

THE IRAQI EXPATRIATES' EXPERIENCE OF THE NORTH AMERICAN MEDIA  
COVERAGE OF IRAQ

by

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### Abstract

There has been extensive media coverage of Iraqi home, culture, and people in the recent past. Concerns have arisen around an unbalanced and biased coverage of the conflict in Iraq, potential censorship or neglect of the humanitarian crisis in the region, and the associated discrimination of people with Middle Eastern ethnicity (Farhoumand-Sims, 2003; Miskin et al., 2003). In this study, I explored the following question: How have Iraqi adult immigrants living in Vancouver, Canada, experienced the recent North American media coverage of their culture, people, and country?

Data were gathered through the use of individual interviews and the interpretive description methodology. Data from 10 participants (8 men, 2 women) were analyzed using Miles and Hubermans' (1994) analytic framework. Themes emerged that described the Iraqi expatriates' exposure to the North American media coverage of Iraq, and the overall responses including the initial impact of witnessing the coverage as well as the ongoing impact. The North American media was perceived to be biased in its coverage of the Iraq war, and that it often engaged in a negative portrayal of Iraqi people, culture, and the religion of Islam. Participants' responses to the initial phases of the coverage included: intense following of the news, difficulties in relationships, signs of depression, concern for families and Iraqis, and a sense of powerlessness. The ongoing impact of the coverage of Iraq brought forth various cultural challenges, changes in worldview, coping, and a desire to show alternative stories through the media.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

*Like the Deserts Miss the Rain*

I walk out the door  
 Past the newspaper stand again  
 Iraq in the news  
 I don't live there anymore  
 It's years since I've been there  
 But now I've disappeared somewhere like Canada  
 I have found some better place  
 And I miss you - like the deserts miss the rain  
 And I miss you - like the deserts miss the rain  
 I have become a success  
 I live in a big house with beautiful lawn  
 For kicks I correct English grammar of the natives.  
 I could be so westernized, eh?  
 I look up at the pictures  
 I can almost hear the screams of profanity at me  
 Things are exactly the way they used to be  
 And I miss you - like the deserts miss the rain  
 And I miss you - like the deserts miss the rain  
 On with my walk  
 I ask why did I remember again?  
 Can I confess I've been reading the news every day?  
 The years have proved to offer nothing since I have moved  
 I have been long gone  
 Why I can't move on  
 And I miss you - like the deserts miss the rain  
 And I miss you - like the deserts miss the rain  
 I swore that I would put this behind me  
 Will the mention of your name always be a pain?  
 I don't live there anymore  
 It's years since I've been there  
 But now I've disappeared somewhere like Canada  
 I've found some better place  
 And I miss you - like the deserts miss the rain  
 And I miss you - like the deserts miss the rain

*Poem included by the permission of author, Elen Ghulam:  
 An Iraqi Canadian who lives in Vancouver with her family.  
 She is the writer and publisher of the blog site [www.ihath.com](http://www.ihath.com).*



As evident by the poem, Iraq has been a topical county in the news for decades, from the Iraq-Iran war (1980–88), to the Gulf War (1990-1991), to the current “War on Terror” (2003-Present). North American media has provided the public with pervasive coverage of the recent war in Iraq, where its live coverage initially kept audiences mesmerized and shocked, particularly those who had close ties with this country (i.e., Iraqi expatriates).

In his master’s thesis on “Iraqi Children’s War Experiences: The Psychological Impact of ‘Operation Iraqi Freedom,’” Al-Mashat (2004), an Iraqi exile living in Canada, described the sense of guilt, helplessness, and anger experienced as he watched the war coverage from his family home in Vancouver. He talked about “being ‘glued’ to the television screen” and his frustration over the “sanitized images of war” by the North American media (p. 2). While struggling to cope with the devastation of war in Iraq, Al-Mashat (2004) accessed other media channels such as “Al-Jazeera” or “BBC” in an attempt to get an accurate picture of war in his country.

Al-Mashat’s metaphor of “sanitized images of war” is relevant to the “bloodless” jargon of the North American media; its use of terms such as “quick, surgical intervention” and “precision-guided bombs” that often minimize the humanitarian crisis in the region (Miskin, Lalic, & Rayner, 2003, p. 15). Miskin et al. (2003) in their report on “Media Under Fire: Reporting Conflict in Iraq,” quoted the following excerpt from a producer of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation on the technology-driven jargon of war coverage by the North American media:

We were told about ‘collateral damage,’ which meant that the bomb missed and hit a house and probably killed a few kids. We heard about ‘target-rich environments,’ which meant that they had plenty of things to shoot at. All of these

terms served to desensitise war to a certain extent. Before we know it, it becomes part of mainstream journalistic language. (p.14)

The boundary between the military and the media became blurred during the recent coverage of war in Iraq when the United States military “embedded” 500 journalists within its front line forces (Miskin et al., 2003, p. 1). The rationale presented was to better inform the public about the unfolding of the war in the region. However, Miskin et al. (2003) argued that another reason was perhaps “to control the information transmitted to the public in order to ensure public support for the conflict” (p. 20). “While the media now has the ability to transmit reports almost instantaneously from the battlefield to the readers and viewers back home, the military has the ability to control such transmissions, by jamming signals or seizing equipment” (p. 21).

Miskin et al. (2003) have questioned the American media’s one-sided coverage of conflict in Iraq and its overemphasizing of certain factors (e.g., success of American soldiers). In contrast to this, the authors also pointed to the neglect or censorship of other factors in Iraq’s media coverage such as the humanitarian crisis in the region.

