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**“The Real Terrorist was Me:” An Analysis of Narratives Told
by Iraq Veterans Against the War in an Effort to Rehumanize
Iraqi Civilians and Soldiers**

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Abstract

War often necessitates or compels the dehumanization of the enemy. Taking away the humanity of a group of people makes them easier to kill and commit atrocities against them while relieving the soldiers, as well as the public at large, of having to deal with any moral dilemmas related to their actions. Additionally, once a people have been dehumanized, it is a difficult task to change those attitudes, particularly when it causes one to examine their own role in civilian casualties, war crimes, and other abuses. While it is not a new phenomena for servicemen and women to return from war and join a social movement dedicated to educating the public and politicians about the human costs of war, we have chosen to focus on just one such organization: Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW). Examining IVAW narratives is especially useful to the literature on dehumanization and rehumanization as the veterans were not only witnesses to the Iraq War, but also actors within the war. Their narratives include insights into the dehumanization process and rehumanization process that are not found in the narratives of other antiwar activists. This research was done by collecting and analyzing testimonies given by members of IVAW during their Winter Soldier event. Through this method we found that members of IVAW used narratives to rehumanize enemy civilians and soldiers in an effort to decrease public approval of war. Members used several methods to rehumanize the Iraqi people and decrease apathy among Americans concerning the War in Iraq: they asked their audience to take the perspective of Iraqis, employed role reversals, emphasized the social roles and family ties of civilians, and highlighted the effects of war on children.

Keywords

Dehumanization, Rehumanization, War Crimes, Antiwar Movement, Veterans

Previous literature states that dehumanization is an important condition for violence and that the dehumanization of enemy civilians and soldiers is often necessary not only for soldiers to take part in the violent acts that constitute war, but also to gain public approval of war. How does a social movement organization make a public sympathetic to a group that has largely been dehumanized? After collecting and analyzing testimonies given by members of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) during their Winter Soldier event—which can be found on YouTube, the IVAW website and in IVAW’s book *Winter Soldier Iraq*

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and Afghanistan: Eyewitness Accounts of the Occupations—we found that members of IVAW used narratives to rehumanize enemy civilians and soldiers in an effort to decrease public approval of war. Members used several methods to rehumanize the Iraqi people and decrease apathy among Americans concerning the War in Iraq: they asked their audience to take the perspective of Iraqis, employed role reversals, emphasized the social roles and family ties of civilians, and highlighted the effects of war on children. This work contributes to and expands the literature on veterans' resistance and protest movements as well as the literature on the dehumanization of enemy civilians and soldiers during war by demonstrating how various strategies of discourse may be used in an attempt to reverse the effects of dehumanization and decrease support for war. Furthermore, this research is significant in that it may contain clues for effectively rehumanizing groups that have been previously dehumanized, which could possibly lead to strategies to reduce mass violence and decrease public approval for war.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF VETERANS' RESISTANCE AND PROTEST MOVEMENTS

While American veterans of war have been successful in exercising influence over the nation's political process (Ortiz 2004; McFadden 2008), their ability to alter the public's perception of war and build an opposition to military combat interventions remains a marginal and difficult task. In this section, we briefly trace the history of veteran's resistance and protest movements from the American Civil War through the most current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Here, the goal is to provide a review of the underpinnings of veterans' resistance movements and anti-war activities—all leading to an examination of recent efforts by veterans to rehumanize enemy civilians and soldiers in an effort to decrease public approval of war.

Albeit in different forms, veteran resistance has maintained a constant presence throughout American history. For example, following the American Civil War, military veterans organized the nation's first veterans' organization, the Grand Army of the Republic, in order to elect candidates to public office who would secure and maintain pensions for former service members (Montgomery 2007). Similarly, following World War I, veterans' organizations, such as the American Legion, lobbied for additional compensation for service members. These organizations initially secured a discharge bonus as well as the promise of an additional payment due to each veteran in 1945 or to the next of kin at the time of the veteran's death. However, faced with the hardship of the Great Depression, organized groups of veterans secured (but not without significant toil and hardship) the early payment of this bonus in 1936 (for a detailed history of this bloody and lengthy protest movement, read: Ortiz 2004). During the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s,

veterans' groups (most notably, the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Disabled American Veterans, and the American Veterans, or "AMVETS") acquired considerable political power and social influence. Indeed, the greatest advance for veterans' benefits came as a result of the political action of veterans after World War II in the call for and passages of various bills (most notably the GI Bill of Rights) which included provisions for education, home and farm loans, business loans, and benefits for those disabled and/or in need of pensions (Camacho and Sutton 2007).

Though veterans' organizations have historically been more-or-less successful in arranging protest and bringing political pressure to secure veterans benefits, an alternative form of systematized veteran resistance (namely organized anti-war activities) did not largely appear until the Vietnam era. Propelled principally by veterans who had been participants in the Vietnam conflict, this period of protest had the primary goals of eroding support for the Vietnam War and bringing the conflict to an end (Hunt 1999; Nicosia 2004; Cortright 2005). One of the most influential and controversial veterans' protest collectives was the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW). It was originally formed by six Vietnam veterans and increased to a thousand members. Formed in 1967 by the more radical and conscientious critics of the war, these veterans were motivated by personal experiences "exacerbated by the particular characteristics of the war in Vietnam, e.g., a neocolonial and racist intervention...which ultimately came to define as the enemy all of the Vietnamese people..." (Lyons 1998: 196).

