

Cover Story: The Rhetorical Construction of Afghan Women in a *Time* Feature

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ABSTRACT

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(Under the direction of Rhonda Gibson)

Some mass media scholars have argued that U.S. news coverage of Afghan women after September 11 helped the Bush administration define its 2001 invasion of Afghanistan as a humanitarian mission. Building on this research, I performed a feminist rhetorical analysis of *Time*'s December 3, 2001, cover story, which promised to deliver "an inside look" at Afghan women's lives. Ironically, the article, "About Face," created an Orientalist distance between readers and Afghan women by constructing the women as objects of the readers' Westernized, masculinized gaze. Furthermore, in casting women as passive victims, the article upheld disempowering ideologies about women and legitimized the war as a rescue mission. In one exception to the victim portrayal, Afghan mothers were cast as brave, determined protectors of their children. Although the "determined mother" portrayal confounded the victim archetype, it still followed the gendered logic of wartime reporting, which confines female agency to the domestic realm.

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Chapter 1: Introduction, Limitations, Literature Review, and Research Questions

After seizing control of Afghanistan by bits and pieces during the mid-1990s, the Taliban, a nationalist movement led by Wahhabi Islamist and Pashtun religious scholars, enforced its cruel interpretation of Islamic law on the country's people. Although repressive of all Afghans, the Taliban's laws were particularly harsh on women, who could not so much as leave home unless they were accompanied by a male relative. Among other restrictions, women could not attend school or work outside the home except in a handful of medical and teaching positions.

During the late 1990s, the U.S. mainstream news media had sporadically reported on the Taliban's oppression of women. But when the American military led an invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001 to dismantle the Taliban government, which was known to harbor the people responsible for the September 11, 2001, plane hijackings, national news stories about the hardships Afghan women faced began to appear much more frequently (Stabile & Kumar, 2005, pp. 771-772).¹ Communications scholars, long aware that women's concerns are underrepresented by the news media, generally agreed that the sudden spotlight on these women, rather than reflecting a genuine concern for their welfare, served an elite agenda of winning public support for the war (Cloud, 2004; Klaus & Kassel, 2005; Stabile & Kumar, 2005). When American audiences were confronted by horrifying images of women

¹Offered as an example of the stepped-up news coverage that Afghan women received in the United States during Operation Enduring Freedom, a LexisNexis Academic full-text search on the phrase *Afghan women* found 32 articles in *The New York Times* and 9 *Newsweek* magazine articles published between 1996 and 2000. The same search returned 62 *New York Times* articles and 17 *Newsweek* articles between September 2001 and March 2002. (Reader letters were excluded from these counts.)

being publicly beaten and stories of widows who were forced to become beggars because they were forbidden to work, it was easy for many people to hate the Taliban and feel that the invasion of Afghanistan was just and warranted.

Over the last few decades, much agenda-setting research (e.g., Erbring, Goldenberg, & Miller, 1980; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; McCombs & Shaw, 1972) has borne out political scientist Bernard Cohen's (1963) assertion that the press "is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (p. 13). In addition, the agenda-setting function of the news media is enhanced when it comes to foreign policy issues (Powlick & Katz, 1998, p. 39). For many Americans, including some policymakers, the news media provide the only source of information about people and events in other parts of the world. Recent evidence (Soroka, 2003) suggests that mass media content can strongly influence public opinion about foreign policy. But the news media also serve as an important link between the U.S. public and policymakers, who follow media reports to track public opinion (Soroka, 2003, p. 28). Given its potential to influence public opinion and even public policy, mass media content is a worthy subject of scholarly analysis, particularly during a war, when lives are at stake.

Media researchers (Cloud, 2004; Klaus & Kassel, 2005; Stabile & Kumar, 2005) have convincingly argued that news media portrayals of Afghan women as helpless victims served to evoke the public's sympathy and foment outrage at their oppressors. But none of these studies lingered over any one article or photo for very long; instead, each examined multiple media texts and images that appeared within a specified time frame. While these studies usefully identified patterns and overarching themes that characterize news media depictions of Afghan women, the sheer amount of their data precluded the "thick description" that, as anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) argued, cultural analysis calls for.

In contrast to the studies cited above, I propose to examine textual and visual representations of Afghan women during the war in a single article that appeared in the December 3, 2001, issue of *Time* magazine. The article, called “About Face: An Inside Look at How Women Fared Under Taliban Oppression and What the Future Holds for Them Now,” is a 14-page feature written by reporter Richard Lacayo that examines the lives of Afghan women before the fall of the Taliban. Photos zoomed in on the covered and uncovered faces of Afghan women suggest that the feature provides an “up-close” and personal account of their story.

Certainly, my study makes no claims to generalizability; nor do I suggest that the article I have chosen to analyze is a representative sample of the U.S. media depiction of Afghan women. Rather, I argue that a close, detailed, and multidimensional rhetorical analysis of one article in a widely read newsmagazine can add depth, texture, and nuance to our understanding of how these women functioned as meaningful symbols in U.S. culture after September 11. Situated within the critical/cultural paradigm of social science research, this study takes as one of its starting points that mass media artifacts, including newsmagazine articles, are important sites of meaning negotiation where dominant ideologies are produced, trafficked, maintained, defended, and—sometimes—subverted. Paying close attention to mass media representations of socially constructed difference markers such as gender, ethnicity, class, and religion can help to denaturalize and dismantle these ideologies, which legitimize power imbalances and contribute to material conditions that benefit some at the expense of others.

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze how one *Time* magazine feature article rhetorically constructed Afghan women at a time when American, British, and Northern Alliance forces were attacking Taliban strongholds in Afghanistan. This analysis can yield insight not only about some images of Afghan women that American audiences received from the news

media following September 11, 2001, but also about how gender functions in American wartime rhetoric. Furthermore, this study can shed light on how journalists' rhetoric can impact the objectivity of their reports. I hope that my findings will improve the practice of journalism by suggesting ways that journalists can use rhetoric to enhance objectivity and serve the public's need for accurate, unbiased reporting.

An excellent example of how textual analysis of a single magazine article can yield valuable insight into underlying ideologies that give rise to media portrayals is Jennifer Jan Schaming's (1999) master's thesis. A student in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Schaming examined American newsmagazine portrayals of African women. Given the dearth of scholarly research about this topic that her literature review had revealed (p. 43), Schaming performed quantitative and qualitative content analyses of every issue of *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report* for the years 1978 and 1988 and for the time period between September 1997 and August 1998 to learn more about U.S. newsmagazine images of African women (pp. 49-50). In an effort to contextualize these images as ideological constructs of U.S. culture, she also used a method of textual analysis borrowed from cultural studies theorists to pinpoint the dominant ideologies underlying the images. Her content analysis revealed that the same types of images kept reappearing (p. 61). Reasoning that the reappearing images were fueled by the same ideologies, Schaming argued that analyzing one article for its ideological content was enough.

In a sense, the *Time* article is not the object of my analysis; it is the location of my analysis. Rich with metaphor, ideologically charged rhetoric, and visual and textual symbolism, the feature I have chosen to focus on offers the researcher a wealth of data to work with—certainly enough for the detailed, intricate analysis that a master's thesis calls

for. It affords an excellent vantage point from which to examine dominant U.S. representations of Afghan women and their symbolic function within the context of America's post-September 11 so-called War on Terrorism.

Lacayo's article is also worthy of special focus because it is by far *Time's* most in-depth article on Afghan women and their lives under the Taliban regime. The magazine has focused little attention on these women otherwise, so this article represents a significant proportion of *Time's* coverage of these women overall. Of the handful of *Time* articles that have dealt with the subject before and since, none is longer than two pages.² The magazine also invested significant time, money, human resources, and space into the 14-page piece. In addition to Lacayo, the article relied on reporting from nine other journalists, both male and female, working around the world.