Similarly, the media’s new technologies that enable us to get live coverage of the conflict, such as when journalists engage in “parachute journalism” as coined by Moeller (1999, p. 26), decontextualization of the events and misinformation occur due to less amount of time spent on analyzing the collected data for accuracy and bias. Such “parachute journalism” is also closely associated with generalization, sensationalization, and Americanization of the crisis (Miskin et al., 2003; Moeller, 1999). Difficulty accessing certain regions, limitations placed on journalists on what to report, as well as the lack of ability to speak the local language often result in unreliable and one-sided coverage of conflicts (Moeller, 1999).

I believe that other consequences of the North American coverage have led to stereotyping of those with a Middle Eastern origin and equating of the religion of Islam to terrorism and fundamentalism. Similarly, it might have brought discrimination, racism, and a lack of empathy towards the needs and challenges of those living in Iraq and others scattered in diaspora as refugees and immigrants from afar. Stereotyping and racist behavior has been one of the consequences of such “parachute journalism,” particularly in the case of those with a Middle Eastern, Arab, or Muslim background or even those physically perceived as belonging to these groups. Ali, Liu, and Humedian (2004) described the discrimination toward Muslim Americans post September 11, 2001 (9/11) making this group susceptible to changes in their religious practices (e.g., women removing the traditional head scarf) so to avoid being harassed. The Council of American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) (2001, 2002) also reported hate messages, denial of religious accommodations, racial profiling, threats, and acts of violence targeted towards American Muslims, thus resulting in feelings such as lack of safety, anxiety, and doubt about one’s loyalty to Islam.

Iraqi expatriates have helplessly witnessed the unfolding of the events in Iraq, the destruction of their centuries old civilization, culture, and heritage and the killings of thousands of innocent Iraqis, possibly including their relatives. As the coverage of the Iraq war has continued, a non-Iraqi like myself (having experienced a prolonged coverage of my own country, Afghanistan in the past), grew to be desensitized and fatigued by all the suffering and atrocities. Despite this compassion fatigue, I developed a curiosity and concern for the Iraqis around me (i.e., Iraqi expatriates living in Greater

Vancouver Area, BC, Canada). This led me to dedicate my Master's thesis to explore the following question:

*How have Iraqi adult immigrants living in Vancouver, Canada, experienced the recent North American media coverage of their culture, people, and country?*

The reason I chose North American media is because of the particular stance it had towards the war in Iraq as elaborated above. North American media refers to both Canadian and American sources including television, radio, Internet, newspaper, and magazines.

It is important to acknowledge that Iraqi expatriates have gone through displacement, immigration, and refugee related experiences as a consequence of various conflicts in the region at different times in history. Discussing the experiences and psychosocial outcomes of refugee status and displacement for this group is beyond the scope of this research. However, the unique issues associated with these experiences is briefly discussed so as to gain an appreciation of some of the additional challenges that this particular group faces or has faced in the past.

Ishiyama (1995) pointed to the loss of validation sources and the challenges of relocation for "culturally dislocated clients" that can also be applied to the case of refugees. Cultural dislocation occurs when a person subjectively feels a sense of displacement or not feeling at home in a particular environment. Such feelings, for example, constitute feelings of uprootedness, homesickness, loss of important validation sources, and conflicts that arise from the new cultural context. The multiple levels of change that refugees need to adapt to include "ambivalence and uncertainty regarding

their sociopolitical and economic status in the host country” (Westwood & Lawrence, 1990; Wehrly, 1990, as cited in Ishiyama, 1995, p. 262).

Other difficulties for refugees, also evident in immigrants and foreign students, include problems such as “communication, finance, employment, schooling and bicultural identity and inter-personal dynamics while adjustment fatigue, discouragement, and depression can be felt by those who are unable to overcome cross-cultural obstacles in their pursuit of personal, academic, and career goals” (Ishiyama, 1995, p. 262). In the case of refugees, the trauma of war compounds all these challenges. Nevertheless, Braken and colleagues (1995) cautioned us that war and violence do not always result in increased rates of psychiatric breakdown [e.g., Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)] but rather could potentially lead to increased general support and social cohesiveness.

### *Situating the researcher*

War and instability had been a part of my life long before I landed in Canada as a refugee in 1996. Being born and raised until 12 years in Afghanistan, and forced to flee the country with my family, involved loss of various validation sources for all of us. These included: leaving my extended family, our relatives and friends, almost all of our possessions, and the house where we all had shared many meaningful moments. We were to join approximately 3 million Afghan refugees in the bordering country of Pakistan. Soon our lives were permeated by uprootedness, culture shock, trauma, discrimination, and an urgent need to survive and learn new things. My family grew into a cohesive whole as we all tried to make sense of the new contexts in which we were at once immersed. I was taught lessons of patience, hope, and resilience in the face of adversity and instability.

Being faced with the lack of opportunities to continue my studies, I joined a relief-based agency to learn English so that I could be admitted to a Pakistani public school. This also meant learning the native language in addition to English, and thus going through the exhausting experience of learning simultaneously two different ways of life and culture. Later on, being sponsored as a refugee by a different relief-based agency to continue my university studies in Canada, I faced new realities. Leaving behind my immediate family and starting a new life on my own, particularly as a woman from a war torn country, contained new surprises and challenges.

In order to maintain close ties with my homeland, I have been involved with various humanitarian projects on a voluntary basis. My aims have been to educate others and myself about my history and to raise awareness about the political, social, and cultural issues in Afghanistan. Despite the fact that I feel I have reached my comfort zone in Canada, I was highly affected when Afghanistan was bombed in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. To inform myself about the war, I was engaged for hours following the news and often wondering how fairly my people were portrayed. I felt that the media was stereotyping every Afghan person as a "Talib," a terrorist, and someone with no compassion for humanity. I also felt I needed to know more about my history as well as the current global political environment. All the previous memories of loss were reactivated for me as I watched the unfolding of the "war on terrorism." These feelings were further exacerbated when the United States declared war on Iraq. It felt like a mirror image of 4 years ago when my homeland had come under attack.