The VVAW wanted to bring their experiences and anti-war messages to the broader public and did so through demonstrations of antiwar sentiment. Of these protest actions, perhaps the most profound and penetrating were the series of testimonies known as the Winter Soldier Investigation. In 1971, members of the VVAW, including John Kerry¹, organized an event in a ballroom of a Detroit motel, where more than one hundred veterans—mostly honorably discharged soldiers—testified about atrocities they committed or witnessed in Vietnam (Stacewicz 1997). The event was held in reaction to the military's investigation into the My Lai massacre of 1968 (see Kelman and Hamilton 1989 for a detailed account of this history) and its subsequent conclusion that it was a "unique and isolated incident" (Wilson 2007). The Winter Soldier testimonies implied instead that such actions were routine and a part of military institutional policy. In this forum, veterans recalled instances of murder and sexual assault against the Vietnamese people as well as tales of destruction of homes, crops and livestock. But common in these narratives is again, the perception that the war was embedded in Orientalist and racist ideologies and was being waged against, not just the enemy, but also broadly against the Vietnamese people. Their testimonies were a way to highlight the atrocities and to

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“direct attention to both the Vietnamese victims of American aggression and the American soldiers who found themselves tragically entrapped by the logic of intervention and occupation” (Lyons 1998: 196). Further, as we argue here, the testimonies of the soldiers were (and are) a way to rehumanize those unfairly labeled “enemy” and also to rehumanize the soldiers themselves, the perpetrators, bystanders, and beneficiaries of such violence.

The VVAW’s Winter Soldier Investigation was filmed and released as a documentary under the name “Winter Soldier” in 1972 (Stacewicz 1997). Later, Senator Mark Hatfield entered a transcript of the Winter Soldier Investigation into the Congressional Record, and Senator J. William Fulbright, chair of the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations discussed the transcripts at the Fulbright Hearings (Hunt 1999). In addition, the VVAW eventually released a book that included transcripts of the confessions and testimonies from the original Winter Soldier Event.

In addition to the VVAW, another antiwar veterans’ organization, dubbed Veterans For Peace, formed in 1986 (Ensign 2006). Both organizations remained active during the period between Vietnam and Iraq—but without the US engaging in any prolonged warring conflicts that resulted in a large number of dead Americans, their activities were limited (Ensign 2006). However, once the US became fully entangled in Afghanistan and Iraq, the VVAW and Veterans For Peace would act as the starting point for what would allow the Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) to emerge.

Like its predecessors, IVAW became a significant antiwar movement. In March 2008, IVAW sponsored its own “Winter Soldier” hearings in which dozens of recent veterans offered accounts of the atrocities they personally committed or witnessed in Iraq. IVAW was founded in July 2004 by Michael Hoffman, Kelly Dougherty, Alex Ryabov, Isaiah Pallos, Diana Morrison, Tim Goodrich, and Jim Massey. IVAW’s main goals are the “immediate withdrawal of all occupying forces in Iraq,” “reparations for the human and structural damages Iraq has suffered, and stopping the corporate pillaging of Iraq so that their people can control their own lives and future,” and “full benefits, adequate healthcare (including mental health), and other supports for returning servicemen and women” (www.ivaw.org). In addition, IVAW has passed resolutions opposing the war in Afghanistan, the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy, and the occupation of Gaza, as well as resolutions supporting non-violence, immigrant rights, and the prosecution of the Bush administration for war crimes (www.ivaw.org).

Here, we also claim that such actions are efforts to decrease public approval of war as well as apathy among the citizenry concerning war. While the potential effectiveness of IVAW to do this will be discussed later in this article, the fact that these messages are reaching

the public from the veterans who experienced them seems to be an important component. After all, the individuals calling for these actions and making these testimonies are the very ones that are applauded in airports, receive local and national press coverage as they are reunited with their families and are invited to Washington D.C. to be recognized for their bravery and service. They are referred to as heroes and role models. Who better then to reach the hearts and minds of Americans? The following section will explore the available research on efforts to rehumanize “enemy others” and set the stage for an analysis of testimonies given by Iraq Veterans Against the War.

DEHUMANIZATION AND REHUMANIZATION

In order to understand how rehumanization can occur, the phenomenon of dehumanization must first be analyzed. Broadly, dehumanization refers to the practice of denying others the quality of humanness and perceiving them as less than human, which in turn leads to the belief that such persons do not deserve equal respect and are worthy of maltreatment (Oelofsen 2009). For example, European colonists called Native Americans savages and beasts; during the Holocaust, Nazis referred to Jews as parasites; in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbs called Bosnian Muslims pseudo-humans—and it is this symbolic stripping away of humanness that helps facilitate cruelty and genocide (Smith 2011).

In terms of reviewing scholarship, we begin with Jahoda (1999) who examined the dehumanization of racial and ethnic others in popular culture. Through his research he found that groups are dehumanized when they are depicted as savages or barbarians who lack certain markers of civility (e.g., lacking self-restraint, moral sensibility, having significant appetites for violence and sex, and being capable of tolerating unusual amounts of pain). In addition, Kelman (1976) states that dehumanization involves denying a person both their identity and their community. Kelman refers to having an identity as being “an individual, independent and distinguishable from others, capable of making choices” (301) and having a community as being “part of an interconnected network of individuals who care for each other” (301). Furthermore, Haslam (2006) explains that to dehumanize an individual means to either deny them human uniqueness—which refers to one’s civility, refinement, moral sensibility, rationality, and maturity; or to deny them of human nature—their emotional responsiveness, interpersonal warmth, cognitive openness, agency, individuality, and depth (257).

Dehumanization is often a central feature within political contexts of protracted conflict such as genocide (Bar-Tal 2000; Jahoda 1999; Chalk and Jonassohn 1990; Kelman 1976). Previous literature states that dehumanization is an important condition for violence and that the dehumanization or othering of enemy civilians and soldiers is often

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necessary not only for soldiers to take part in the violent acts that constitute war but also for public approval of war. When individuals are dehumanized, they no longer evoke compassion and moral emotions and are subject to moral exclusion, or the belief that certain individuals are “outside the boundary in which moral values, rules, and consideration of fairness apply” (Opatow 1990: 1). Anthropologists Montague and Matson (1983) explain that when people are reduced to objects, they become dispensable, making almost any atrocity justifiable. On the topic of dehumanization, psychologist Zimbardo (2008) states, “under such conditions, it becomes possible for normal, morally upright and even usually idealistic people to perform acts of destructive cruelty” (3).