From a critical/cultural perspective, the mass media are controlled by a ruling elite whose ideas, beliefs, and interests they disseminate. Certainly, Time Inc., *Time* magazine's publisher and a subsidiary of Time Warner Inc., is one of the most influential media players in the United States. It receives nearly one-fourth of the advertising revenue of all U.S. consumer magazines, and two out of every three U.S. adults read a Time Inc. magazine every month.³

Time's content can help shape the opinions of the millions of Americans who turn to it for information. In publication since 1923, *Time* magazine is a well-recognized and well-

²Using the Academic Search Premier article database, I searched all *Time* (U.S. edition) articles whose keywords, subject terms, or abstracts included the terms *women* and *Afghanistan* or *women* and *Taliban*. My search yielded only 10 articles, none of which was longer than two pages. Five of the articles were two paragraphs or less.

³http://www.timewarner.com/corp/businesses/detail/time_inc/index.html. Visited February 15, 2006.

respected brand. Boasting a weekly circulation of 4,050,859,⁴ the magazine reaches more readers than any other newsmagazine in the United States. *Time's* website, <http://www.time.com>, where the public can access current articles as well as thousands of archived articles, is also the most trafficked newsmagazine Web site with 2 million visitors monthly.⁵ In addition, if Americans don't seek out the magazine themselves, *Time* often has a way of finding them. People who don't subscribe or buy copies at the newsstand may encounter the magazine in doctors' offices, fitness centers, and other public places.

In contrast to quantitative studies, whose validity rests on unbiased, value-free research conditions, qualitative research relies on the researcher's subjectivity for its contributions. By approaching my analysis from an explicitly feminist perspective, I hope to take advantage of feminism's insights into how social constructions of gender and other differences support and maintain patriarchy and how ideologies of domination can be challenged.

After briefly discussing the limitations of my study, I will review the scholarly literature relevant to the study of Afghan women's representation in the U.S. media. Finally, I will conclude chapter 1 by listing the research questions I plan to address in this study.

Limitations

Every text is polysemic; that is, every text is open to more than one interpretation. Writers and other rhetors can encode text with meaning using rhetorical strategies, but they cannot determine how audiences decode or interpret them. This study will investigate how rhetorical strategies in the *Time* article make meaning, but it makes no contribution to our

⁴From *Time's* June 2005 Audit Bureau of Circulations statement at http://www.time.com/time/mediakit/audience/circulation/ABC_Statement.pdf. Retrieved January 12, 2006.

⁵<http://www.time.com/time/mediakit/about/index.html>. Visited January 12, 2006.

understanding of how readers decode this text for themselves.

Literature Review

Gender and Wartime Reporting

Although a solid theory regarding women's place in wartime news coverage has yet to develop (Magor, 2002, p. 143), there is consensus among many scholars that the news media's reporting of war tends to be very gendered; that is, wartime reporting is structured by a rigid distinction between notions of masculinity and femininity. In her influential book *Does Khaki Become You?* feminist political scientist Cynthia Enloe (1983) contended that wartime narratives define war as essentially male turf and deny women access to the front by labeling them as camp followers (Enloe, 1983, p. 15). According to this argument, the masculinized battlefield is offset by a feminized home front (Enloe, 1994, p. 220) in need of protection. Thus, militarist ideology conflates femininity with passivity, family, and domesticity for the purpose of glorifying military strength. Wartime news coverage reflects this ideology, as Enloe noted: "'Womenandchildren' rolls so easily off network tongues because in network minds women are family members rather than independent actors, presumed to be almost childlike in their innocence about the realpolitik of international affairs" (1994, p. 214).

Political scientist Augusta C. del Zotto (2002) attributed gendered conflict reporting to the professional practices of journalists as well as an ideological reliance on political realism, which overlooks women's roles in war. As she argued, "the media, in their relentless pursuit of speed and simplicity, tend to reduce the complexity of war to a set of manoeuvres, orders and declarations made solely by state actors" (p. 142). Other scholars have also noted the marginalization of women in conflict reporting, which tends to restrict them to features

and other “soft” news items (Magor, 2002, p. 142). Following Enloe, mass media scholar Deepa Kumar (2004) noted that dominant narratives of war, which define soldiers as exclusively male, marginalize and disempower women by casting them most often as victims (p. 298).

But historians of wartime rhetoric and imagery have shown that women have been made visible as symbols in other ways, too. These studies have revealed that

depending on what the situation calls for, gender ideology may promote women as physically strong and capable of backbreaking work (e.g. slave women, frontier women), as competent to do men’s work (e.g. Rosie the Riveter in World War II), as dexterous and immune to boredom (e.g. electronics assembly industries), or as full-time housewives and devoted mothers (e.g. post-war demands that women vacate jobs in favor of returning soldiers and repopulate the nation).” (Peterson and Runyan, 1999, p. 42)

For example, art historian Melissa Dabakis (1993) analyzed gender and class ideology in Norman Rockwell’s iconic *Rosie the Riveter* and other U.S. World War II propaganda that urged women to join the workforce for the duration of the war. She argued that Rockwell’s painting, which appeared on the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post* on May 29, 1943, juxtaposed symbols of feminine strength and delicacy in an uneasy balancing act as it tried to resolve the ideological tensions that the government’s temporary need for working women presented:

Delicacy and refinement (often characteristics of middle-class glamour) had been abandoned and femininity was reconstituted in terms of strength. Both complicitous with and resistant to dominant wartime constructions of femininity, Rockwell’s *Rosie the Riveter* embodied contemporary renegotiations of gender on the home front. (Dabakis, 1993, p. 201)

Besides highlighting the heightened ideological role of the mass media during wartime,

Dabakis's analysis underscored the ideological, context-dependent nature of gender.

Another potent symbol of wartime femininity is motherhood. An embodiment of the ideological link between femininity and the home front, the mother icon has been appropriated by governments and antiwar movements alike. Anthropologist Micaela di Leonardo (1985) described this mother figure as she has been imagined by antimilitarist movements:

Here enters the central, powerful image of the Moral Mother—nurturant, compassionate, and politically correct—the sovereign, instinctive spokeswoman for all that is living and vulnerable.... The Moral Mother represents the vision of women as innately pacifist, and men as innately warmongering. It is she who will take the toys away from the boys. (di Leonardo, 1985, p. 602)

Whether invoked by governments or peace movements, the Moral Mother symbol is a product of maternalist ideology, which conflates femininity with motherhood, assumes that women have a particular instinct for nurture, and suggests that men and women have naturally distinctive spheres (Brown, 1999, p. 538). Di Leonardo argued that feminist pacifists should be wary of the symbol because it could be used “to push [women] back into full responsibility for home and children—and second-class citizenship” (di Leonardo, 1985, p. 615).

Historian Susan Zeiger (1996) traced the construction of motherhood in U.S. national culture before and during World War I. According to her research, motherhood became an important symbol within the rhetoric of the antiwar movement, which claimed that women were innately more peaceful than men and would oppose U.S. involvement in the war out of concern for their sons (Zeiger, 1996, p. 8). Zeiger argued that to contain the perceived threat that pacifist mothers presented to the mobilization of the nation for war, government rhetoric

vilified this form of motherhood as unpatriotic and selfish. Aided by the mass media—particularly the entertainment media—it moreover sought to construct and glorify a patriotic form of motherhood that emphasized national service and duty to nation (Zeiger, 1996, p. 21).

Zeiger also explored World War I representations of motherhood within U.S. Army propaganda. She contended that the symbol of the loving, loyal American mom was intended not only to remind soldiers and their families of what they were fighting to protect but also to shore up soldiers' morale (Zeiger, 1996, p. 28). She also argued that news stories about "hostess houses," which were on-base domestic outposts staffed by matrons, helped domesticate the foreign war to an isolationist, unworldly public (p. 33) as well as win support among mothers, who could rest easy knowing that their sons were being taken care of (p. 34).

News coverage of Afghan women after September 11, 2001

American news media coverage.

Scholars who have examined coverage of Afghan women in *The New York Times*, CBS's *60 Minutes*, *Time* magazine and other prominent American news media outlets during the 2001-2002 U.S. war with Afghanistan agree that U.S. policymakers' post-September 11 rhetoric about the Taliban's oppression of Afghan women had little to do with concern for their welfare. Rather, these scholars have argued, such rhetoric served the Bush administration's political agenda of winning public support for war (Cloud, 2004, p. 287; Hunt, 2002, p. 116; Lorber, 2002, p. 379; Stabile & Kumar, 2005, pp. 765-766).

