

## Chapter 4 Extract

*“In order to initiate change, strategic solutions must be adopted.”<sup>1</sup>*

With the prevalence of “negative stereotyping and illegitimate reporting”,<sup>2</sup> there is a high degree of contention surrounding the current and forthcoming status of Afghan women within their micro, meso and macro spheres of life. Considering the mass desensitisation of Western society to the inauthentic representation of Afghan women in media, it is paramount to contemplate how this may affect future perceptions of the collective demographic. Therefore, this chapter will explore implications which have arisen relating to the future of misrepresentation in media as well as the opportunity for more multilateral, less sensationalised depictions of Afghan women.

Upon being asked, “Do you believe that mainstream media will continue to perpetuate the exclusionary perception of an oppressed and passive gender when discussing Afghan women in the future?”, my interviewee, Isra Ali, stated that, “while I’m hopeful that change will occur as awareness is raised, ensuring that mass media provides realistic, balanced, and nuanced representations is a formidable challenge”.<sup>3</sup> This view was corroborated by my focus group,<sup>4</sup> in which participant 3, stated that, “in my opinion it would be extremely difficult for the media to shift it’s representation of Afghan women”. Participant 2, similarly agreed with this statement, reaffirming that, “the media has created such a distinct image that no matter the future discourse, there will always be an underlying view of Afghan women”. This response demonstrates the difficulty in spurring positive change within a macro institution, such as media, however, it must be considered that such a response generalises to some extent, as while it may seem like no change has occurred, it could potentially be too subtle to discern. Nonetheless, the scepticism revealed in these research methodologies correlate to that which was suggested by SBS’, Paul Cutler, who advocates that, “it is unlikely that mass media will strive to shift the nature by which it represents certain groups”.<sup>5</sup> Such findings are demonstrative of the continuity of misrepresentation in the media. Cutler proposes that this probability is due to the fact that Western media outlets “strive to inaccurately represent groups

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<sup>1</sup> Mackie, V. (2012). *The ‘Afghan Girls’: Media representations and frames of war*. Continuum. 26 (1), pp.115.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix D for Interview 2

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix E for Focus Group

<sup>5</sup> Posetti, J. (2010). Muslim women and western media representations. *Jihad sheilas or media martyrs: Muslim women and the media*. University of Wollongong, pp.33.

in exchange for high ratings”.<sup>6</sup> These findings are unsurprising as the, Information Manipulation Theory suggests that, “a sender might assemble information packages to a receiver, including either half-truths, exaggerations or lies in order to satisfy an agenda”.<sup>7</sup> This theory can be applied to the sensationalised nature by which media reports on the ‘oppression’ of Afghan women, when in actuality, the “majority don’t suffer this maltreatment”.<sup>8</sup> When questioned about the potential for changing representation in media, interviewee, Mariam Wardak stated that, “the social narrative of the identity of Afghan women is slowly changing – often two steps forward, one step back”.<sup>9</sup> This statement reaffirms a cynicism surrounding the potential evolution of mainstream media to accurately depict Afghan women, though, only reflects a singular perspective. However, such comments arising from those who have been impacted by the media’s misrepresentation are discouraging, and highly evidence the slow progress of change which can be expected from within the macro socialisation agency of media.

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<sup>6</sup> Op cit.

<sup>7</sup> Information manipulation theory. (2019). *Communications Monographs*, [online] Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03637759209376245?journalCode=rcmm20> [Accessed 24 May. 2019].

<sup>8</sup> Heath, J. and Zahedi, A. (2011). *Land of the unconquerable: the lives of contemporary Afghan women*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, pp.31.

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix C for Interview 1