Given the context of this paper, we are interested in the processes of dehumanization (and later techniques of rehumanization) that have been used to label and construct images of Iraqis and Arab and Muslim men and women since 9/11 and the American Invasion of Iraq. Following 9/11, Americans were “drawn back into the body politic,” becoming less critical of social institutions and more jingoistic (Carey 2002: 87). While media coverage and social-political discussion of Muslims increased dramatically after 9/11, the conversational milieu often failed to provide a nuanced and contextual understanding of Iraq, Islam, and Muslims in general (Steuter and Wills 2008). Indeed, as Malcolm, Bairner and Curry (2010: 216) write: “Edward Said’s claim that ‘malicious generalizations about Islam have become the last acceptable form of denigration of foreign culture in the West’ (1997: xii) seems more pertinent now than ever.”

Further, Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (2003) provides an interpretative framework from which to understand this dehumanization and the imagined, oppositional relationship between the “‘West’ and the ‘Rest’ and Muslims in particular” (Saeed 2007: 447). Said’s work explores the history of the “Us versus Them” binary in which Islamic and Arab cultures have been defined as deficient and antithetical to Western culture. In this way then, orientalism constructs cultural generalizations and stereotypes that depict the Orient (and its members) as “irrational, backward, violent, animalistic, untrustworthy and corrupt” (Steuter and Wills 2008). To be sure, the extent to which Arab and Muslims have been dehumanized and degraded in post 9/11 orientalist frameworks is extensive and is well documented (David and Jalbert 1998; Steuter and Wills 2008; Smith 2011).

Having identified this, our task now is to examine efforts to rehumanize “the other” and to identify specific strategies of rehumanization. As several scholars have implied, such efforts of rehumanization (for both the other and self) are efforts “to heal the burdens of psychic injury” (Lyons 1998: 195) and to cleanse a spoiled self (Oelofsen 2009). While there is much literature on dehumanization, academic research on rehumanization is still sparse. Much of the current

work on rehumanization centers on person-centered medicine in order to rehumanize patients who are easily dehumanized by the healthcare system (Miles and Mezzich 2012; Anderson 2011; Miles and Mezzich 2011; Miles 2009; and Marcum 2008). Halpern and Weinstein (2004) state that there is surprisingly little research concerning the rehumanization of individuals who have been dehumanized in the process of war or ethnic cleansing, although such work has important implications for the health and wellbeing of citizens and there has been substantial research concerning the reconstruction of infrastructure and the establishment of law in areas torn apart by war and ethnic cleansing. In addition, the research that does exist on rehumanization following war or ethnic cleansing tends to examine rehumanization processes between populations that directly interact with one another, such as Halpern and Weinstein's (2004) work on rehumanizing processes, which examines everyday interactions between Croats and Serbs. While this research is immensely valuable, there is little work that examines strategies to rehumanize a population in the eyes of a public that will have little direct contact with these individuals, as the average American will not come into contact with Iraqi civilians. A notable exception is Bonds' (2009) work, which examines the efforts of American peace activists to counter the dehumanization of Iraqis through role taking narratives in order to increase rates of activism. Specifically, Bonds interviews peace activists who traveled to Iraq in order to live among the civilian population and experience "first hand" the trauma and abuses resulting from the U.S. occupation. Their narratives worked to challenge the dehumanizing rhetoric of Iraq War promoters typically found in the mainstream media. Our work extends the exploration of Bonds (2009) and examines the use of empathy building as an anti-war movement tactic by soldiers who witnessed, experienced, and in some cases committed, these abuses first hand. We feel that examining IVAW narratives is especially useful to the body of scholarship on dehumanization and rehumanization, as the veterans were not only witnesses to the Iraq War, but also actors within the war. Their narratives include insights into the dehumanization process and rehumanization process that are not found in the narratives of other antiwar activists. Members of IVAW discuss their first hand experiences with the dehumanizing rhetoric found in the US military, which not only leads to the acceptance of Iraqi deaths as collateral damage but also encourages war crimes and other war time abuses. In addition, many of their narratives gave detailed accounts of the experiences that led them to see dehumanized Iraqi civilians as humans again.

The research that does exist by rehumanization scholars has already identified several specific strategies. Indeed, a most common tactic to rehumanize "the enemy" is to emphasize our shared commonalities of being. For Keen (1986) and David and Jalbert (1998),

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this most common characteristic is the family. David and Jalbert (1998: 32-33) write:

The category ‘family’ carries with it a sense of civic responsibility (i.e., part of its many logical properties). Family men are not conventionally the kind of men who engage in activities related to terrorism. On a commonsense level, this operates to inform readers and listeners that there should be no fear of people who have families because, presumably, they would not engage in anything which could jeopardize the well being of others or their family members.

Dehumanization may also be countered by engaging others’ perspectives (Bonds 2009; Oelofsen 2009) and promoting empathy (Bonds 2009; Halpern and Weinstein 2004). Oelofson (2009) notes that using “world travel” in literal and symbolic ways can create an engagement with other’s perspectives that can lead to rehumanization, and Bonds (2009) demonstrates that role taking and empathy can be used to counter dehumanizing rhetoric. Other identified strategies of rehumanization involve combating stereotypes through education (Shaheen 2003) and emphasizing a group’s positive social contributions and law-abiding ways (David and Jalbert 1998); transforming “us and them” into “we” through the shared play and celebration of sport (Dominic, Bairner and Curry 2010; Eitzen 2013) and via positive presentations in art and media (Shaheen 2003; Wiltz 2009); and demonstrating the willingness of victims’ to forgive and humanize their offenders (Gobodo-Madikizela 2002, 2008).

In the end, we seek to contribute to previous work on dehumanization and rehumanization, as well as veterans’ resistance and protest movements, by examining how such movements can use various strategies of discourse to rehumanize enemy civilians and soldiers in order to decrease support for the war. We will expand on previous scholarship that identifies perspective taking and an emphasis on the family as strategies in rehumanization and introduce the following new strategies in rehumanization: employing role reversals and highlighting the effects of war on children.