Mass media scholars Carol A. Stabile and Deepa Kumar (2005) performed a qualitative textual analysis of newspaper and newsmagazine articles published during the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan that focused on the hardships faced by Afghan women. They

identified two narrative frameworks that the news media relied on in their coverage of Afghan women (Stabile & Kumar, 2005, p. 771). These frameworks, the protection scenario and Orientalism, legitimized U.S. aggression against Afghanistan in the name of protecting women.

According to the logic of the protection scenario, women need protection from the rapacious clutches of a real or imagined enemy, in this case the Taliban (Stabile & Kumar, 2005, p. 770). For their part, Orientalist narratives legitimize colonization or military action by constructing Muslims in the Middle East as barbaric zealots in need of civilizing (Stabile & Kumar, 2005, p. 771). Stabile and Kumar contended that together, these narratives justified the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan as a civilizing mission in search of a “noble ideal”: the protection of women (Stabile & Kumar, 2005, p. 771, quoting Said, 2000, p. 574).

Stabile and Kumar showed how these narrative frameworks worked hand in hand with the articles’ failure to place the Taliban’s rise to power within a historical context for audiences. The scholars demonstrated that an explanation of the circumstances leading up to the Taliban’s seizure of power would have shown that the U.S. itself had contributed to the dire circumstances of these women whom it now claimed to save (Stabile & Kumar, 2005, p. 766). By omitting this historical context, Stabile and Kumar argued, U.S. news media coverage not only positioned the Taliban as the root of all evil but also exonerated the U.S. of any wrongdoing. It also naturalized women’s oppression within an ahistorically misogynistic, uncivilized Afghan society as well as naturalized Orientalist constructions of the Middle East, which reflect the ideology of Western supremacy (Stabile & Kumar, 2005, p. 774).

Communications scholar Dana Cloud (2004) performed an ideographic analysis of photographs of Afghans, particularly Afghan women, on *Time* magazine’s Web site,

<http://www.time.com>, to analyze how they illustrated the “clash of civilizations” that political scientist Samuel Huntington described in his 1998 book of the same title, which describes an inescapable conflict between the United States and non-Western—particularly Islamic—civilizations that are hostile to capitalism. The photos that Cloud studied appeared either on the cover or inside of *Time* between September 11, 2001, and September 11, 2002.

Following Michael Calvin McGee’s (1980) definition of ideographs as “historically and culturally grounded commonplace rhetorical terms” that invoke ideologies that “organize consent to a particular social system,” Cloud maintained that news media images of Afghan women fell under a “clash of civilizations” ideograph (Cloud, 2004, p. 288). By constructing binary oppositions between the U.S. self and the enemy other, evoking a paternalistic stance toward Afghan women, and linking the West with modernity and freedom, these images lent support to the U.S. war with Afghanistan (Cloud, 2004, pp. 286-287).

News media coverage in other Western countries.

Communications scholars Elisabeth Klaus and Susanne Kassel (2005) used critical discourse analysis to examine how reporting on women’s rights became part of war reporting and how it legitimized the Afghanistan war in German public discourse (Klaus & Kassel, 2005, p. 344). Whereas my study examines U.S. media representations of Afghan women, Klaus and Kassel focused on representations of these women and how they functioned within a German context.

Their sample consisted of every article about Afghanistan published between September 11, 2001, and September 11, 2002, in two prominent German newsmagazines: *Der Spiegel*, whose editorial position tends to be liberal-leaning, and *Focus*, which is more politically conservative. Of the 45 articles they found that mentioned women, only 1 article

in *Der Spiegel* and 1 in *Focus* centered on the plight of women (Klaus & Kassel, 2005, p. 344).

Their textual analysis revealed that three prominent types of women were presented: veiled women, politically active women, and refugees (Klaus & Kassel, 2005, p. 345). For Germans, the veil “overwhelmingly signifies cultural distance, religious fanaticism and fundamental violation of human rights” (Klaus & Kassel, 2005, p. 341). Veiled women and refugees in the articles Klaus and Kassel studied were depicted as silent victims, even in post-Taliban Afghanistan.

Even when women were portrayed as taking part in traditionally male realms, such as politics, they were “seldom portrayed as actively shaping their own lives and futures” (Klaus & Kassel, 2005, p. 345). One article in *Der Spiegel* followed a female participant in the first Loya Jirga, the council that elected Afghanistan’s first head of state after the Taliban were deposed. Klaus and Kassel noted that the article provided almost no information about her political opinions; instead, readers learned of her unhappiness with the hotel waiters, her bouts of crying at night, and her headaches. Thus, the article downplayed her political activities, instead highlighting what could be perceived as her physical and emotional weaknesses.

Klaus and Kassel’s study demonstrated how symbolic meaning is contingent on context. For example, they showed how German associations with Islam and the practice of veiling stem from Europe’s colonialist past—something that is outside U.S. collective memory (Klaus & Kassel, 2005, p. 341). They also argued that the idea of a “German responsibility” to prevent humanitarian catastrophes owing to the country’s Nazi past gave rise to the moral justification for sending troops to Afghanistan (Klaus & Kassel, 2005, p.

343). So whereas the U.S. media constructed the invasion of Afghanistan as a civilizing mission (Stabile & Kumar, 2005, p. 771), it was framed as a humanitarian duty in Germany.

Islamic Veiling

One normative attitude in the West toward the veil⁶ regards it as a means of controlling women in patriarchal Islamic society. This attitude, which implies an assumption that women are forced to wear the veil, ignores the fact that in many Islamic societies veiling is not enforced and that many women choose to veil.

Some scholars have challenged this wholesale equation of the veil with oppression. For example, anthropologist Suzanne Brenner (1996) examined the increasing popularity of the veil in late 20th-century Java, a predominantly Muslim island in Indonesia where women have not traditionally worn the veil. In 1993, she interviewed approximately 20 Javanese women about how they came to the decision to wear the veil in spite of the challenges it brought, such as the disapproval of their families and difficulty in the job market (Brenner, 1996, p. 676). Brenner argued that the veil's meaning does not reside within the veil itself. Instead, every society and every time period interprets the veil differently (Brenner, 1996, p. 690).

Social researcher Myfanwy Franks (2000) objected to critiques that seem to consider the veil to be oppressive in and of itself (para. 1). She interviewed 10 British Muslim women between 1995 and 1998 about their experiences as white women who veil and about their reasons for doing so. Based on these interviews as well as 30 responses she received to a snowball questionnaire, Franks concluded that the veil is neither oppressive nor empowering; rather, her research led her to conclude that “the hijab may be experienced as liberating or

⁶I use the term *veil* generically to refer to all styles of head covering worn by Muslim women observing *hijab*, or the practice of dressing modestly.

oppressive by different women in the same society depending on such variables as type of religious belief, class, income and everyday practicalities” (2000, para. 28).

Scholars widely agree that the veil’s meaning can only be understood within its social context and is therefore not fixed. Several scholars performed ethnographic research and interviewed women who veil as a means to understand the meaning that the veil has for women who choose to wear it.

Sociologist Jen’nan Ghazal Read (2000) conducted in-depth interviews in Austin, Texas, between 1996 and 1997 with 12 Muslim immigrant women who veil and 12 who do not. She and colleague John P. Bartkowski studied their responses to compare the gender attitudes of veiled and unveiled women. They relied on theories of discourse to inform their discussion of the veil’s meaning. For them, meanings attributed to the veil are a product of cultural discourse; in other words, the veil’s significance is constructed and negotiated through social practices such as the rhetoric of religious elites and the social interactions of the women who wear the veil (Read & Bartkowski, 2000, p. 397). Their study explored how veiling and antiveiling discourses affect participants’ decisions to veil or not to veil.

