced time and again its combat formulas developed and perfected in

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<sup>160</sup> Matthew Fraser, *Weapons of Mass Distraction: Soft Power and American Empire* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003),108.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

Westerns and World War II dramas, with their masculine, patriotic, gun toting heroes prevailing over a variety of evil.”<sup>162</sup> The American government has a tradition of exalting tradition male gender roles the courageous fighter, in order to glorify war and garner support for violent foreign policy.

One of the most recent and disturbing collaborations was *The Sum of All Fears*, a movie based on the Tom Clancy which tells the story of a CIA analyst who saves the United States from nuclear terrorism. The idea for the movie was spawned when “a group of Hollywood studio executives held secret meetings with top White House officials to discuss how American movies and Hollywood produced television shows could combat global terrorism.”<sup>163</sup> Phillip Strub, the Pentagon’s special assistant for entertainment media admitted, in reference to the movie, that the Pentagon “want[ed] an opportunity to communicate directly to the American people through that powerful medium.”<sup>164</sup> The message that was communicated was that nuclear terrorism is an immanent threat and that there are evil, inhuman people who are willing to undertake it. Moreover, fighting terrorism is glorious, admirable and heroic feat. The relationship is mutually beneficial: Hollywood promotes war to assist the Pentagon with specific public elations goals, and violence- especially realistic violence- helps Hollywood sell movies:

American cinema has celebrated the virtues of patriotism and militarism from the earliest Western movies to the later combat, action, sci-fi and blockbuster genres. At the hands of dozens of directors, military action has been romanticized, beautifies and in most cases relativized insofar as violence is represented as a positive thing for the American military.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Boggs, 151.

<sup>163</sup> Fraser, 108.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. ,109.

<sup>165</sup> Boggs, 148.

Viewers (male and female alike) watching such films are taught that it is the role of men to defend their nation, that it is admirable to risk their lives, and that violence is necessary to resolve conflicts. Just as children's Disney films inspire girls to fantasize about being the princess rescued by Prince Charming, war movies socialize young men to dream about being the soldier, valiantly setting off on a mission for the greater good of their country.

### **Papa Bush**

Such socialization, combined with historical context has also determined the type of leaders that America elects and trusts. Electing Bush was a way to reassure the battered American male identity. Bush follows the American tradition of presidents who choose to demonstrate their masculinity through military might. Throughout American history, most presidents have:

praised masculine aggressiveness while cloaking their bellicosity with selfless generalities, such as employing force to advance the nation's or even humanity's welfare....With military force, they could test their virility, seemingly prove it and usually benefit from it.<sup>166</sup>

George W. Bush possessed his own brand of masculinity that appealed to America in a way that was appropriate of an era. In particular, he appealed to America as a paternal figure, the messiah, and the compassionate but steadfast leader. Average citizens could identify with him because he came off as the all-American man; while not being pretentious or intellectual, he is still able to portray strong masculine characteristics, which was particularly appealing in a historical moment when traditional masculinity notions were being questioned and transformed:

Bush also embodies the primal uncertainty many men feel... This angst, which threatens to pop up like a sour belch, solidifies his bond with threatened men.

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<sup>166</sup> Alexander Deconde, *Presidential Machismo: Executive Authority, Military Intervention and Foreign Relations*.(Boston: Northeastern, 2000), 286.

They identify with his struggle to carry off the feat of macho, and many women empathize with that effort.<sup>167</sup>

With September 11<sup>th</sup> intensifying uncertainty about what it meant to be an American man, Bush had the freedom to carry out his agenda militaristically. A frightened public was willing to trust a leader that promised to protect them. In short, “the appeal of this harsh, punitive style is directly related to anxiety.”<sup>168</sup> After September 11<sup>th</sup>, the American public was nothing if not anxious. Richard Goldstein explains, “The mindset of manly belligerence was already in place when the planes struck. In the horror that followed, we struggled for a way to respond--and we found it in the icon of neo-macho man.”<sup>168</sup>

By taking on the role of this ‘neo-macho man’- a figure that was at once compassionate yet strong, caring but resolute, the administration was “able to run wild in promoting the interests of a reactionary, corporate elite on a global scale while cloaking these interests in the rhetoric of the American myths.”<sup>169</sup> However, in order to maintain the public’s uninhibited trust, he had to keep the nation scared. Psychologist Renana Brooks points out that Bush continually “describes the nation as being in a perpetual state of crisis and then attempts to convince the electorate that it is powerless and that he is the only one with the strength to deal with it.”<sup>170</sup> Oliver James’ psychoanalytic study of Bush confirms this analysis, finding that Bush possesses “an authoritarian personality”, is

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<sup>167</sup> Richard Goldstein, “Bush’s Basket: Why the President Had to Show His Balls,” *Village Voice*, 21 May 2003 (Newspaper online); available from <http://www.villagevoice.com/issues/0321/goldstein.php>. Accessed 14 December 2004.