Now as a graduate student in counselling psychology and a person with prior experience of displacement and war, I have often wondered what it has been like for the

Iraqi immigrants living in Canada who have witnessed prolonged and intense coverage of the war in Iraq. I have wondered what kinds of supports this community has sought to relieve themselves of the possible trauma and how they have rebuilt themselves knowing that their loved ones and homeland have gone through cultural and social destruction.

To find these answers for myself as an Afghan in exile, as well as a counsellor, I have embarked on this research project to broaden my perspective of the various challenges and the unique needs of the Iraqi community. I realize that as an outsider my understanding of this community is limited. Thus, I would like the participants of this community to share those stories that have been censored or ignored through the mainstream media.

### *Summary*

Iraqi expatriates have been exposed to extensive coverage of the recent war in Iraq by the North American media. Concerns have also arisen around the biased coverage of the conflict in Iraq, potential censorship and neglect of the humanitarian crisis in the region, and the associated discrimination of people with Middle Eastern ethnicity. The psychological impact of such coverage on Iraqis living outside their country of origin has not been researched until now. Through a qualitative design of interpretive description, this study aims to bring forth the perspectives and experiences of the Iraqi expatriates as they have witnessed the coverage of their culture, home, and people by the North American media.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 (9/11) permanently changed the political landscape of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century United States. Three airplanes were hijacked in mid-air and two were deliberately crashed into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, two prominent American icons. All of the planes' passengers perished, as did many people working in the buildings as well as the rescue workers. Several factors contributed to a huge sense of shock not only among Americans but also the rest of the world. First, not since Pearl Harbour had the US been attacked on home soil. Even in the case of Pearl Harbour the attacks were not conducted on the mainland, but the relatively distant military target in Hawaii. On 9/11, huge numbers of civilian casualties along with saturated media coverage resulted in extreme emotional reactions from people.

Research conducted post September 11 indicated that the event and its media coverage led to development of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), acute stress, and other stress reactions in adults and children living in the US (e.g., Schlenger et al., 2002; Schuster et al., 2001). Following is the definition of PTSD (American Psychiatric Association, 2000 as cited in Strug, Mason, & Hiller, 2003, p. 80):

PTSD is a psychological condition resulting from exposure to traumatic stressor or event to which the individual responded with fear, helplessness, or horror and has distinct types of symptoms consisting of re-experiencing the event, avoidance of reminders of the event and hyperarousal for at least one month.

Research regarding 9/11 has also shown that those living in close proximity to the places of attack, such as Manhattan for example, exhibited more symptoms due to witnessing intense media coverage (Galea et al., 2002). Similarly, those with prior history



of trauma such as PTSD and depression were found to exhibit a reactivation of earlier trauma and more symptoms of stress (Ahern et al., 2002; Kinzie et al., 2002). Other populations such as children and younger adults were also affected by the event (Ford et al., 2003; Schuster et al., 2001); women were found to be more susceptible to developing PTSD symptoms (Pulcino et al., 2004) as well as non-white groups such as Hispanics (Strug, Mason, & Heller, 2003), and elderly (Strug et al., 2003; Van Zelst, De Beurs, & Smit, 2003).

Upon reading the literature, it has been fairly difficult to distinguish clearly the impact of particular events on individuals and groups from the impact of media coverage of those events. It must be noted that not every study listed here exclusively addresses the impact of media coverage of events.

In this section, I seek to review some of the studies conducted post 9/11, both quantitative and qualitative as well as those conducted with Muslim communities. Prior history of trauma and its reactivation will be explored, followed by the limitations of PTSD models in the study of trauma. The relevance of compassion fatigue and mass media's communication of human suffering is explored, followed by a brief analysis of portrayal of ethnic minorities in the media.

### *September 11 Studies*

This section includes an analysis of both quantitative and qualitative studies that were conducted post 9/11. Studies that look at responses to the event of September 11<sup>th</sup> and its coverage, by American expatriates, the Hispanic community in New York City, and various Muslim communities are of particular relevance to the present study, and are thus explored in detail.

### *Quantitative Studies*

Galea et al. (2002) conducted a study that looked at the effects of PTSD and depression in residents of Manhattan 5 to 8 weeks after the event of 9/11. One thousand and eight adults participated in the study through a random telephone survey. Of the total sample, 7.5 % reported PTSD symptoms, whereas 9.7 % indicated depression. Of those who lived closer to the location of the event, 20 % reported PTSD symptoms. Prediction of PTSD symptoms depended on: ethnicity (in this sample, Hispanic ethnicity), prior history of stressors, panic attack during or after the events, those living closer to the incident location, and those who had experienced personal and material loss due to the event. Female gender was also linked to both PTSD and depression as indicated in other research (Pulcino et al., 2004; Schlenger et al., 2002; Schuster et al., 2001; Silver et al., 2002). The likelihood of depression was also increased for those who had directly experienced losses due to the event such as loss of a family member. Similarly, belonging to a minority groups such as having a Hispanic ethnic background was also linked to both depression and PTSD of minorities (Strug et al., 2003).