Like Read and Bartkowski’s study, the studies I found revealed the veil to be something other than a source of repression. In some cases, scholars found the veil to be a source of empowerment for the women who wear it. In Brenner’s (1996) analysis, veiling in modern-day Java is often the expression of a desire to distance oneself from Javanese customs and tradition and Western cultural imperialism:

Islamic clothing is a departure from Javanese styles of clothing as well as the Western styles that have increasingly replaced them; it signals a rupture with—even an erasure of—both “Javanese” and “Westernized” dimensions of the local past. In this it stands as a symbol of the [Islamic] movement [in Java] as a whole. (Brenner, 1996, p. 682)

She found that veiling in Java is part of an Islamic movement that is self-consciously modern and progressive:

University students who wear *jilhab* [the Javanese word for *hijab*] casually pepper their speech with contemporary, Western-derived expressions, speaking of their desire to “actualize their potential” and of their motivation and ambition for veiling. While some might cite the wives or the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad as their models in dress or behavior, they are more forward-looking than regressive in their attitudes and lifestyles. (Brenner, 1996, p. 679)

She also found that women who veil in Java use it as a means of self-mastery in a society in which women recently have found themselves with more autonomy (Brenner, 1996, p. 688).

Sociologists Pat Mule and Diane Barthel (1992) reviewed scholarly literature on Egyptian women who choose to veil to determine whether the decision reflects an autonomous acceptance of Islam or submission to a newly strengthened patriarchal element in Egyptian society (Mule & Barthel, 1992, p. 324). They saw the veil’s newfound popularity in Egypt as women’s attempt to gain esteem within a society in which females who wear Western clothing are often viewed disrespectfully. In other words, an Egyptian woman’s decision to wear the veil cannot be seen as a simple reflection of her own values but must be understood as a choice made within the constraints that Egyptian society places on women (Mule & Barthel, 1992, pp. 327-328). Mule and Barthel argued that the resurgence in veiling in Egypt signals neither women’s complete coercion by a patriarchal society nor the autonomous embrace of Islam over Western imperialism.

In an essay about the emergence of a new Islamic elite in Turkey, sociologist Nilüfer Göle (1997) also observed an upward trend in veiling, which she described as “new veiling.”

Göle argued that this revival signifies

the political participation and the active voluntary reappropriation of an Islamic identity by women.... [Y]oung, urban, educated groups of Islamist girls are politically active and publicly visible.... The educated Islamist women, both in terms of their appearance—in stylish fabrics with widened shoulders—and in their energetic outlook—taking buses and going to the universities—remind one more of the secular and self-assertive modern women than of the traditional Muslim ones. (Göle, 1997, p. 57)

The women whom Göle described do not sound like passive victims; they seem like confident participants of society who use the veil to proclaim a modern Islamist identity.

In an essay about European images and conceptions of Orientalized women since the Middle Ages, art historian Wijdan Ali (2003) drew a distinction between the veil of the late 20th century and the veil of the early 20th century. Ali said that the veil's comeback in Islamic societies is "a form of asserting a contemporary Muslim woman's identity and a symbol of resistance to foreign culture and the West which has been assailing and degrading her own civilization, religion and sexuality" (p. 85). According to Ali's analysis, the modern veil, or *hijab*, that is worn in Islamic societies serves several practical purposes: it enables women to abide by religious orders, it protects them against sexual harassment, and it is a money-saver among low-income groups, especially university students, who often feel pressured to be stylish and fashionable. Because of the veil, they do not need to worry about buying the latest styles.

These studies all emphasized women's agency in choosing to wear the veil. In this way, they challenged the view that the veil is necessarily disempowering for the women who wear it.

The Veil in the News and Entertainment Media

Little research has examined the veil in the U.S. media. Islamic studies scholar Faegheh Shirazi (2001) performed an extensive study of what she calls the “semantic versatility” of the veil (pp. 7-9). For several years, she collected visual and printed material depicting the veil from various cultures and time periods. The vast amount of material she collected testifies to the potency and symbolic significance of the veil. Her findings “reveal[ed] that the semantics of the veil depend on the specific cultural, historical, and religious contexts in which it is used” (Shirazi, 2001, p. 175). In fact, she found that its semantics often shift within one culture, time period or even within the pages of the same magazine (Shirazi, 2001, p. 176).

Exploring its semantics in advertising, American erotica, and Hindi films, Shirazi found that the veil most frequently represents eroticism, exoticism, oppression, or piety. She found that American advertisers rely on the veil’s exoticism and eroticism to “seduce Western men into buying Jeep Cherokees and IBM computers” (Shirazi, 2001, p. 38). When marketing their products to women, advertisers use the veil to symbolize backwardness. She found that in advertisements that target Middle Eastern consumers in the United States and Canada, the veil appears as a marker of authenticity.

In a survey of French representations of veiling over the last two centuries, political scientist Neil Macmaster and Toni Lewis (1998) examined the connection between French colonization of Algeria and the portrayal of veiled women in French news and entertainment media. They argued that since colonial times, the veil has been a signifier of the social, political, and cultural order in existence between the Western world and Islam (Macmaster & Lewis, 1998, para. 23). They contended that during the colonial era, which they defined as the time between France’s conquest of Algeria in 1830 and when Algeria won its

independence during the Algerian War of 1954-1962, the unveiling of women was a pervasive theme of Orientalist art, literature, photography, and film. A popular premise of Orientalist literature and art during the colonial era, they held, was the European voyeur who secretly catches sight of an unveiled and unaware Oriental woman (Macmaster & Lewis, 1998, para. 5). This “unveiling” was a projection of European male fantasies of penetrating the harem, the most sacred of Muslim spaces. Often in movies a French hero would break into the harem to capture a beautiful princess from a cruel sheik. Macmaster and Lewis argued that

through the allegory of unveiling and disclosure of the harem, the Western eye asserted a colonial invasion and violation of the central values of Muslim society. While indulging in erotic fantasy and possession of the ‘Other’ female it simultaneously underlined the inferiority and barbaric nature of Islamic society which enslaved women, through polygamy and force, to the odious lust of cruel sultans. (Macmaster & Lewis, 1998, para. 11)

According to Macmaster and Lewis’s analysis, these glimpses inside the forbidden harem and the unveiling of women mirrored the invasion of the Muslim world by the West. These images also served to legitimize the colonial order by presenting the European hero as the savior of victimized women from their malicious Oriental captors.

Macmaster and Lewis went on to argue that the veil’s iconographic representations in French media shifted after the end of French colonization of the Arab world. In undermining the political order, Algerian independence also undermined the veil’s symbolic value as an object to be violated through European hegemony. Macmaster and Lewis contended that the veil came to signify a “hyperveiling,” which they defined as “an inversion [of the allegory of unveiling] which emphasizes the most complete forms of female covering” (Macmaster & Lewis, 1998, para. 3).

This hyperveiling, while accentuating the social, cultural, and political distance between Western society and the Islamic world, has become a signifier of political danger. They argued that this imagery has become universal in the French and Western media since the Iranian Revolution of 1978-1979. They attributed this to the wars that have taken place in the Middle East, terrorist activity, the spread of Islamic fundamentalism, and the increasing visibility of Muslims inside France (Macmaster & Lewis, 1998, para. 22). They linked a proliferation of images of the veil in the Western media since the early 1980s to a growing fear of an Islamic threat to the West (Macmaster & Lewis, 1998, para. 2).

Research Questions

1. How is Afghan womanhood constructed in the article's text and accompanying photographs?
2. How does this construction support and maintain or challenge ideologies of patriarchy and of Western domination of Afghanistan?
3. What does this artifact suggest about the role that gender plays within war rhetoric?

Chapter 2: Theory and Method

In chapter 1, I explained that news media researchers have repeatedly argued that U.S. news coverage of Afghan women immediately following September 11, 2001, largely served to build support for the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in November 2001. As these scholars have contended, by drawing attention to the Taliban's cruel treatment of women, the U.S. news media helped the Bush administration define the invasion as a civilizing mission with a humanitarian purpose.

Building on these studies, I will perform a feminist rhetorical analysis of a single article that appeared in *Time* magazine in December of the same year. The article, "About Face: An Inside Look at How Women Fared Under Taliban Oppression and What the Future Holds for Them Now," focused on the mistreatment of Afghan women by the Taliban regime. In chapter 1, I argued that limiting my analysis to one article is appropriate because of the wealth of symbolism and imagery that the 14-page cover story contained. Moreover, given the scant attention that *Time* has paid to Afghan women overall, Lacayo's article represents the bulk of the magazine's coverage of these women.

Like other studies, this analysis can contribute to our understanding of how the U.S. news media portrayed Afghan women in the wake of September 11. But by paying close attention to the textual and visual rhetoric of one article, I hope to take my analysis a step beyond other studies by considering rhetoric's effect on journalistic objectivity and making suggestions for improvement.