<sup>168</sup> Richard. Goldstein, “Neo-Macho Man: Pop Culture and Post-9/11 Politics,” *The Nation*, 24 March 2003 (Newspaper on-line); available from <http://www.thenation.com/doc.mhtml?i=20030324&c=4&s=goldstein>. Accessed 12 December 2004.

<sup>169</sup> Burbach, and Tarbell, 14.

<sup>170</sup> Renana Brooks, “Bush Dominates a Nation of Victims,” *The Nation*, 24 June 2003 (Newspaper on-line); available from <http://www.alternet.org/story/16243>. Accessed 13 December 2004.

“intensely moralistic” and, like many dictatorial leaders, will “avoid introspection or loving displays, preferring toughness.”<sup>171</sup> A war environment was therefore one that best fit Bush’s leadership qualities. Instead of being a representative of a democratic people, Bush could lead the nation in a father-knows-best manner without being questioned.

Bush did not hesitate to dress the part. When Bush announced the commencement of the war he was outfitted in such a way that he was reminiscent of “stars once common in America medical dramas of the 1960s, men like Dr. Zora or Dr. Gillespie, father figures who would always speak the ‘truth’, usually a very moral truth, to their younger colleagues and to the watching audience.”<sup>172</sup> In this speech, Bush speaks in a slow-measured tone, as if he is breaking regrettable news to his children. Bush played the part of other mythical male figures as well. Later on, in preparation of a broadcast about the progress of the war, Bush:

flew in to the USS Abraham Lincoln at the controls of a jet that made a striking tail-hook landing. He arrived wearing a pilot’s outfit, full of gear, looking every bit the skilled warrior ready for battle....The performance recalled other masculine moments in the history of political theater...memories of victories generals and emperors parading through the streets of ancient Rome...imagery of the Third Reich, because of the obsession that regime had with organizing mass spectacles in which Hitler received the adulation of the faithful.<sup>173</sup>

Bush was portraying himself as a fighter and “showing solidarity with the returning victors, the real men and women who had done a superb job in Iraq. These warriors, he said, had continued the glorious tradition of the American military: ‘the daring of Normandy, the fierce courage of Iwo Jima.’”<sup>174</sup> Bush was continuing Hollywood’s

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<sup>171</sup> Oliver James, “So George, How Do You Feel About Your Mom and Dad? Psychologist Oliver James Analyses the Behaviour of the American President,” *The Guardian*, 2 September 2003 (Newspaper on-line); available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/g2/story/0,,1033771,00.html>. Accessed 1 March 2005.

<sup>172</sup> Rutherford, 34.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>174</sup> Rutherford, 181.

tradition of glorifying violence, only this time he was dramatizing reality. The message was that America was a nation that would not tolerate any challenge to its authority. The United States was sufficiently superior to crush any potential enemy. America bought into it: “61% [of Americans] believed a real benefit of the Iraq war was the fact that other governments around the world were now more afraid of the United States.”<sup>175</sup>

Bush’s speech on the Abraham Lincoln conveyed a sense of historic self-importance as well. He was not only a fighter, but also the messiah: “President Bush’s speech on 1 May aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln conveyed a slightly secularized version of the gospel of salvation: ‘Men and women in every culture need liberty like they need food and water and air.’”<sup>176</sup> Bush sold the war by simultaneously feeding the ego of the United States and creating a moral responsibility for the nation. Bush convinced Americans that he was the necessary leader to turn Iraq into the promised land.

Using marketing techniques fit wells into Bush’s character: “All of his adult life George W. Bush has been a salesman. To his childhood chums, his multiple business associates and his political supporters he has been able to sell questionable schemes.”<sup>177</sup> With the help of the military and media, it is therefore no surprise that the Bush administration successfully found the soft spot of American culture. In a moment when the nation was questioning its identity and questioning what it meant to be an American man, the Bush administration provided an answer. They sent the message that it was acceptable to still be a warrior, with Bush leading the way in the reclamation of masculinity.

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>177</sup> Burbach and Tarbell, 114.

## Chapter 5: The Payoff: Sex and Violence

Because the media and the government constructed the war in Iraq in accordance with male gender norms, there were often inappropriate and sometimes tragic consequences in the way the war was conducted, as there have been in wars throughout history. Two of the most prominent gendered features of the war in Iraq were the sexual abuse of detainees in the Abu Ghraib and the increased incidence of domestic violence within the armed forces.