METHODS AND SETTING

IVAW, inspired by the original Winter Soldier Investigation, sponsored an event entitled Winter Soldier: Iraq and Afghanistan in Silver Spring, Maryland—intentionally held only a short distance from the nation’s capital—from March 13 to 16, 2008. In an effort to create awareness of the consequences of the War in Iraq, the members of IVAW gave testimonies concerning the effects that the war has had on both Iraqi and Afghanistan civilians and American soldiers. The Winter Soldier: Iraq and Afghanistan held various sessions, which included the

Breakdown of the Military, Civilian Testimony, Corporate Pillaging, Cost of War at Home, Crisis in Veteran Healthcare, Future in GI Resistance, Gender and Sexuality, Legacy of GI Resistance, Racism and War, Response to Department of Defense, and Rules of Engagement. Many of the IAW members giving testimonies had written the testimonies beforehand and read them aloud. Several of the speakers also brought photos or videos as evidence of war crimes or other forms of abuse that they had witnessed or taken part in while at war—many of which were graphic images of dead bodies. Though the eyewitness testimonies of the participants were not formulaic and varied considerably from one participant to another, they typically demonstrated a link between war crimes and other abuses and the functioning of the military and American society in general. Ultimately, these varied narratives attempted to rehumanize Iraqi and Afghanistan civilians and called for an end to the wars. Following Winter Soldier: Iraq and Afghanistan, other veterans around the country began organizing what IAW has referred to as “mini-Winter Soldiers” in order to tell their own stories (IAW and Glantz 2008).

In addition to posting videos of many of the testimonies on YouTube, the IAW website (www.iaaw.org) contains video and audio archives of all testimonies made at Winter Soldier: Iraq and Afghanistan. In addition, most of the testimonies were transcribed and published by IAW and journalist Aaron Glantz as a book titled *Winter Soldier, Iraq and Afghanistan: Eyewitness Accounts of the Occupations*. The book includes chapters that correspond to the various sessions held at Winter Soldier, as well as an introduction by Dougherty explaining how IAW was formed, how Winter Soldier came about, reactions to the Winter Soldier event, and the importance of eye witness testimonies.

We examined sixty-four testimonies from Iraq Veterans Against the War. Forty-four of the testimonies we examined took place at Winter Soldier: Iraq and Afghanistan. The transcribed testimonies appearing in the book *Winter Soldier: Iraq and Afghanistan* averaged three to five pages in length. In addition, we also coded twenty other testimonies made by members of IAW that were uploaded to YouTube. Many of these were recorded at mini Winter Soldiers or speaking events, in which members of IAW were asked to discuss their experience at colleges or antiwar rallies. A few testimonies emerged from interviews with IAW members conducted by independent news organizations that had been uploaded to YouTube. We transcribed any portions of testimonies that appeared on YouTube but were omitted from the book, as some testimonies were slightly edited.²

To study the narratives of IAW, we conducted a qualitative document analysis (Babbie 2004), guided by grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967). After identifying the testimonies of IAW members as intriguing narratives that served to make sense of the atrocities of war

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and their effects on both soldiers and civilians, we used memoing to document themes that emerged while reading and viewing the testimonies. After seeing rehumanization themes emerge through memoing, we narrowed our focus and began selectively coding IVAW members' testimonies for such themes. We then used additional memoing to identify four subthemes of rehumanization narratives: asking an audience to take the perspective of the other, employing role reversals, emphasizing the social roles and familial ties of the other, and highlighting the effects of war on children.

PRELUDE TO THE SOLDIERS' TESTIMONIES: DEHUMANIZING OF IRAQIS

If dehumanization or othering is necessary not only for soldiers to justify the violence they take part in against enemy soldiers and civilians, but also for citizens to support a war, how can antiwar movements rehumanize enemy civilians and soldiers in order to decrease support for a war? Members of IVAW sought first to demonstrate the prevalence and effects of the dehumanization of Iraqis—typically brought about by the military or American culture more generally—and demonstrate the need to rehumanize Iraqi civilians.

IVAW states that they hope to turn public opinion against the War in Iraq by describing the “degrading forces of war and occupation that dehumanize and destroy...human beings” (IVAW and Glantz 2008: 3) and to “try to break their fellow citizens out of a collective apathy that allows the war and occupation to continue” (7). In demonstrating the prevalence and effects of the dehumanization of Iraqis, IVAW made the case that war crimes and other war time abuses were not anomalies, but were due to the dehumanizing rhetoric embedded within the United States military culture. For example, Glantz draws a link between dehumanization and wartime abuse:

Why do these seemingly senseless killings occur? What makes them possible? What brings otherwise normal young men and women to the point of committing terrible atrocities? ... the answer begins with the dehumanizing nature of military training itself (IVAW and Glantz 2008: 59).

Additionally, within their testimonies, members of IVAW also called attention to the military's use of racism to dehumanize Iraqis. As Glantz stated:

Overt, institutionalized racism from the command also plays an important role in distancing soldiers and marines from the people they kill. This system did not

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begin with the occupation of Iraq or inside the U.S. military. It is as old as war itself. In the 1930s, Nazi propaganda films depicted Jews as rodents. During the Rwandan genocide, ethnic Tutsis referred to the Hutus they slaughtered as 'insects' or cockroaches. During the 1960s and '70s, American soldiers dehumanized the Vietnamese people by calling them 'gooks'. Today, members of the US Armed Forces regularly refer to Iraqi and Afghan civilians as 'hajis' and 'towel-heads' (IVAW and Glantz 2008: 61).

Similarly, as Blake³ stated at an antiwar rally:

Dehumanization is a big thing with the troops over there. We're taught not to connect with the Iraqi people. We're taught not to view them as human beings, that's why it's common in the military to call the Iraqi people hajis, similar to the Vietnam where the Vietnamese people were called Gooks, because they didn't want to connect with them (Reece20796 2008).

In addition, several of those giving testimony gave examples of dehumanizing discourse within the military and demonstrated that such practices were deeply embedded within the social institution. Prysner⁴ stated the following:

Then September 11 happened, and I began to hear new words like "towel-head," and "camel jockey," and the most disturbing, "sand nigger." These words did not initially come from my fellow lower-enlisted soldiers, but from my superiors; my platoon sergeant, my first sergeant, my battalion commander. All the way up the chain of command, these viciously racist terms were suddenly acceptable (IVAW and Glantz 2008: 98).