Rhetoric as an Object of Study

In this chapter, I explain the methodology of my analysis, feminist rhetorical criticism, which is a qualitative form of textual analysis described by rhetorical critic and scholar Sonja K. Foss (2004). The focus of this mode of inquiry, rhetoric involves the use of symbols in human communication (Foss, 2004, p. 3). Rhetorical criticism rests on the premise that humans use rhetoric to frame much of their reality (Foss, 2004, p. 4). The critic makes a theoretical assumption that our knowledge and experiences depend on the symbols we use to make sense of the world around us and of ourselves. As Foss explained, “Reality is not fixed but changes according to the symbols we use to talk about it. What we count as real or as knowledge about the world depends on how we choose to label and talk about things” (p. 6). The symbols we encounter and use affect our perceptions of the world. Thus, rhetorical criticism is concerned with the use of symbols as an integral part of the social construction of reality.

Symbols are not the same as signs, according to Foss’s definition. Whereas signs have a direct, a priori relationship with their referents, symbols have no natural connection with theirs. The link between a symbol and its referent is a human construction that a person uses in order to communicate an idea.

Foss’s method of rhetorical criticism relies on the systematic analysis of a rhetorical act or its artifact, which is the tangible product of a rhetorical act (Foss, 2004, pp. 6-7). In the present study, the *Time* article that will be analyzed is an artifact of the author’s rhetorical acts of writing. Rhetorical criticism enables the critic to move beyond a visceral response to symbols he or she encounters in order to understand and explain how symbols function (Foss, 2004, p. 7).

Another aim of rhetorical criticism is to contribute to our understanding of rhetorical

processes (Foss, 2004, p. 8). The rhetorical critic uses his or her analysis to theorize about some aspect of rhetoric. This contribution to theory, in turn, should help improve the practice of communicating.

Feminist Rhetorical Criticism

Foss defined feminist criticism as “the analysis of rhetoric to discover how the rhetorical construction of gender is used as a means for domination and how that process can be challenged so that all people understand that they have the capacity to claim agency and act in the world as they choose” (Foss, 2004, p. 157). In other words, the critic must ask how differences between men and women are constructed so as to legitimize patriarchy and how this construction functions to deny women agency so that they can be dominated by men.

Despite their differences, feminists are united in their commitment to eradicating relationships of domination for all people, not just women (Foss, 2004, p. 153). Foss explained:

Feminists do not believe that oppression and domination are worthy human values and seek to eradicate the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture. They want to transform relationships and the larger culture so that the patriarchal values and traits of alienation, competition, imperialism, elitism, control, and dehumanization that characterize interaction under an ideology of domination are disrupted. (pp. 153-154, citing hooks, 1984, p. 24)

While analyzing the construction of gender is one way to uncover ideologies of domination within an artifact, rhetorical analyses of any form of identity that denotes difference can also expose belief systems that legitimize one group’s domination over another. Because the present study is concerned with the construction of women, the word *gender* will be employed throughout the rest of this section for the sake of convenience. But feminist rhetorical criticism can be applied to the study of any relationship of dominance that is

represented in an artifact.

The first step in feminist rhetorical criticism involves analyzing the construction of gender in the artifact under study (Foss, 2004, p. 158). To do this, the critic must determine what the artifact presents as normal, desirable traits and behavior of women and men. This involves posing certain analytical questions about the artifact whose answers provide clues as to how gender is constructed. Answers to these questions serve as units of analysis.

To analyze the construction of Afghan womanhood in the *Time* article, the present study will consider the following questions:

1. How does the text of the article position the reader? Whom does the article address? Is the audience asked to identify with these women? Who are “we,” and who are “they”?
 2. How does the text describe Afghan women? For example, does the article call them courageous, frightened, beautiful, defiant, subservient?
 3. Do women possess agency in the article, or are they passive, powerless victims? Are they active participants in building their own future, or are they effete objects with no volition of their own?
 4. How do the photos depict women? Do they portray the women as active participants in society? Are they sexualized for the pleasure of a heterosexual male audience?
- The article and accompanying photos will be deconstructed with these questions in mind.

The second part of a feminist rhetorical criticism must examine what the artifact suggests about how the ideology of domination is constructed and maintained or, if applicable, how it can be challenged and transformed. If the article promotes an ideology of domination, the critic should “use the artifact as a vehicle to study the ideology of

domination and the rhetorical processes that create and sustain it” (Foss, 2004, p. 159). The analysis must show how that ideology is supported and maintained through rhetoric.

In chapter 3, I will present my analysis, first discussing how the text and photos construct the reader and how they structure the relationship between the reader and the events and people in the article. Then, I will turn my attention to the article’s construction of women.

Chapter 3: Textual Analysis

In chapter 2, I discussed the methodology by which I will analyze the rhetorical construction of gender in the *Time* article. Described by Sonja K. Foss (2004), feminist rhetorical criticism examines the symbolic use of language to construct gender in news media texts, photographs, and other artifacts. To do this, the critic must determine what the artifact presents as normal, desirable traits and behavior of women and men. This involves posing the following analytical questions about the artifact:

1. How does the text of the article position the reader?
2. How does the text describe women?
3. Do women possess agency in the article?
4. How do the photos depict women?

The second part of a feminist rhetorical criticism must examine what the artifact suggests about how the ideology of domination is constructed and maintained or, if applicable, how it can be challenged and transformed.

In this chapter, I present my analysis of the construction of gender in the article. First, I will discuss how the text and photos construct the reader and how they structure the relationship between the reader and the events and people in the article. Then, I will turn my attention to the article's construction of women.

Constructing the Reader

Positioning the Reader

As critical linguist Roger Fowler (1991) pointed out, "language is not a clear window

but a refracting, structuring medium” (p.10). In other words, language structures our thoughts and helps determine how we make sense of the world. Likewise, the language that journalists use helps determine how audiences perceive and understand news reports.

Furthermore, the rhetorical choices that journalists make can help structure how the audience relates to a news story; in other words, language “not only ‘constructs reality’ in a determinate and selective way; it also organizes the relationship between speaker and hearer along specific lines” (Hartley & Montgomery, 1985, p. 233). For example, rhetorical strategies and other linguistic choices that writers make help define the relationship between themselves and the audience, and they can also establish the distance between the audience and the people and events in the story.

The language and the photos of the article under analysis use various strategies to convince the reader that he or she is receiving a close, intimate, almost personal account of the story. The article’s “dek” headline, “An Inside Look at How Women Fared Under Taliban Oppression and What the Future Holds for Them Now” (pp. 34-35), suggests that it moves “behind the veil” to provide readers with a front-row view into the lives of Afghan women. In addition, the writer uses the present tense to tell the story, as if the action were taking place right now (Hartley & Montgomery, 1985, p. 236). Two photos, one on pages 34 and 35 and another on pages 36 and 37, zoom in on women’s faces so readers can get a close look at them. Finally, several photos depict intimate scenes, such as men and women casually mingling and dancing at a secret wedding ceremony in Herat that took place while the Taliban still controlled Afghanistan (pp. 44-45).

By positioning the reader so close to the people and events in the article, these rhetorical strategies imbue the story with a sense of immediacy in both time and space. This

immediacy makes the story seem more real, as if readers were experiencing the action firsthand. Thus, these strategies serve to increase the article's credibility in the reader's mind.

Another reader-positioning strategy the article deploys is the use of the second-person *you* to address the reader. It makes occasional use of *you* throughout, such as in, "But nearly any educated woman you speak to loathes the burka" (p. 38) or, "On the streets, you would never know that these silent, shapeless forms, encased in these shrouds, have any views at all" (p. 40).

The first sentence of the article provides a good example of how the use of *you* positions the reader: "In the streets of Kabul, you can see something these days that has not been glimpsed there for almost five years—women's faces" (p. 36). This sentence invites the reader into the story by asking him or her to imagine him- or herself within the scene being described.

The use of the pronoun *you* to address the reader, which is sometimes referred to as synthetic personalization (McLoughlin, 2000, p. 68, citing Fairclough, 1989), creates the impression that the writer is talking to the reader directly. It lends a familiar, informal tone to the narrative and creates the impression that the author and reader are having a personal conversation. It constructs a direct bond between the reader and writer and thus, like the nearing strategies explained above, lends credibility to the narrative.