Masculine constructions of war shape how the course of war plays out, reinforcing masculine values and providing incentives for aggression and legitimizing violence. One of the often negative consequences of this connection is a perversion of sexual norms, increasing the incidence inappropriate sexual behavior, victimization of women and aggressive sexual tendencies. Joshua Goldstein explains that during war, “soldiers how an almost universal preoccupation with sex” because “armies segregate large numbers of post-adolescent males for extended periods, thereby creating a kind of critical mass of pent up sexual desire.”<sup>178</sup> Additionally, soldiers are freed from the constraining sexual norms of their homeland and exposed to a distressed population which often leads to the prominence sexually available women. In an environment that promotes aggression, war and sex are linked because they are driven by “the same unbridled drive for pleasure, especially in the case of the masculine libido.”<sup>179</sup> In many cases, the identity of the soldier becomes tied up in sexual aggression because:

the association of the soldier’s phallus with his rifle occurs in a context which the soldier’s identity as a man is stripped away... The soldier is nothing without his weapon, for it is this weapon that entitles him to his identity- an identity mediated

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<sup>178</sup> Joshua Goldstein, 334.

<sup>179</sup> Rutherford, 166.

by the collective. Because the weapon symbolizes his masculine identity and serves a surrogate for his own phallus, the handling and shooting of the rifle is infused with sexual arousal.<sup>180</sup>

In a destabilized nation, sex tends to be widely available. Women are more likely to prostitute themselves and soldiers have a greater opportunity to seek out vulnerable women or even to rape them. In fact, rape is so commonplace during wartime that Alexandra Stiglmyer calls it “a normal accompaniment to war.”<sup>181</sup> As Cynthia Enloe explains, “there are women available. Those women are of another culture, another color, another society... You’ve got an M-16. What do you need to pay a lady for?”<sup>182</sup> Soldiers tend, therefore to be promiscuous during war. During World War II, for example, “the average US soldier who served in Europe from D-Day through the end of the war had sex with 25 women”<sup>183</sup> during the war. War journalist Chris Hedges attributes the hyper-sexualized nature of war to the fact that “power [is] reduced to such a raw level and the currency of life and death cheap, eroticism races through all relationships.”<sup>184</sup> Because soldiers are risking their lives in war, they disregard long term consequences (and sometimes ethical implications) of their actions. During the war in Iraq, the correlation between war and sex even had an effect on those remaining at home:

One of the trivial results of the Iraq war was how it changed, briefly, the pattern of searches on the Internet: reports came out that the hunt for sex sites, consistently the favorites on the web, had been upstaged by the hunger for war news...the way the invasion was represented, especially on TV and how it was sold amounted to a case of machismo rejuvenated.<sup>185</sup>

## Abu Ghraib

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<sup>180</sup> James McBride, *War, Battering, and Other Sports* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995), 56.  
<sup>181</sup> Alexandra Stiglmyer, *Mass Rape: The War in Former Yugoslavia* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska 1994), 84.

<sup>182</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *Does Khaki Become You?: The Militarization of Women’s Lives* (Boston South End Press, 1983), 321.

<sup>183</sup> Joshua Goldstein, 337.

<sup>184</sup> Hedges, 101.

<sup>185</sup> Rutherford, 166.

However, there were many more serious consequences to the sexualized nature of the war in Iraq. One of the most visible and horrific examples were the human rights abuses of Iraqi detainees at the Abu Ghraib prison. While prisoners were abused in a variety of ways, many were subject to sexualized abuse. One prisoner said in his sworn statement that American military police took “photographs [of prisoners] as if it was a porn movie.”<sup>186</sup> Other incidents included positioning detainees “in simulated sexual positions with other internees,”<sup>187</sup> “forced participation in group masturbation”<sup>188</sup> and even “alleged rape.”<sup>189</sup>

Part of what made such horrific incidents possible was the illusion that war was not real. In marketing the war as a movie or a video game soldiers, it became easier to dehumanize Iraqis and disassociate from the consequences of abuse. In wars, “the liquidation of the enemy, with enemy [is] defined as simply the other, is part of the redemption of the nation.”<sup>190</sup> The military ensures that soldiers will have no qualms about killing by perverting normal standards of moralist and human treatment: “in the world of war, guilt may be honor, the gunning down of unarmed pedestrians including children may be defined as heroic.”<sup>191</sup> The pragmatic explanation is that the Bush administration was more concerned with carrying out an efficient war and achieving economic goals than with any humanistic impacts: “the road to the abuses began with flawed administration policies that exalted expediency and necessity over the rule of law

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<sup>186</sup> Karen J. Greenberg, and Joshua L. Dratel, ed. *The Torture Papers* (New York: Cambridge, 2005), 516.