Prysner explained how dehumanizing the term haji can be, saying, "When I got to Iraq in 2003, I learned a new word, 'haji.' Haji was the enemy. Haji was every Iraqi. He was not a person, a father, a teacher, or a worker." Another IVAW member, Casey⁵, made the following comments to a journalist at an anti-war rally:

Journalist: From the outset was there much consideration about the Iraqi people in your mind?
Casey: Oh no, no. I mean that came later on, definitely, but no, I wasn't concerned about them at all.

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Journalist: Was that something for you personally, or was that something drilled into you by the military?

Casey: No, I mean that's why they call them Haji. I mean you got to desensitize yourself from them, they're not people. They're animals.

Journalist: What upset you the most about things that happened in Iraq?

Casey: The total disregard for human life, I mean I would have to say is.... Overall, just the total disregard for how they jam into your head, 'this is haji, this is haji, you know, you totally take the human being out of it, and make them a video game.

Journalist: Your superiors were doing that? Your commanders?

Casey: Oh, of course.

Journalist: Up to what level?

Casey: I mean everybody...I mean yeah, if you start looking at them as humans and stuff like that, well God, how are you going to kill them?

(Reece2076 2008)

REHUMANIZING AFGHANIS AND IRAQIS

Of course describing acts of dehumanization will only reduce support for a war if the public sees the subjects of the dehumanization as humans that are worthy of humane treatment. In addition to emphasizing the widespread prevalence and dire effects of dehumanization, the members of IVAW worked to rehumanize Iraqi civilians. The narratives of rehumanization that IVAW members presented were often based on first hand experiences that changed their views of Iraqis and, as a result, their opinion of the war more generally. In other words, their testimonies were an attempt to allow the public to experience second hand the interactions that had led them to see Iraqis as human and ended their support for the Iraq War. Members of IVAW attempted to rehumanize Iraqis by asking their audience to take the perspective of Iraqis, employing role reversals, emphasizing the social roles and family ties of civilians, and highlighting the effects of war on children.

Taking the perspective of the other

One of the main ways that members of IVAW attempted to rehumanize Iraqi civilians and soldiers was by asking audience members to take the perspective of these civilians and soldiers. These findings are similar to literature that shows that promoting symbolic world travel to create an engagement with others' perspectives (Oelofsen 2009) and encouraging empathy (Halpen and Weinstein 2004) can lead to rehumanization. Bonds (2009) explains that the peace activists in his

study "provide audience members with an opportunity to practice moral reasoning from the imagined position of suffering others" (5) in hopes of increasing rates of mobilization.

In most instances, members of IVAW asked their audience to take the perspective of Iraqi civilians and soldiers by walking them through specific scenarios from an Iraqi's point of view, or as Emanuel stated, "put ourselves in the Iraqis' shoes who encountered these events every day and for the last five years" (49). Arendt⁶ does this in the following testimony, stating:

There are two specific things I will address about the operation at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. One is the issue of torture. I've heard a lot of speculation as to what torture is. I would like to ask everyone to consider whether living in a cell for five years, away from your family and friends, without ever being given answers as to why you're there, whether this is torture. Having to ask nineteen-year-old boys who don't have any idea about the policies of their government why they're detained and the answers that we weren't able to give—I consider that torture (IVAW and Glantz 2008: 83).

Similarly, Goldsmith⁷ asks the audience to take the perspective of Iraqis by walking them through the following scenario:

I was nineteen years old when I deployed to Iraq and I spent the first eight months of my deployment in the slums of Sadr City. It's a place that was neglected not only by Saddam Hussein but is horribly neglected by America right now. When we went there we promised them freedom; we promised to get them clean water, to get them food, to get them jobs. Instead, there are two to four hours of electricity a day, randomly. Sewage leaks into the fresh-water system....Imagine living in a place where it gets up to 150 degrees. You don't want to go out during the day, and at night American soldiers are rolling around your streets telling you that you can't go outside, and you can't talk to your friends, you can't enjoy yourself. You can't gather outside the coffeehouse or the chai shop because if you go out past dark you're committing a crime. So essentially, during the summer months Sadr City was a prison. Three million people in Sadr City were prisoners of war (IVAW and Glantz 2008: 186).

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In the following example, Endicott⁸ walks the audience through the scenario of American soldiers raiding an Iraqi's home:

Try to imagine yourself tonight, as you sleep warm in your bed with your wife, your children in the next room, 2:00 am your door is kicked in and men are screaming as they kick open your bedroom door, screaming a language you don't understand, they're pointing machine guns at your face as they drag you by your hair from your bed slamming your face down onto the ground, putting their boots on the back of your neck and smashing your face harder into the concrete floor. Your struggle to protect your family and your home is futile, as you are blindfolded and handcuffed so tight that you lose feeling in your hands within minutes. All you know is you can hear your screaming wife and children crying for help and you are too useless to protect them. You were not on a list of suspected terrorists. You were not on a list of known terrorists, in fact, you completely supported the US coming into your country and promising freedom and prosperity. You are simply a man in a house, on a street, that my platoon decided to search. When your blindfold is finally released, the men have left your home, it's destroyed. Your wife and children are huddled in a corner defenseless and crying. Every drawer in your home is thrown, the contents broken, soiled, your bed has been urinated on, your wife's panties are glued to the wall, maybe a family heirloom is missing, or other objects stolen, the floor is wet with fresh chewing tobacco spit, and you vainly try to tell your family it will be okay, and never happen again, but in your heart you know all the while your chances are, it probably will (Claiborne 2009).