Schlenger et al. (2002) also attempted to study the psychological reactions after the 9/11 incident in 2273 adults living in New York, Washington DC, and other metropolitan areas through a Web-based descriptive epidemiological study. PTSD symptoms as well as psychological distress following the event were studied. Adults were also asked to report on their children's stress reactions. Most adults perceived that one or more of the children in their households had been upset by the event. Schuster et al. (2001) conducted a similar study looking at psychological reactions to 9/11 in a group

of 560 adults through random digit dialing immediately after the event. Adults were asked about their understanding of their children's reactions towards the event (information on 170 children was gathered). Stress symptoms were measured through a PTSD checklist for all participants. Eighty-four percent of the parents had talked to their children about the event, while 34 % had restricted their children's television viewing time. Concerns of safety for oneself and others were indicated by the children as well as one or more stress reactions. This study also confirmed that nonwhites and women in their sample had experienced relatively more stress reactions. In this sample, however, the level of stress was linked to the extent of television viewing time. Authors suggest that television served as a source of information and a way of coping with the event, in particular for those with low social support. However, television viewing aggravated symptoms in children. The authors also suggested that often stress in parents is associated with stress in their children. However, in this sample, those parents who experienced stress did not report stress in their children. Coping for this sample involved utilizing religion, making donations, and participating in communal activities.

Ford et al. (2003) looked at young adults' response and reactions towards 9/11 right after the event as well as 9 weeks later in attempts to understand the responses of those who had not been directly affected by the event. They wanted to measure how the time and distance had influenced reactions towards 9/11. In-home interviews were conducted with approximately 7,000 participants. Variables such as "sadness, psychological distress, closeness to parents, importance of religion and spirituality, trust in government, and substance use" were measured (p. 572). This study, in contrast with others, focused more on responses and general symptoms than the development of

disorders such as PTSD or depression. The overall results indicated that young adults had been affected by 9/11 events. Most of the reactions reported were transient and included greater trust in the government, significance given to spirituality and religion, and reactions of distress and sadness. As with other studies, there was a gender difference with women expressing more stress reactions (Pulcino et al., 2004; Schlenger et al., 2002; Schuster et al., 2001; Silver et al., 2002). Proximity to the event also increased likelihood of reported distress. A decreased reporting of negative reactions, with the exception of substance use, was noted in this study.

A study by Potts and Sanchez (1994) examined the relationship between television viewing and people who report depressive moods. The sample consisted of 116 undergraduate psychology students (72 female; 44 male) between the ages of 18 to 42. Two measures of depression were used: Beck Depression Inventory (BDI-Short Form) (Beck & Beck, 1972; Beck, Rial, & Rickels, 1974 as cited in Potts & Sanchez, 1994) and the California Epidemiological Scale for Depression (CESD) (Weissman, Sholomskas, Pottenger, Prusoff, & Locke, 1977 as cited in Potts & Sanchez, 1994). Potts and Sanchez (1994) asserted that television viewing serves as a coping mechanism for depressed persons particularly when they experience difficult times in their lives. Television viewing also serves as a means to reduce feelings of helplessness thus giving depressed persons a sense of control (i.e., information gathering). However, when it comes to portrayal of negative events such as crime or crisis, the same individuals report an increase in negative mood that is often accompanied by avoiding or limiting television viewing. A questionnaire was used to assess motivation for television viewing and the subsequent psychological outcomes. Participants were also asked to choose from a list of

possible outcomes of TV news viewing ranging from positive to negative (e.g., relaxed, excited, insecure, being informed, and etc). Potts and Sanchez (1994) found that participants used TV viewing as a means to escape from their negative feelings (i.e., avoiding people, problems and loneliness). Women reported an increase in these moods following their viewing. Despite a correlation between TV viewing and coping, authors found that depression did not lead to an increased use of TV for this sample. Of note, women with depression engaged in less TV viewing.

Dutta-Bergman (2005) investigated the linkage of depression and September 11 news consumption as well as the association of affect and cognition to crisis coverage. Data from Pew Center for the People and the Press was used that included a survey conducted in September and October 2001. The sample consisted of 2184 adults (52.7% women and 47.3% men). The questions in the survey explored respondents' news consumption activities, ranging from the Internet use, to newspaper, radio, and television coverage of September 11 attacks. Another set of question was used to measure depressive symptoms: "Have you yourself felt depressed by the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon?" "Have you had difficulty concentrating on your job or your normal activities because of the way you feel about the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon?" and "Have you had any trouble sleeping because of the way you feel about the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon?" (p. 10)

Dutta-Bergman (2005) found that those reporting to have depression engaged in more newspaper reading versus those that did not report depression. This was also linked to depressed individuals' exhibiting difficulties in concentration, sleeping, and

participation in normal activities. Those who viewed television were also the ones who reported having depression, versus non-viewers. Keeping television on was associated to difficulties in sleeping. Similar results were found for those who checked the Internet (e.g., reporting difficulties in sleeping and concentration). It was also found that the more depressed the individual, the more news of the September 11 events they followed. This seemed to have served as a coping strategy, thus helping the participants with their depressive symptoms. However, the authors suggested that future research needs to look at motivations underlying the consumption of terrorist or crisis news.

### *Qualitative Studies*

Speckhard (2002), in his study of American personnel ( $n=250$ ) stationed overseas in Belgium, found that the tragic images of 9/11 had led to development of acute and post traumatic responses in this community. Through informal individual and group interviews and stress debriefings, the community's stress level as well as their coping styles were investigated. Witnessing their homeland under attack and watching its graphic media coverage had served as a major stressor for this expatriate community. Several PTSD symptoms regarding the media coverage were reported. Following are some of the unique examples: (a) *Dissociative* symptoms: "I am having a hard time finding a place for this in my mind" (p. 108). (b) *Derealization*: "When I see the television playing it again, it looks to me like something out of Hollywood, like the movie Independence Day, but not something that really happened" (p. 108).