Preserving Distance

In the previous section, I explained that the article uses several nearing strategies to create the impression that readers are receiving a personal, intimate account of the events being reported rather than reading about them in the mass media. The use of present tense and the second-person *you* to address the reader lend a sense of immediacy to the narrative

and create a false familiarity between the reader and narrator. By imbuing the account with a sense of realness and constructing a bond between the reader and author, these strategies serve to increase the article's credibility.

When the article hails the reader directly, it also obliges audience members to adopt a certain subject position or identity in relation to the people in the story (Chandler, 2002, p.180). Again, the first sentence of the article provides a good example of this: "In the streets of Kabul, you can see something these days that has not been glimpsed there for almost five years—women's faces" (p. 36). By asking the reader to imagine looking at the uncovered faces of Afghan women, the sentence encourages him or her to adopt the author's perspective and thus a subject position or identity that is separate from the women. Asking the reader to imagine being an Afghan woman who, for example, is walking down the street without a burka for the first time in years would encourage the reader to identify with the women, but the subject position that the article offers preserves some distance and maintains the division between "us," the author and reader, and "them," the women.

Only once does the text of the article invite the reader to adopt the perspective of an Afghan woman—one who is wearing a burka: "Try negotiating a busy Kabul street—around donkey carts, careening buses and the Taliban roaring by in Datsun pickups—when your hearing is muffled and your vision is reduced to a narrow mesh grid" (Lacayo, 2001, p. 38). But rather than encouraging the reader to identify with this woman, it serves to support the assertion of the previous sentence: "It [the burka] is also life-threatening" (p. 38).

Thus, by hailing the reader as *you*, the article encourages readers to imagine themselves within the scene being described and to adopt a particular subject position vis-à-vis the people in the narrative. When the article invites the reader to imagine him- or herself

talking to or looking at an Afghan woman, it creates a subject position that has more in common with the author and reporters than with the women themselves. By encouraging readers to identify with the journalist, this rhetorical strategy might enhance the credibility of the account, but it also preserves the Orientalist division between “us” and “them.” So, in spite of the nearing strategies that the article utilizes to convince readers that they are receiving “an inside look” at Afghan women, the article allows readers to maintain some distance from these women.

Next, I will discuss how the text and photos in the article use rhetoric to portray Afghan women. In addition, I will consider whether the article affords them agency or casts them as passive objects whose circumstances depend on the actions of men.

The Construction of Afghan Women

In this part of my analysis, I argue that the article’s portrayal of Afghan women relies largely on American-held stereotypes about traditional female roles and women in Islamic societies. Then, I explore the various strategies that the article uses to deny the women agency.

Stereotyping

The first aspect of the article’s construction of Afghan women involves stereotyping. One influential theory that has informed feminist studies of mass communications states that the mass media participate in the “symbolic annihilation” of women by underrepresenting, denigrating, trivializing, and victimizing them (Tuchman, 1978). One means by which the mass media symbolically annihilate women is through the use of stereotypes. Stereotypes create distance between others and ourselves and “convey prejudices and derogatory meanings towards other social groups by assuming their staticism and repetitive behavior”

(Gutiérrez, 2001, pp. 11-12). Stereotypes dehumanize by obscuring individual characteristics and portraying certain groups as predictable and static units. Critical linguist Roger Fowler (1991) suggested that the news media use stereotypes as “mental pigeon-hole[s]” that make the people and events on which they report easily comprehensible to their audiences (p. 17). Stereotypes trivialize women by confining them inside predefined cultural categories that reinforce dominant patriarchal ideologies.

By and large, the *Time* feature’s depiction of Afghan women confirms common American stereotypes about women—and especially women in Muslim societies. Photos show women in what are in America traditionally female roles as mothers, food preparers, and consumers. The cut line on page 36 identifies the woman in the picture as simply “a mother.” In the top photo on page 38, a woman named Rawshan makes bread. The two photos beneath it depict women as consumers of fashion. In the middle photo, women shop for shoes, and the bottom photo shows several women shopping for burkas.

On page 38, the article poses the rhetorical question, “What are Afghan women really like beneath the burka?” Then, as if to answer the question, it presents three poor, uneducated women from the same village. The passage implies that these three women—whose portrayal reinforces American-held stereotypes about women in Islamic societies—represent all Afghan women, who can be distilled to a few characteristics.

For example, the women all report dissatisfaction with their lives and have either experienced domestic violence directly or have a close female relative who has. When a man enters the room during the interview, all three women cower. Noting that the three women have agreed to speak through a female interpreter only, the article explains, “They worry that their husbands might object if they learned that a man was present at the interview” (p. 40).

Yet the article does not make clear whether the women actually said this; it is possible that the reporter merely assumed that the women were motivated by fear instead of acting according to their own beliefs about proper behavior between men and women. In this way, the passage reaffirms the stereotype that poor, burka-clad women have no opinions of their own. It also upholds the notion that they are controlled by tyrannical husbands.

None of the photos shows women engaging in work outside the home or in other occupations that U.S. cultural norms would link with maleness. According to its caption, the photo spread on pages 34 and 35 shows female demonstrators in Kabul demanding women's rights, but the photo shows only their burka-covered faces. Rather than depicting the women actively "in struggle," as the caption says, the photo is more effective as a striking image that readers can compare with the image on the next two pages (36 and 37) of a woman lifting her burka to reveal her face.

Disempowering Afghan Women

In a rhetorical analysis of gender, the critic must also pay attention to how gender constructions serve to deny or grant women agency. As explained below, I found that the *Time* article denied Afghan women agency by repeatedly portraying them as victims and by objectifying them as something to be looked at. Additionally, the article used passive voice to rhetorically deny them agency.

Victimization.

Depicting women as victims of the Taliban's cruelty was essential to justifying the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. During the war, presenting Afghan women as helpless victims helped demonize the United States' enemies and provided an opportunity to cast U.S. and British troops as valiant heroes who were doing the right thing.

Throughout the *Time* feature, women repeatedly appear in both the text and photos as victims who need protection from the Taliban or from their husbands and other male family members. By recounting the cruelties women endured, the article makes the case that “the Taliban made Afghanistan a laboratory for the systematic oppression of women” (Lacayo, 2001, p. 38). But in so doing, the article robs women of their agency by reaffirming their powerlessness.

For example, Banaz, a 32-year-old woman who is interviewed in the article, said that she believes her husband lies to her when he claims that the Koran permits husbands to control their wives as they see fit (p. 40). The article then affirms her powerlessness, noting, “Still, Banaz can do nothing. If she disobeys her husband, he will beat her, as he has done many times before” (p. 40).

In another example, the three photos on pages 40 and 41 depict women being victimized. The largest photo shows a man whipping several women and children before a crowd of people, some of whom are smiling. The caption explains, “The Taliban often beat women with steel cables as punishment for petty crimes” (p. 40). In order to bring attention to the Taliban’s cruelty, the photo and caption rely on stereotypical portrayals of women’s victimization and powerlessness.

In the photo just below it to the left, several women peer into a sparse room, where a figure shrouded in black sits beside a closed wooden box. The caption explains the scene: “At Malalia maternity hospital, a woman weeps near the coffin of a relative who died from uncontrolled bleeding during childbirth, a common occurrence. The family is too poor to move the body” (pp. 40-41). Both the dead woman and her mourning relative are victims of a society that does not value women. To an American, the woman died a needless death;

uncontrolled bleeding during childbirth is rare. And the weeping woman cannot do so much as move the body because she is so poor. In fact, all she can do is weep.

The most graphic photo appears in the lower right corner of the page. The 15-year-old girl in the photo, Zarghona, has been badly burned by her father-in-law, who, according to the caption, said she had not cleaned her husband's clothes properly (p. 41). In the photo, Zarghona is lying in a shelter, apparently her only refuge.

Without disputing that these photos show women in desperate situations, I point them out to argue that the editorial decision to repeatedly portray women as victims reinforces one-dimensional stereotypes about disempowered, impoverished, and abused women in Muslim societies.