Role reversal

Members of IVAW also worked to rehumanize Iraqis by taking part in role reversal and portraying themselves as villains. Narratives create verbal representations of society and allow individuals to understand their place within the social order (Maynard and Whalen 1995; Goffman 1981). Typically social movements use narratives to identify some individuals as victims, some as villains, and others as heroes (Benford and Snow 2000; Oliver and Johnston 2000; Turner 1996). Doing so identifies dedicated members in a positive light and reinforces negative views of individuals that are seen as challengers to the movement, thereby supporting the status system of the group (Fine

2002). However, unlike most social movement narratives that portray group members as heroes, and unlike narratives in American media and culture which often depict US soldiers as heroes and Iraqi and Afghan soldiers and civilians as villainous terrorists and insurgents, members of IVAW often depicted themselves as villains. By changing their role from that of hero to that of villain, IVAW members relegated Iraqis and Afghans to the roles of victims or heroes. Doing so allowed members of IVAW to portray the Iraqis and Afghans in a positive light in hopes of rehumanizing them, rather than portraying them as villains who deserve violent treatment.

While some members made blanket statements identifying themselves as villains, like Prysner who bluntly stated, “We were told we were fighting terrorists; the real terrorist was me, and the real terrorism is this occupation” (IVAW and Glantz: 100), most of the members depicted themselves as villains by describing their villainous behavior. Even the introduction of the book highlights this behavior, stating:

Over four days of gripping testimony, dozens of veterans spoke about killing innocent civilians, randomly seizing and torturing prisoners, refusing to treat injured Afghans and Iraqis, looting, taking ‘trophy’ photos of the dead, and falsifying reports to make it look as though civilians they killed were actually ‘insurgents’ (IVAW 2008: 6-7).

For instance, Turner⁹ presented himself as a villain in the following narrative:

On April 18, 2006, I had my first confirmed kill. He was an innocent man. I don’t know his name. I call him “the Fat Man.” During the incident he walked back to his house, and I shot him in front of his friend and father. The first round didn’t kill him after I’d hit him in his neck. Afterwards, he started screaming and looked right into my eyes. I looked at my friend I was on post with, and I said, “Well I can’t let that happen.” I took another shot and took him out....We were all congratulated after we had our first kills, and that happened to have been mine. My company commander personally congratulated me, as he did everyone else in our company. This is the same individual who had stated that whoever gets their first kill by stabbing them to death will get a four day pass when we return from Iraq (IVAW and Glantz: 25).

Endicott also portrays himself as a villain, stating:

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I knew my time had come. As I laughed, I ran, this was everything I had hoped for. My chance to kill. I didn't care how or who, but someone was going to die today, and I was going to be a part of the gun club, which I so cherished. From that moment forward, our efforts became more intense, we began getting intelligence of suspected terrorist safe houses, weapons caches, we would gear up, pump our death metal and pump each other up comparing body counts, telling each other, 'It's only a matter of time before we get another.' We knew every way to walk right around the rules of engagement. Rules of engagement—what a joke! To us, the rules of engagement were not rules at all, but merely words on a piece of paper, somewhere printed for the sole purpose of protecting officers if we grunts actually got caught (Claiborne 2009).

Similarly, Casey told the following story:

Oh at that time, when we first got down there you could basically kill anyone that you wanted, I mean it was that easy, you didn't even have to get off and dig a hole or anything like that, all you had to do was having something there for a picture, I mean we were driving down the road at 3 in the morning, there was a guy along the side of the road, shoot him, throw a shovel off, there you go (Reece2076).

In all of these cases IVAW members depicted themselves as villains who not only took part in violence as an unfortunate but necessary part of war, but who took part in unjustified violence because it was gratifying for them. Not only do these stories explicitly state that those targeted were random or innocent targets—who were at times merely reduced to numbers in a body count—but that such acts were acceptable in the military. By depicting themselves as insensitive, bloodthirsty villains, and portraying their victims as random bystanders, the members of IVAW contradict any narratives that depict Iraqis as evil villains, deserving of their violence, and instead reveal them as victims.

Emphasizing familial roles

The third way that IVAW members worked to rehumanize Iraqis was by portraying them as family members. As stated above, family men may seem less threatening and therefore less likely to be villains. In addition, as previous literature has noted, dehumanizing others involves portraying them as lacking moral sensibility, emotional responsiveness,

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and interpersonal warmth, and denying that they are part of a community. In contrast, notions of family often conjure up feelings of moral sensibility, emotional responsiveness, interpersonal warmth, and a sense of community. Furthermore, it is likely that recognizing one's role in a family makes it easier for others to relate to them and see them as human, as most individuals can relate this to their own experience of family bonds. Duffy¹⁰ emphasized this connection to familial roles in the following example:

A lot of people called them hajjis. To me, this detainee was just an old man that could've been somebody's father, grandfather, or uncle. I remember exactly how he looked, and I remember exactly how he felt, dying in my hands (IVAW and Glantz: 87).

In this example, Goldsmith contrasts the dehumanizing practice of bragging about killing Iraqis with the realization that an individual has a social role and a connection to other family members:

People made videos to send home to their friends and family to brag. They were used to build morale, to say that killing is right, death is right, dead Iraqis are a great thing, and that's wrong...This is somebody's brother, this is somebody's husband, this is somebody's son, and this is somebody's cousin (IVAW and Glantz: 187).

Once again, in contrast to the dehumanizing practices of creating war trophies, familial roles are called upon to depict someone as real and as an emotional entity that one can relate to in order to rehumanize them. In another instance, Hurd¹¹ told the following story to emphasize the familial roles of Iraqi citizens:

We were out on a dismounted patrol one day, walking by a woman's house. She was outside working in her garden. Our interpreter threw up his hand and said, "Salaam Alaikum," which means "Peace of God be with you." She said, "No. No peace of God be with you." She was angry and so we stopped and our interpreter said, "Well, what's the matter? Why are you so angry? We're here to ensure your safety." That woman began to tell us a story. Just a few months prior, her husband had been shot and killed by a United States convoy because he got too close to their convoy. He was not an insurgent. He was not a terrorist. He was a working man trying to make a living for his family. To make matters worse, a

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Special Forces team operating in the Kindi area holed up in a building there and made a compound out of it. A few weeks after this man died, the Special Forces team got some intelligence that this woman was supporting the insurgency, so they raided her home, zip-tied her and her two children, threw them on the floor, and detained her son and took him away. For the next two weeks, this woman had no idea whether her son was alive, dead, or worse. At the end of that two weeks, the Special Forces team rolled up, dropped her son off, and without so much as an apology drove off. It turns out they had acted on bad intelligence. Things like that happen every day in Iraq. We are harassing these people. We are disrupting their lives (IVAW and Glantz: 39).