In terms of Posttraumatic Arousal, the following symptoms were noted (p. 109-113): (a) *Increased Anxiety/Trouble Concentrating*: "I haven't been able to focus all week. I feel like there is a big hole in my chest." (b) *Anger*: "Do you think its normal that

I sit for hours and plan responses involving nuclear attack?" indicated by a military personnel wanting to retaliate; (c) *Sleep Disturbance*: "I woke up at five a.m. I don't sleep well since this happened." (d) *Sense of threat/increased startle*: "I don't know about you, but I am doing an awful lot of looking over my shoulder now." (e) *Panic/increased agitation/physical indicators of arousal*: "I was frantic because my husband was on a flight back to America at that very time. It made me physically sick. " (f) *Uncertainty/ fears about future*: "I worry about living here now." (g) *Reactivation of PTSD*: "I am a World War II child. I lived through the bombings, the bombardment by Americans of my town in Germany when I was a small child. I never went to therapy for it. I try to keep it out of my mind, but the truth is, this brings a lot of it back."

With regards to how the individuals and family members responded to the events, these were some of the examples. (a) *Marriage and family issues*: "I am about ready to kill my husband. He keeps saying there's nothing to worry about, that there's no danger. I know deep down inside he's afraid, but he'll never admit it, meanwhile he acts like I'm crazy" (p. 114). (b) *Children at post*: Parents did not want to tell their kids about what had happened. Children had inquired what all this meant, showed sleep disturbances, bedwetting, or worrying about the war. Parents differed in terms of how much they sheltered their kids from the graphic images shown over and over on the television. (c) *Extended family considerations*: "My daughter works and lives very close to the Twin towers," expressing concerns regarding her safety"(p. 115). (d) *Cultural challenges*: Dealing with challenges from a far while helplessly watching their homeland under attack had amounted to significant stress for this community. Others had experienced racist incidents of discrimination such as the following comment made by a parent:

My daughter goes to a local Belgian school. I found it very difficult dealing with Belgian parents after this happened. I don't think they mean to be rude or aggressive with me but so many of them come to me and say things like, 'Well you know it's your fault really. This is happened because of the American foreign policies...' (p. 116)

The September 11<sup>th</sup> event had also led to the community feeling racist towards the Arab community living in Belgium. One state official had warned the teenagers against using local cabs, by stating, "They are all driven by Arabs, you know, and I wouldn't ever put my child in one nowadays" (p. 116). Another diplomat reported, "Sometimes I'm afraid that I'm becoming a racist. It's not that I don't like Arab or Muslim people anymore, but I am certainly more aware of them and I don't like seeing them in certain places, like airports for instance" (p. 116).

Additional responses by American expatriates consisted of: "*Increased sense of vulnerability /ongoing stress*" where participants reported feelings of insecurity and threat, "*Grief reactions*" where some felt a sense of loss and seeing the Twin Towers being destroyed, and "*Survival guilt*" where one participant felt guilty for having moved away from the US, leaving others behind (Speckhard, 2002).

Speckhard (2002) found two ways of coping in this community: dysfunctional and functional. The dysfunctional coping included arguments with family members, feeling on the edge, use of alcohol, increased worries regarding potential threats, and constantly listening to the news. The functional coping involved spending time with family members, appreciating their company, and feeling intimate with one another.

An exploratory study by Strug et al. (2003) in the form of focus groups looked at the impact of 9/11 on older Hispanics, their psychological reactions, and ways of coping. They also wanted to investigate if prior experience of coping with stressors or disasters



might have led to the communities dealing well with the trauma of 9/11, or conversely had led to their vulnerability towards further difficulties. Thirty-one elderly Hispanics participated in six focus groups sessions in a community center day program for seniors. This community had also witnessed an additional trauma immediately after 9/11 (i.e., the crash of a plane heading to Dominican Republic carrying some relatives and locals of this community). The groups were facilitated in Spanish, and the following topics were investigated (p. 82):

1. How would you describe your reactions to 9/11?
2. In what ways did you cope with the feelings of these events produced in you?
3. Did you feel that you needed to talk to someone in your community about these events and your feelings?
4. In your view, what was the overall mood like in Washington Heights in the aftermath of 9/11, Anthrax and Flight 587?
5. Do you think that older people reacted differently than younger people to all these events?
6. Were there any gender differences?

Strug et al., (2003) believed that this community was at risk due to ethnicity and age, and also the fact that they were a minority group in the US. The authors pointed to the fact that the Hispanic population is composed of diverse groups of nations, thus cautioning us not to assume that they would all have similar responses, reactions, and distress or coping styles. However, rates of PTSD and depression have been shown to be higher in Hispanics as compared to non-Hispanic groups in studies that were conducted post 9/11 (Ahern, Galea, & Vlahov, 2002; Galea et al., 2002). Similarly, 5 to 7 months after the event of 9/11, Hispanics were twice as likely to express negative emotional and negative symptoms than other groups, and more likely to discard their mail (due to Anthrax scare) or to avoid crowds (Smith, 2002). The major reactions towards 9/11 media coverage were responses such as "electric shock," "emotional shock," or "a cold

feeling” (p. 85). Eighty-seven percent reported acute distress, whereas 71 % of the total sample indicated feeling anxious whenever the words of 9/11 were heard, spoken, or read. Twenty-three percent indicated feelings of horror towards the graphic images. Other symptoms included avoiding the sites that had been attacked, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, physical complaints, and fear of safety. For example, some participants were afraid of using the elevators for the fear that “a Taliban” might have placed a bomb there.

Despite all these stress reactions, the coping mechanisms of this community included turning to religion and having an “attitude of acceptance” or “resignation” in the face of adversity (p. 92). For example, one person indicated, “I did not have to go to the doctor, because I have a doctor who is great and that doctor is God. Pray, pray, and with the help of God, everything will turn out okay” (p.89). Additional means of coping involved family togetherness, watching less television, or engaging in hobbies. In terms of the general mood, it was one of “A depressed community and feeling vulnerable” (p. 90). Others felt that they could not enjoy the Christmas festivities given that others were in pain. With regards to age differences in coping, the participants felt that older people had been more affected than the younger community members. The reason provided was the fact that the elderly were “more socially isolated and frail, more aware of depressing world events and think more about death than younger people” (p. 91). Gender differences in terms of coping involved the participants feeling that women had been more impacted by the events. The participants had not sought mental health services due to stigma attached to utilizing mental health services. Other barriers reported also involved lesser accessibility and the long waiting lists of psychological services.