Even when the article introduces readers to a woman who wields some power because of her job, it casts her as a victim:

Dr. Rahima Zafar Staniczai, head of the Rabia Balkhi hospital for women, remembers how Taliban religious police would beat her in the street any time they caught her rushing to work uncovered: "They would hit us and spit on us, and then we would have to come in to the hospital to do our work." (p. 36)

The article might have described her as a brave woman with the courage to defy the Taliban's edicts, but instead, it casts her as a damsel in distress.

Objectification.

According to feminist media theory, one hallmark of patriarchal culture is "the display of woman as spectacle to be looked at, subjected to the gaze of the male audience" (van Zoonen, 1994, p. 87). Feminist media theorists see the dynamic between man-as-spectator and woman-as-spectacle as an organizing principle of patriarchal society that

privileges the (heterosexual) male perspective and defines women as objects of the male gaze. They have also argued that this structure has other far-reaching implications, as the following quotation explains:

Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. (Berger, 1972, p. 47, cited in van Zoonen, 1994, p. 87)

Thus, these theorists argued, the structure of man-as-spectator and woman-as-spectacle denies women any perspective of their own apart from the dominant male one. This patriarchal structure, which privileges the male gaze, squelches alternative viewpoints and subjectivities that could challenge its dominance.

The article employs rhetorical strategies that construct readers as voyeurs and Afghan women as objects to be looked at. According to the article, the burka is “to Western eyes, a kind of body bag for the living” (Lacayo, 2001, p. 36). By reducing Western people to their eyes, this sentence employs a form of synecdoche, which is a rhetorical trope that substitutes part of something for the whole (Chandler, 2002, 132). The substitution emphasizes the eyes and their viewing function as an integral part of the Western being.

The article also encourages readers to look at the women. The most obvious evidence of this is the number of photos that accompany the text. The feature is 14 pages long (pages 42 and 43 contain an advertisement), and photos account for 71.4% of the used space.⁷ Six

⁷I arrived at this figure by calculating the percentage of space on each page that photos account for and then averaging that number. Pages 34, 35, 37, 39, 41, and 45 are 100% photo each. Here is how I calculated the percentage for pages consisting of text and graphics: Bearing in mind that graphic designers rely on grids of columns and rows when designing newspaper and magazine pages, I observed that each page (except for pages 46 and 47) is a grid consisting of three columns and four rows and thus can be divided into 12 equal parts. Pages 46 and 47 use a grid of three columns and three rows and thus consist of nine equal parts apiece. I then

pages are devoted entirely to photos.

In encouraging their objectification, the article strips Afghan women of their agency and subordinates them to another's gaze. The photo caption on page 39 is an excellent example. The photo depicts the back of a woman who appears to be hurrying toward a car—from the caption, readers know it is a cab. Her burka flapping, she is in mid-step, and we see that she is wearing white high heels. The caption's opening words, "Alive and kicking," draw our attention to the woman's feet and lets us know that her shoes are an important element of this shot. We cannot see her face, but the male cab driver is looking at her. His expression is hard to read, so the caption tells us how to interpret it: "A taxi driver in Herat glares at a woman in high heels and a shortened burka five days after the Taliban left town."

In this photo, the woman appears to be the agent; she is moving while the man sits passively. Yet the caption treats the man as the actor; he is glaring at her, presumably for the audacity to wear those shoes and to shorten her burka. Thus, the photo caption defines the scene in a way that robs the woman of agency and renders her the object of the man's gaze. (Curiously, the man does not appear to be glaring at the woman at all. Perhaps he is not as preoccupied with her shoes as the caption asks us to believe.)

The article also frequently refers to aspects of a woman's appearance, such as her clothes, and the title itself, "About Face," is a double entendre that on the one hand alludes to an about-face in Afghanistan brought about as U.S.-led forces dismantled the Taliban government. But its placement with a photograph that zooms in on Afghan women's faces (pp. 34-35) suggests a more literal interpretation: The article is about women's faces.

One passage at the end of the article forges a link between women's clothes and

determined the percentage of each page devoted to photos. Here are my totals for each page: pp. 36, 38, and 44: 67%; p. 40: 33%; p. 48: 50%; and p. 49: 75%.

makeup and their freedom. Here is what readers first learn about 18-year-old Mashal: “At 18, she wants to be a doctor. ‘I want to be freed from Allah,’ she says. ‘I don’t want to wear a veil at all. I want to wear miniskirts’” (p. 49). The article moves from her professional ambition to what she wants to wear without skipping a beat, thus implying that the two are not only equal in importance but also connected in some way. Next, the article introduces Fakhira, a 35-year-old mother who operated a secret beauty salon in Kabul before the Taliban were ousted. Her salon, we learn, is decorated with photos of female models torn from Pakistani magazines, and the shelves are full of cosmetics and hair-styling products. Of the beauty products, the article says, “In a society that forbids them, they seem weirdly precious” (p. 49). As if freedom for women means permission to wear lipstick.

Curiously, several photos portray other people staring at the women. For example, the male taxi driver in the photo on page 39 gazes at the woman hurrying toward him. We see only her back, so the direction of her gaze stays hidden. The largest photo on pages 40 and 41 shows a group of men and women staring while several women and children receive a whipping. The photo below it on the left shows a group of women staring at a woman who is mourning the death of a relative.

Passive voice.

Passive-voice sentence constructions make it possible to describe an action without naming an actor. In the following passage, the article uses passive voice to summarize Afghan history before the Soviet invasion in 1979:

By 1964 [Afghan women] *had been granted* the vote. The cities had begun to produce a small elite of educated women.... But under the Russians, women’s rights *were protected*.... More women *were introduced* into government, *given an authority* that many men found unnerving.” (pp. 40 and 44, italics added)

Through the repeated use of passive voice, this passage denies Afghan women agency, presenting them as the passive recipients of the rights they won during that time. They “were granted the vote” rather than winning it for themselves. They did not simply enter government; they “were introduced.” And their rights “were protected;” they did not fight for their own rights. The passage seems to suggest that just as women themselves need protecting, so do their rights.

Rather than portraying women as agents effecting change for themselves, the passage casts them as passive recipients of change. This passage preserves the ideology that women need protecting, even as they gained power in the 1960s and 1970s, because they are incapable of fighting themselves. In so doing, it upholds the myth that women need protectors and thus legitimizes the U.S. presence in Afghanistan.

Interestingly, the passage avoids naming any party—the women; the Afghan government; or America’s old Cold War enemy, the Russians—as the responsible agent. Doing so would dilute or confuse the crude dichotomy of good us/bad them on which the article relies. In fact, the one agent in the passage is the “cities” that “produce[d]” educated women. By anthropomorphizing “cities,” the article ascribes agency to something that cannot threaten the United States’ position as hero.

The Determined Mother

There was one exception to the portrayal of Afghan women as weak and in need of saving. Interestingly, the article seems to glorify motherhood at times, portraying mothers as brave and determined protectors of children. For example, the article credits “determined mothers” for finding schooling for their daughters at a time when education for females was prohibited (p. 46).

In another example, a photo spread on pages 36 and 37 depicts a woman and a child. Her burka lifted to reveal her face, the woman gazes lovingly into the eyes of the little girl. The cut line in the lower left corner just above the page number reads, “A mother lifts her burka to speak to her daughter as they flee the battle-ravaged northern city of Kunduz” (p. 36).

The photo invites the reader to read the woman’s face, as if it were a book. She has strong facial features. Despite the fact that she is running for her life to escape ground fighting and U.S. air strikes on her hometown, she has a faint smile on her face. The child is looking away from the camera at the woman, but the little girl’s silhouette shows that she, too, is smiling. Their smiles suggest that they are not sad to be leaving their home. The sun is shining, and the woman can breathe easy now that she has lifted her burka and left her life behind.

The message of this photo is triumphant. In this idealized portrait of Afghan womanhood, a strong mother carries her daughter to a better life elsewhere. The photo seems to suggest that the war and violence visited upon Afghanistan by the U.S. invasion has not brought women misery but rather sunshine, freedom, and new opportunities.

Although the article’s “determined mother” portrayal constructs women as strong, it does not challenge patriarchal ideologies. Rather, it reinforces them by granting women agency only within their traditional roles as mothers.