This story not only demonstrates the way that war disrupts the family unit, but also demonstrates that the individuals detained and killed in the war are all real people with family members. Such narratives make it easy for others to relate to Iraqis and to see them as humans.

Highlighting the effects of violence on children

Another tactic used by IVAW members to rehumanize Iraqis was to highlight the effects of war on Iraqi children. Focusing on children may be effective in rehumanizing individuals in that the assumptions generally made about children (e.g. that they are innocent and vulnerable) are incompatible with characteristics attributed to those who are dehumanized (e.g. that they have strong appetites for violence and sex, are prone to criminality, and are capable of tolerating unusual amounts of pain). Furthermore, in American culture, as in many cultures, it is generally assumed that one should act in a nurturing way towards children and that children should be shielded from violence. Such assumptions about children and how they should be treated are incompatible with dehumanizing rhetoric that frames some individuals as deserving of violence or as expendable. Therefore, discourse that describes Iraqi children as the recipients of violence should portray the violence as unacceptable and Iraqis as real humans. For instance, an unidentified IVAW member speaking at a mini Winter Soldier event used the following example to highlight the effects of war on children and the lack of concern of the United States military for Iraqi children:

One time our patrol, many a times we would swerve to actually try to hit people and kids, and one of our drivers missed and he opened his door and he hit this child with his door and these doors are plated with a lot of armor. They're really heavy. Just to pick up the door by itself, it

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almost takes two men to do it, just to put the door onto the hinge, and these doors are just really heavy, and a moving vehicle opening this door, swinging it out and hitting this kid, um, I'm sure that kid must have died. And I was in the truck, I was on the gun on the truck behind the truck that did it, and we finally pulled up the base where we were headed to, we were on an escort mission, and uh, the TC came around and was screaming and yelling at the kid who did it, and I was like 'Thank God,' you know, something is being done, and uh, the kid was left alone and he's pissed off that he got yelled at, and I was asking him about it and he said that he got in trouble because he endangered himself and his crew by opening the door and there could have been a possible IED (Reece 2076).

Similarly, Ewing¹² gave the following example to emphasize war's effect on children:

Soon we began to bring candy in our bags and the guys up in the turret of the Bradleys would throw it out the sides of the vehicle. The kids all rushed to the sides of the vehicle and hung out and fought for the candy. It was billed as a gesture of goodwill. There was also another motive: If the kids were around our vehicles, the bad guys wouldn't attack. We used the kids as human shields (IVAW and Glantz 2008: 70-71).

In addition, Goldsmith related the following example of how the occupation in Iraq and American portrayals of Iraqis led him to endanger children's lives:

There was a little boy, on an alley way to my left, on top of a building. A little boy who hated American soldiers. And he was holding up a stick, as if to mock having an AK-47, and he was pointing it at me, pretending to shoot. I trained my weapon on him. I positively identified my target. I trained my weapon on him, and thought for a couple minutes, 'I hate these Iraqis. I hate these kids who throw rocks and bricks at me. This is my chance. I can kill this kid. Just to take one out of the couple million of them out.' It took me a lot of thinking to not pull that trigger that day. I could have killed a six-year-old boy, I could have killed someone's son, but I didn't. But I was put in that position. I was put in that

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position by the United States occupation of Iraq and by the media creating this hatred for Iraqis (IVAW and Glantz 2008: 188).

Conclusion and Effects of Rehumanization Strategies

The testimonies of these soldiers paint a grim picture of war, attesting to acts of brutality and inhumanity they witnessed or carried out. In telling their stories, veterans sought to bring out the cruelties and dehumanization embedded in the U.S. war effort. Some of these testimonies addressed acts of large-scale violence and human rights violations, while others focused on racism, xenophobia, and the systemic harassment of Iraqi citizens.

Through the medium of firsthand accounts, veterans urged the public to experience the concrete abuses resulting from broader foreign policy decisions and perpetuated by U.S. soldiers. But more than just telling stories, their ultimate goal was the rehumanization of persons victimized by the war in an effort to decrease public approval for war. Members of IVAW asked their audience to take the perspective of the other, employed role reversals, emphasized the social roles and family ties of civilians, and highlighted the effects of war on children, in hopes that a public outcry would influence government officials to end the war. Put another way, members of IVAW hoped that translating their firsthand experiences of war would also lead the public to see Iraqis as humans victimized by an unjust war. As Dougherty¹³ stated:

By acknowledging our experiences, it pressures people to recognize their own responsibility for the actions being taken by a military that is ultimately meant to defend them...We must remind people that the occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan are being waged by the United States as a country, not simply by our military or our political administration. By speaking out, we pressure our fellow Americans to acknowledge their own responsibility for these occupations, which is a necessary part in bringing them to an end. (IVAW and Glantz 2008: 5).

Research exploring public sentiment against war has generally focused on weariness of war due to mounting casualties (Gartner 2008; Gartner and Segura 1998; Levy and Morgan 1986; Mueller 1973), mounting economic costs (Flores-Macias and Kreps 2012), and the influence of media (Christie 2006) and elites on public support for war (Berinsky 2007; Berinsky and Druckman 2007). However, little research exists on the strategies explicitly used to decrease public support for war—especially in terms of effective strategies to rehumanize groups

that have previously been dehumanized in initial efforts to generate public support for war. Notable exceptions include Motyl et. al's (2012) work that demonstrates how the reframing of war and other similar forms of violence as animalistic reduces subjects' support for war. Moreover, the work of Bonds (2009) suggests that role taking and the offering of empathic experiences of those victimized by war may be an effective strategy in reducing war lust and hatred of (or at least indifference toward) those "othered" by war.