A focus group study funded by Status of Women Canada and Multiculturalism Canada and facilitated by an Afghan Women's Organization (a non governmental organization based in Toronto) was conducted in 2002 in response to the media coverage of Afghans and Muslims. This was an attempt made by the affected communities to have their voices heard and to point out some of the stereotyping and stigma that the Muslim community and Afghans had experienced as a result of distorted media coverage post 9/11 (Farhoumand-Sims, 2003).

The rationale behind this project was the extent that North American media, and in this study, Canadian media, had been involved in "misrepresentation and misunderstanding about Islam and the Muslim diaspora" (Farhoumand-Sims, 2003, p. 4). This stereotyping had led to not only racism and discrimination but also psychosocial outcomes for the communities (e.g., withdrawing from social activities or hiding their ethnicity). This project was a step towards developing advocacy initiatives by the community, to learn ways of building partnership with media networks, a way to provide a voice and empowerment, to generate knowledge and understanding about the community, and to improve certain practices by the media bodies as well as ways to implement the generated knowledge. Nineteen individuals, with a Muslim background and living in the Greater Toronto Area, participated in four focus group sessions whereas another 3 participated in individual interviews. "One third of the participants were of South Asian background, one quarter were Afghan, two were African, and the remaining two Palestinian, and French Canadian" (Farhoumand-Sims, 2003, p. 8).

Various sources of media such as print, radio, and television broadcast were identified and analyzed by the focus group participants. The level of analysis included:

(a) the content such as “images, terminology, language, topics selected and the choice of interviewee;” (b) “stigmatization and stereotyping;” (c) “journalist’s knowledge of Islam, and their intention in presenting the report;” (d) “subjectivity: the role of the journalist, editors, cameramen, and reporter/host in shaping the quality and accuracy of the report;” (e) the “context: the impact of political climate on reporting;” and (f) “familiarity of the interviewee with media organizations and the reporting process” (Farhoumand-Sims, 2003, p. 9). One media outlet, in particular (i.e., the National Post) was judged by all participants to hold “anti-Muslim” views. Some of the striking findings were that the focus group interviewees felt that they had to “defend their ‘Canadian-ness,’ while also trying to defend their religious beliefs and faith” (p. 1). In general, participants reflected on how the media had ignored certain aspects of Muslims and Afghans (e.g., their strength, resiliency, and humanity), while reinforcing stereotypes (e.g., a woman in a Hijab and a bearded man). “Lack of representation within the Muslim community, including cultural, national, geographic, ethnic and socio-economic diversity” (p. 2) was another piece of information that had not been reported. The participants also felt that often the journalists displayed “personal bias” (p. 2) and a lack of understanding and sensitivity to the issues in Middle East, Afghanistan, or about Muslim countries in general. Other comments about media included: representing Islam as one giant entity and not highlighting the diversity of nations that made up the Muslim world. Often, Arabs were equated to Muslims, or Islam equated to Arabs, thus reducing other religious minorities or diverse faiths within the religion. Muslim women were also portrayed exclusively as being oppressed and having no voice in the community. Similarly, “human rights issues such as poverty, access to health and education services, impact of on-going

conflict in Afghanistan” (p. 9) were often ignored. Participants felt that the crimes by Caucasians were often described in individual terms, but if a similar crime was committed by someone with a Muslim background, the whole community and faith was stigmatized. Many felt that community members were not provided space to voice their concerns in the media or to serve as experts about the issues that had to do with their community or faith (Farhoumand-Sims, 2003).

Various suggestions for change were put forth by this project and included empowerment and advocacy on the part of the community in the form of challenging stereotypic images and representations of Muslims, encouraging media networks to have local voices heard, for media to refrain from words that stereotype Muslims such as “terrorist,” “Islamist,” or “extremist;” journalists to educate themselves about the history, culture, and traditions of a country before they report sensitive topics, and to keep their own biases and judgments aside. Similarly, participants suggested that the media should include “counter-narratives” in instances when “their co-religionists engage in unacceptable behaviour” so as to avoid a “distorted, uni-dimensional image of reality” (p. 19) that has to do with Muslims and finally to appreciate diversity within the Muslim faith and the mainstream Canadian Muslims who are just like other Canadian citizens (Farhoumand-Sims, 2003).

Inayat (2002), by using theories of psychosocial transitions and bereavement, explored the lives of five Muslim women seeking counselling four weeks after the 9/11 incident. According to the author, the psychosocial transitions theory points out that certain events such as the above tragedy can lead to a change in one’s world view such as one’s expectations and assumptions about one’s place in the world. Through a qualitative

discourse analysis, several themes emerged that indicated a transition in these women's worldviews. These included "loss (both of life and of the current meaning of Islam), confusion, a need to be different from the perpetrators and for some, a need to reflect on other injustices committed in the name of Islam." (p. 351)

*Summary.* The majority of studies conducted after September 11 looked at PTSD, acute stress and depression as major responses or emotional reactions to 9/11 disaster or its coverage. Studies found that several factors contributed to the acute stress/PTSD reactions following a disaster. These included: proximity to the place of attack, female gender, increased consumption or witnessing of the media coverage of the disaster, prior history of trauma, belonging to a minority ethnic group, older age, and people who had experienced a direct personal loss due to the September 11<sup>th</sup> attack.