Chapter 4: Conclusion, Strategies for Improvement, and Topics for Future Research

In the preceding thesis, I performed a qualitative textual analysis of a *Time* cover story about Afghan women that appeared in the December 3, 2001, issue, less than 3 months after the September 11, 2001, attacks and at a time when the United States was fighting a war in Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban regime. News media researchers have repeatedly argued that U.S. news coverage of Afghan women during that time largely served to build support for the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in November 2001. By drawing attention to the Taliban's cruel treatment of women, these scholars have argued, the U.S. news media helped the Bush administration define the invasion as a civilizing mission with a humanitarian purpose.

Using a method of feminist rhetorical criticism described by Sonja K. Foss (2004), I examined how the article and accompanying photos rhetorically constructed Afghan women. Situated within the critical/cultural paradigm of social science research, this study made the theoretical assumption that news media artifacts are important sites of meaning negotiation where dominant ideologies are produced, maintained, or subverted. By identifying the latent meanings embedded in seemingly "objective" media texts, scholars working within this tradition seek to chip away at ideologies that naturalize one group's domination over another.

Feminist rhetorical criticism explores how the rhetorical construction of gender is used as a means for domination and how that process can be challenged (Foss, 2004, p. 157). To do this, the critic must determine what the artifact presents as normal, desirable traits and behavior of women and men. This involves posing several analytical questions about the artifact.

First, the critic must examine how rhetoric structures the relationship between the writer and audience. This article used several nearing strategies to create the impression that readers were receiving a personal, intimate account of the events being reported. The use of present tense and the second-person *you* to address the reader lent a sense of immediacy to the narrative and created a false familiarity between the reader and the narrator. By imbuing the account with a sense of realness and constructing a direct bond between the reader and author, these strategies served to increase the article's credibility.

The article also used the second-person *you* to invite the reader to adopt a particular subject position within the narrative. Sentences like “But nearly any educated woman you speak to loathes the burka” (Lacayo, 2001, p. 38), encouraged the reader to imagine him- or herself within the scene being described. Moreover, the article asked the reader to imagine looking at or, in the case of the sentence above, talking to an Afghan woman rather than identifying with her. So, although the article promised to deliver “an inside look” at Afghan women's lives, the subject position that it offered the reader maintained some distance between the women and them. The division between “us” and “them” was preserved.

The critic must also examine the rhetorical construction of gender in the text and photos. In my first research question, I asked how the article's text and photographs constructed Afghan women. I found that the article portrayed them as mothers, consumers, and domestic workers—roles that are typically associated with women in U.S. culture. This finding supports the contention of feminist political scientist Cynthia Enloe (1983; 1994) and mass media researchers who have argued that when women figure into wartime reporting, they are usually confined to the domestic sphere as family members rather than conceived of as political agents.

In addition, the text and photos in the *Time* article repeatedly portrayed women as victims of violence and poverty. This echoed the arguments of mass media scholar Deepa Kumar (2004), who noted that war narratives frequently marginalize and disempower women by casting them as victims (p. 298). It also recalled the protection scenario logic described by Kumar and colleague Carol A. Stabile (2005), which justifies colonialism and military force by positing that women need protection from a particular enemy, in this case the Taliban. By portraying the women as helpless victims in need of protection, the article helped legitimize the American invasion as a humanitarian operation and helped construct Western soldiers as their saviors.

I also found that the article's depiction of Afghan women perpetuated common American-held stereotypes about women in Muslim societies. Stereotypes dehumanize by obscuring individual characteristics and portraying certain groups as predictable and static units. Besides repeatedly depicting the women as victims of poverty and violence, the article tried to essentialize Afghan women by rhetorically asking, "What are Afghan women really like beneath the burka?" (p. 38). Then, as if to answer the question, the article introduced readers to three poor, uneducated, apparently timid women from the same village who all expressed dissatisfaction with their lives. The passage implied that these three women represent all Afghan women.

Furthermore, the article used various strategies that constructed Afghan women as something to be looked at. For example, the title of the article, "About Face," is a pun that on one hand directly referred to the women's faces. Additionally, photos of the women accounted for 71.4% of the feature's page space. The article also frequently made reference to aspects of a woman's appearance, such as her clothes, and one passage on page 49 even

forged a link between the women's clothes and makeup and their freedom.

In the second research question, I asked how the article's construction of Afghan women supports or challenges ideologies about patriarchy and Western domination of Afghanistan. My analysis revealed that in spite of its cry of support for these women, the article did nothing to challenge either of these ideologies. The article used a number of strategies to disempower women, including repeatedly portraying them as passive victims without the power to defend themselves or to control their futures. Passive-voice sentence constructions rhetorically denied Afghan women agency.

Furthermore, by encouraging readers to objectify Afghan women, the article reinforced women's position as objects of the dominant male gaze. By portraying them as passive victims and by objectifying them, the article upheld patriarchal ideologies that classify women as weak and powerless.

I found one exception to the article's construction of Afghan women as weak and in need of saving. In several instances, Afghan mothers were portrayed as brave and determined protectors of their children. For example, the photo on pages 36 and 37 depicted a strong, able woman carrying her daughter. Despite the fact that she was a refugee, the woman's expression was clear and bright. The photo seemed to hint of a brighter tomorrow for both her and her daughter.

Still, in spite of their strength and agency, the article's "determined mothers" did not challenge patriarchal ideologies. Rather, the portrayal followed the gendered logic of wartime reporting, which conflates femininity with passivity, family, and domesticity. The determined mother portrayal reinforced the patriarchal status quo by granting women agency only within their traditional roles as mothers. Likewise, the photos that depicted Afghan

women as bakers and shoppers also confined female agency to the domestic realm.

In the third research question, I asked what the article's depiction of Afghan women suggests about the rhetorical role of gender during times of war. Constructing the women as weak, powerless victims helped cast the United States' invasion of Afghanistan as a heroic mission rather than as an act of violence that took lives and cost many Afghans their homes. By portraying Afghan women as too weak and powerless to fend for themselves, the article lent support for the war by fostering the impression that the United States and Britain were rescuing them.

Strategies for Improvement

In chapter 1, I expressed my hope that my study would shed light on ways that journalists can use rhetoric to improve their coverage of Afghan women. First, they should avoid stereotyping Afghan women. As I discussed above, the *Time* article rhetorically asked, "What are Afghan women really like beneath the burka?" (p. 38). That question, which presumes that all Afghan women are in essence alike, not only perpetuates but actually constructs a stereotype by suggesting that the three poor, uneducated, discontent women interviewed in the article represent all Afghan women. By glossing over their individuality, the passage dehumanizes the women. Furthermore, it misinforms readers by implying that all Afghan women are as poor, uneducated, and timid as the three women interviewed here.

Mass media professionals would better serve their audiences by presenting Afghan women in a greater variety of roles. When news pieces such as the *Time* article highlight women only as victims and mothers, they leave part of the story untold. Afghan women are taking part in government, returning to professions they left when the Taliban came to power, and participating in building Afghanistan's future. By documenting these aspects of Afghan

life, U.S. journalists and photojournalists paint a more complete, nuanced picture of these women for their audiences.

Finally, journalists striving for objectivity should tread carefully when hailing the audience directly because doing so could invite bias into their account. As discussed above, the *Time* article addressed readers using the second-person *you* in a way that prompted them to adopt a particular subject position in relation to the people in the narrative. In this case, the article created a subject position for readers by encouraging them to imagine looking at Afghan women, just like the reporters themselves did. Although encouraging readers to share the reporters' perspective might have lent a sense of veracity to the account, it compromised the article's objectivity by privileging that point of view over all others. At the same time, by positioning readers as viewers and Afghan women as something to look at, it limited readers' ability to identify with the women.

Topics for Future Research

I argued that one of the ways that the *Time* article denied Afghan women agency was through the use of passive voice. As mentioned before, passive-voice sentence constructions make it possible to describe an action without naming an actor. Further research could examine the rhetorical functions of active and passive voice within news reporting to analyze how they figure into news media constructions of men and women. Additionally, the findings of this study could be compared with the visual and textual rhetoric in a newsmagazine article about American women. Such a study could perhaps shed light on how U.S. ideologies about Islam and the Middle East impact the social construction of gender.

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