

From Achilles to Chris Kyle-Militarized Masculinity and Hollywood in the Post-9/11 Era

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Abstract : Hollywood has had a long and enduring history of showcasing the United States military to civilian audiences, and the portrayals of soldiers in films have had a definite impact on the civilian perception of the US military. The growing gap between the civilian population and the military in the US has led to certain stereotypes of military personnel to proliferate, especially in the area of militarized masculinity, which has often been harmful to the psychological and spiritual wellbeing of military personnel. Examining Hollywood's portrayal of soldiers can serve to enhance our understanding of how civilians may be influenced in their perception of military personnel. Moreover, it can provide clues as to how male military personnel may also be influenced by Hollywood films as they form their own military identity. The post 9/11 era has seen numerous high budget films lionizing a particular type of soldier, the 'warrior-hero', who adheres to a traditional form of hegemonic masculinity and exhibits traits such as physical strength, bravery, stoicism, and an eagerness to fight. This paper examines how the portrayal of the 'warrior-hero' perpetuates a negative stereotype that soldiers are a blend of superheroes and emotionless robots and, therefore, inherently different from civilians. This paper examines the portrayal of militarized masculinity in three of the most successful war films of the post-9/11 era; Black Hawk Down (2001), The Hurt Locker (2008), and American Sniper (2014). The characters and experiences of the soldiers depicted in these films are contrasted with the lived experiences of soldiers during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Further, there is an analysis of popular films depicting ancient warriors, such as Troy (2004) and 300 (2007), which were released during the early years of the War on Terror. This paper draws on the concept of hegemonic militarised masculinity by leading scholars and feminist international relations theories on militarized masculinity. This paper uses veteran testimonies collected from a range of public sources, as well as previous studies on the link between traditional masculinity and war-related mental illness. This paper concludes that the seemingly exclusive portrayal of soldiers as 'warrior-heroes' in films in the post-9/11 era is misleading and damaging to civil-military relations and that the reality of the majority of soldiers' experiences is neglected in Hollywood films. As civilians often believe they are being shown true depictions of the US military in Hollywood films, especially in films that portray real events, it is important to find the differences between the idealized fictional 'warrior-heroes' and the reality of the soldiers on the ground in the War on Terror.

Keywords : civil-military relations, gender studies, militarized masculinity, social psychology

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