The qualitative studies that went beyond PTSD reactions, acute stress, or depression linked to 9/11 event or its coverage highlighted that the participants experienced grief reactions, changes in worldview, various cultural challenges (e.g., stereotyping and discrimination), difficulties in relationships with others, and concern for extended family members. Some studies also explored coping behaviors associated with the witnessing of the disaster coverage, and these included: turning to faith, spending time with family and loved ones, engaging in community activities, and trusting the government.

The majority of studies conducted post 9/11 explored the impact of one incident or its coverage (i.e., 9/11) and the immediate reactions to the events, with the exception of a few studies that did some follow-up with the affected communities.

### *Previous Trauma and Reactivation*

To better understand the impact of disaster coverage, and the related PTSD/acute stress symptoms, this section briefly explores the linkage of previous trauma and its reactivation when individuals are faced with a current traumatic incident.

Toren and colleagues (2002) attempted to study how prior trauma can influence psychological reactions towards a current trauma. The participants consisted of a group of Israelis who had witnessed Scud missile attacks during the gulf war in 1991 and were later exposed to an additional threat (i.e., missile attack by Iraq in 1998). An Israeli control group with no prior history of trauma was used as a comparison. Various scales were used to assess the level of anxiety, anger, and the impact of the stressful events and possible symptoms such as intrusive or avoidance symptoms after exposure to a stressful event. A three-month follow-up showed that there had been a significant decrease in the level of symptoms for both groups. However, for those with prior history of trauma or exposure to trauma, more symptoms of anger were noted. It was implied that certain symptoms such as anger regarding a prior traumatic event might persist, while others may decrease with time. The overall results indicated that prior history of trauma could lead to vulnerability towards a potential traumatic or stressful event.

Physiological symptoms such as a hyperarousal state in individuals with PTSD who were faced with a traumatic event were studied by Kinzie and colleagues (1998). Participants in the study consisted of two groups of patients with PTSD diagnosis that included refugees from Cambodia and U. S. Vietnam Veterans. These two groups allowed a cross-cultural comparison of reactivation of PTSD symptoms in the face of a new stressful event (e.g., five videotaped scenes of traumatic events that included clips of

the Vietnam War and Cambodian refugee scenes along with other events). The authors also wanted to find out if the hyperarousal state responses indicated a reactivation of the patient's specific previous trauma, or more of a general arousal response.

After measuring and evaluating patient's behavior, their ratings of distress and changes in heart rate, Cambodian refugees exhibited more distress reactions to all of the events as compared to US Vietnam veterans. This difference cross culturally indicated that perhaps understanding of, and response to, trauma might be culture bound and also specific to the degree of trauma experienced. The Cambodians rated the Cambodian refugee scene as most disturbing and Vietnam Veterans, the specific video on Vietnam. The control group, who consisted of mostly Caucasians, rated the domestic violence video clip as the most disturbing. However, a week later, the Cambodian group still displayed persistent negative reactions such as sadness, concerns regarding relatives in Cambodia, reporting more memories of past experiences, and more intrusive and depressive thought patterns (not just specifically to the Cambodian event, but to all of the events).

Kinzie et al. (1998) offer possible explanations for such cross-cultural differences in responses. One suggestion is that the study populations differ from each other on various dimensions such as degree of trauma (e.g., Cambodians were in concentration camps for 4 years with no sense of personal agency and experiencing various challenges such as starvation, beating, and loss of loved ones). In the case of veterans, they had more of an active involvement and a brief exposure to stressful events as compared to Cambodian refugees. Other possible explanations were lower level of education, Buddhist religion, and most prominently, the refugee status of Cambodians, which might



have compounded the perception and degree of trauma. The Cambodian sample consisted of a majority of females and other studies (Pulcino, et al., 2004, Schlenger et al., 2002; Schuster et al., 2001; Silver et al., 2002) have indicated that women are more susceptible to potential trauma. On the other hand, the Veterans were all male, with higher degree of education and were currently living in their country of origin, which may offer some protective status.

#### *Limitations of studies on trauma*

Most of the September 11 studies looking into the effects of war and trauma have used PTSD criteria to assess the level of psychological reactions and responses. Yet, there are several limitations to the use of PTSD models. First of all, it is based on a deficit model that neglects measuring protective and resiliency factors in individuals.

The only exception among the studies listed is that of Speckard (2002), which investigated functional coping of American expatriates when they were faced with images of September 11 incidents.

In addition, PTSD based frameworks are considered to be based on a Western value system, thus making them limited in their use and interpretation with non-Western groups (Bracken et al., 1995). Sideris (2003) also asserted that PTSD is a bio-medical framework that often isolates the individuals from his or her social relations. It is also limited in how it evaluates the effects of social and cultural destruction on individuals, for example, in case of Iraqi refugees. Bracken and colleagues (1995) also argued that PTSD endorses a notion of individuality limited to Western culture, and often emphasizes similarities in responses to trauma between different cultural groups, while underestimating the differences. Thus, treatments based on these measures can often be limited in their

application to diverse cultural groups. Bracken et al. (1995) suggested an alternative model that encompasses various contexts such as social, political, and cultural realities. Social realities include dimensions such as “family circumstances, available social networks, economic position and employment status” (p. 1077). The political reality can include factors such as “individual’s political engagement and movement,” “social position as determined by class, gender and ethnic factors, and whether they are victims of state oppression and or other forms of organized violence” (p. 1077). The term cultural reality as suggested by this model, could entail factors such as “linguistic position, spiritual or religious involvement, basic ontological beliefs and concepts of self, community and illness” (p. 1077). However, the researchers do not indicate concrete guidelines for using the suggested model.