However, while these soldiers and social movement activists have a high degree of legitimacy and the social credentials necessary to make anti-war narratives, we cannot conclusively state that IVAW's rehumanization strategies led to an increase in empathic support of Iraqi citizens, nor to a decrease in public support for the war. The reason for this is speculative and worthy of future research regarding the limited success of anti-war and social movement activism. Nonetheless, in a track similar to that of Steuter and Wills (2008) and Bonds (2009), we argue that U.S. governmental, military and media elites took purposive action to limit Americans' ability to hear stories of abuse by staging campaigns of favorable news coverage of the war (Barstow, 2008). Further, there is evidence to suggest that governmental and media officials also lead a counter movement to smear anti-war soldiers and limit their ability to issue statements of abuse against the U.S. military (Cammaerts and Carpentier 2009, Leitz 2011). Ultimately, further research is necessary to understand how members of the public made sense of the IVAW's efforts to rehumanize Iraqi citizens. Additionally, social movement scholars need to explore the links between these anti-war protest actions and media and governmental efforts to combat the coverage of U.S. war abuses. Research on this strategy of rehumanization (as well as oppositional counter efforts) may expand our understanding of the costs and benefits as well as successes and failures associated with a variety of social movement activism.

In the end, we do feel that the larger connection between rehumanizing narratives, public disapproval of war, and the decision of government officials to end or continue wars is a worthy endeavor of exploration. We hope that our examination of the tactics employed by IVAW encourages others to study strategies of rehumanization narratives. To reiterate, further research is needed on the effectiveness of rehumanization narratives on subjects' approval of war, as well as a more general line of scholarship on strategies to reduce public support for war. While our research design allowed us to specifically examine what strategies IVAW used to rehumanize Iraqis, research that tests the effectiveness of such strategies would be a valuable endeavor.

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Postscript: The Future of IVAW Activism

On March 20, 2003, the United States invaded Iraq in order to depose its ruling regime. Eight years later the war officially ended on Dec. 15, 2011. With the withdrawal of U.S. troops and the official military involvement in Iraq ended, IVAW says it will now turn its attention to ensuring that vets are not forgotten as they try to reintegrate into civilian society. But this is not to say that IVAW will be politically inactive. As IVAW member Michael Hoffman states:

Some of us are going to move on to completely different things. But we need to be there for the next generation of veterans, to help them and teach them the lessons we learned in opposing our war, but also be there for them so they don't fall apart (quoted in Fiedler, 2011).

And finally from the IVAW website:

We continue to strive for a world free of unjust war—a world without the political and economic conditions allowing militarism to exist, and without structural forces pushing our youth, our poor and those facing incarceration into the military; We strive for a society that prioritizes care for its warriors—where all who serve receive adequate benefits and the highest standard of compassionate care regardless of discharge status; We strive for a society that holds political leaders, profiteers, and war criminals accountable for the consequences of their actions; We strive for a political and military culture that embraces full human rights for service-members, veterans and all people; We strive for a political culture that prioritizes nonviolence, open communication, and democratic decision-making over militarism—a culture committed to building peace and preserving life, solving international conflicts through diplomacy and alternative conflict resolution; We strive for a political culture that acknowledges our nation's moral responsibilities to the people of Afghanistan, Iraq, and all civilians adversely affected by U.S. military intervention. The United States must fully accept guidance from these affected peoples and provide support they find valuable; Finally, we endeavor for our movement to be an ally to the oppressed—a community connected in solidarity with war torn peoples, working across differences for reconciliation, mutual healing and collective liberation (ivaw.org).

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End Notes

¹ John Kerry is an American politician and current U.S. Secretary of State. He was a combat veteran who later became an anti-war advocate and outspoken member of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. He

was the presidential nominee for the Democratic Party in the 2004 presidential elections.

² The number of times that the videos have been viewed on YouTube varies between a couple hundred times and over one million times.

³ Michael Blake served in the Infantry Division of the U.S. Army. He was deployed to Iraq from April 2003 to March 2004. Following his return he filed for and received Conscientious Objector Status and an honorable discharge.

⁴ Michael Prysner served in the United States Army Reserve as an Aerial Intelligence Specialist. He was deployed to Iraq from March 2003 to February 2004. He was 24 years old at the time of Winter Soldier (IVAW 2008: 98).

⁵ Jody Casey served as a 19 Delta Cavalry Scout sniper in Iraq.

⁶ Christopher Arendt served as a Specialist in the United States Army National Guard. He was deployed to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and was 23 years old at the time of Winter Soldier.

⁷ Kristopher Goldsmith was a Sergeant in the United States Army and served as a Forward Observer. He was deployed to Sadr City from January to December 2005. He was discharged from the military after attempting to commit suicide to avoid further deployment. He was 27 years old at the time of Winter Soldier (IVAW 2008: 185).

⁸ Ryan Endicott served in the United States Marine Corps in Iraq and Southeast Asia at the rank of Corporal (IVAW 2009).

⁹ Jon Turner was a Lance Corporal in the United States Marines and served as an automatic machine gunner. In 2006 he was deployed to Fallujah, Abu Ghraib, and Ramadi. He was 22 years old at the time of Winter Soldier (IVAW 2008:23).

¹⁰ Andrew Duffy served as a Sergeant in the Iowa Army National Guard. He was deployed to Abu Ghraib from October 2005 to October 2006 and worked as a medic.

¹¹ Jason Hurd served as a Specialist in the Medic Troop of the Tennessee National Guard. He was deployed to Central Baghdad from November 2004 to November 2005. He was 28 years old at the time of Winter Soldier (IVAW 2008: 38).

¹² Scott Ewing held the rank of Specialist while serving in the United States Army as a Calvary Scout. He was deployed to Tal Afar from March 2005 to March 2006 (IVAW 2008: 70).

¹³ Kelly Dougherty originally served in the military police unit of the Colorado National Guard and was deployed to Iraq from March 2003 until February 2004 as a medic.

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