<sup>187</sup> George Fay and Anthony Jones, “The Fay Jones Report,” in *The Torture Papers* (New York: Cambridge, 2005), 1071.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 1024.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 1024.

<sup>190</sup> Hedges, 139.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

[and] eviscerated the military's institutional constraints on the treatment of prisoners.”<sup>192</sup>

If the war had been marketed realistically, if the military had been trained accurately about the people and the political situation in which they were interfering, the likelihood that such prison abuse would have occurred would have been reduced. Moreover, if war was not marketed as expression of masculine aggression, the entire conception of the goals and conduct of the war would have been transformed and these human right violations might have been avoided.

### **Domestic Violence**

Iraqi citizens were not the only ones who felt the repercussions of masculine aggression in war. The families of military personnel were often victims as well. In general, the United States' military promotes the idea that masculine identity is associated with violence (see chapter 1) and thus “there has always been a significantly higher incidence of domestic violence among military families than in the civilian population.”<sup>193</sup> From this already heightened level, there was a “sharp increase in frequency [of domestic violence incidents] when the war started.”<sup>194</sup> One of the messages that the military sends is that conflicts are most effectively settled violently. Aggression and strength are rewarded, and those who show emotion or weakness are reprimanded. With the increased stress of war, turn their frustrations against their family members. Despite this problem, “the military -- both the leadership and the soldiers -- remains staunchly resistant to acknowledging domestic violence as a serious problem” and those who have tried to seek solutions for the problem have been stigmatized as

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<sup>192</sup> Phillip Carter, “The Road to Abu Ghraib,” *The Washington Monthly*, 11 April 2004 (Magazine on-line); available from <http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2004/0411.carter.html> Accessed 30 March 2005.

<sup>193</sup> Bill Berkowitz, “Bringing the Violence Home,” *Alternet*, 3 June 2004 (Article on-line); available from <http://www.alternet.org/waroniraq/18857>. Accessed 30 March 2005.

<sup>194</sup> Lutz, 1.

“unpatriotic” and “traitors.”<sup>195</sup> In order for the problem of domestic violence to even to be addressed in the military, the gendered framework must first be challenged. As long as the notion of national security is tied to the idea of violence, stoicism and strict authoritarianism, there is no hope for change within the military or outside of it. Until the humanistic impact of violence on both the victim and the perpetrator is acknowledged, domestic violence and human rights abuses are likely to continue in future wars. The military treats its subjects as machines, refusing to acknowledge individuality, weakness or emotion. Yet, this approach inevitably fails. Unable to sufficiently repress emotion and stress, soldiers turn their anger, pain and confusion towards themselves and their families. It is no wonder that mental illness is such a common occurrence in war veterans.

### **Conclusions**

Living in a gendered world is unavoidable and neither innately good nor bad. The intrigue of the Other provides the excitement of romance, balance and diversity. Yet, gender norms can also be used as manipulative tools, especially when combined with marketing techniques. The war in Iraq provides a particularly brutal example of how social constructs can be used to dictate public opinion resulting in heartbreaking consequences. If we become aware of how gender constructs affect us, about the identities that the media encourages us to assume, we become less vulnerable to their potential negative impacts. We all have a responsibility in challenging the harmful aspects of such constructs:

When we interrupt coworkers' sexist jokes, when we work to prevent violence against women; when we practice active listening with our partners; when we take care of our children; when we champion a culture of compassion rather than a culture of destruction, we are, by example, enlarging the national debate about manhood. If enough of us replace old-style masculinity with a "kinder, gentler"

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<sup>195</sup> Berkowitz, np.

definition (to borrow a phrase from George Bush, Sr.), there's a chance men will reject "might equals right" as their credo.<sup>196</sup>

But it is impossible to simply make old conceptions of masculinity disappear- there needs to be something to replace them. Instead we must provide an alternative space for men to develop a conception of masculinity and redefine what it means to be an American man. This redefinition is important for the well-being of men and women alike. The pressure on men to always be the leaders, the heroes and the protectors is often unbearable. Moreover, it constrains women to be submissive, helpless and secondary.

Awareness about the extent to which marketing techniques pervade culture is equally important. While it is obvious that America is commercialized, we often do not realize that deceptive marketing techniques are not limited to goods and services. Just as we watch television commercials with a critical eye, so too do we need to be prudent when listening to news coverage or the words of our elected representatives. Such awareness will make us less likely to be duped in the future and more likely to make authentic and democratic political decisions.

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<sup>196</sup> Okun, 2.

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