*Compassion: Media’s Coverage of Human Suffering*

Moeller (1999), in her book on media and compassion fatigue, talked about the “public’s short attention span, the media’s peripatetic journalism, the public’s boredom with international news, [and] the media’s preoccupation with crisis coverage” (p. 2). She also highlighted how “media causes the public to lose interest, and the media’s perception that their audience has lost interest causes them to downscale their coverage, which causes the public to believe that the crisis is either over or is a lesser emergency...” (p. 12).

Hoiyer (2004) explored the connection between compassion and the media’s discourse of global suffering. She quoted Nassbaum (2003) for the definition of compassion, which is “a painful emotion occasioned by the awareness of another person’s underserved misfortune” (p. 514) that include affective and cognitive reactions.

She distinguished the terms empathy and sympathy from compassion by linking compassion to public and political fields. "The media may be seen as an intermediate link between the level of social situations, in which audiences' interpretation and responses develop, and humanitarian organizations and politics" (p. 514).

Upon analyzing two empirical studies related to media and the coverage of human suffering, Hoijer (2004) developed four categories of compassion as described later. The first study included a total of 500 telephone and in-depth personal interviews of Swedish citizens looking at consumption of violent news, whereas the second study involved focus group interviews with Swedish and Norwegian citizens and their responses to the Kosovo war. Hoijer established the following categories:

(a) "*Tender-hearted compassion*" looks at the ways that audiences express empathy or pity for the victims of suffering (e.g., 'It breaks my heart when I see refugees. They are coming in thousands and they tell what they have through. It's so terrible') (p. 523). (b) "*Blame-filled compassion* brings up the suffering of the victims in combination with indignation and anger" (e.g., 'I became angry when I saw the many innocent people and civilians who died and were stricken by the conflict') (p. 524). (c) "*Shame-filled compassion* brings in the ambivalence connected with witnessing the suffering of others in our own comfortable lives and the cosiness of our living room" (e.g., 'I had such a bad conscience and I almost did not manage to watch any more terrible scenes on television. And they weren't just scenes, it was reality') (p. 253), and (d) "*Powerlessness-filled compassion* arises from a subjective awareness of the limits of the media's spectator's possibilities to alleviate the suffering of the victims" (e.g., 'I got a feeling that it would never stop and I experienced so much impotency') (p. 253). Hoijer (2004)

asserted that an individual could experience multiple forms of compassion at the same time.

In contrast to compassion, Hoijer (2004) pointed to a different response that included audiences distance themselves from the coverage of human suffering, by coining it “Distantiation from compassion.” Various responses that fall under this category include: criticism of news in general to get the focus away from the human suffering or taking on a “critical propaganda perspective.” This occurs when various warring parties are involved (p. 524). Other responses could include becoming numb or feeling remote from the depictions of the humanitarian crisis. When participants take a “critical propaganda perspective” they use terms such as “sensationalization” and “commercialization” to describe the news coverage they consume.

Hoijer (2004) referred to another response called “*Gendered Compassion*” where women have been found to respond with more compassion and men with more “distantiation and repudiating interpretations” (p. 525). Women have been found to show more empathy with victims of crisis coverage. They are also found to attend more to humanitarian-related concerns arising from the conflicts or wars. Hoijer linked these gender differences to socialization, where women are encouraged to display more compassion and caring. In contrast, men are socialized with ideals of “heroic warfare and violence” (p. 525).

Another study by Kinnick, Krugman, and Cameron (1996) attempted to empirically study the concept of compassion fatigue as it relates to communication about social problems. Compassion fatigue is defined as “emotional burnout” characterized by “emotional over load and subsequent emotional exhaustion” (p. 688). It relates to those

who are involved in a helping profession requiring them to attend to others in need. It also refers to audiences experiencing information overload from watching others in trouble. These situations often lead to feelings of powerlessness and desensitization or detachment towards the crisis or suffering.

A telephone survey of two groups of undergraduates ( $n=50$ ) with followup questions was used in this study. AIDS, homelessness, violent crime and child abuse were the explored topics. Kinnick et al., (1996) identified that "*Compassion fatigue is issue dependent*" (p. 702) that is, violence and abuse produce more concern as participants perceive "similarity between viewers and victims" (p. 702); whereas AIDS and homelessness led to more compassion fatigue. "*Compassion fatigue is an individual and multidimensional phenomenon*" that is, different responses to mass media can be produced ranging from "hypersensitivity" to "desensitization" (p. 702-703). The range of responses include: blaming the victim for his or her own behavior, feelings of inefficacy (i.e., nothing can be done), empathy towards the victims, or avoidance of topics due to finding them stressful. "*The mass media play a primary role in the development of compassion fatigue.*" In this category, the authors stated that the pervasiveness of mass media's portrayal of negative events is linked to desensitization and avoidance particularly when the content reaches a "point of saturation" (p. 703).

In summary, the studies that explored the concepts of compassion and compassion fatigue and their relation to the depiction of human suffering elucidated that audiences engage in various strategies to make sense of human suffering, ranging from distancing themselves to expressing empathy to the victims of the suffering. Compassion fatigue was found to be issue-dependent and a complex multidimensional phenomenon.

*Minorities and the Media*

ter Wal, d'Haenens, and Koeman (2005) attempted to examine the representation and presentation of ethnicity in EU and Dutch domestic news. The authors highlighted that since most audiences do not have a direct involvement with ethnic minorities, news portrayal can be influential in how these minorities are regarded. According to this study, negative news is often associated with ethnic minorities. These views are further enhanced by factors such as the prejudice and cultural values of journalists and news agencies as well as their lack of time or means to consult with appropriate sources when reporting about ethnic minorities. Similarly, journalists and media agencies show a lack of knowledge and training about minorities' cultures or backgrounds. This is further complicated by the limited access of agencies to hire reporters from minority groups. Through a quantitative content analysis of EU and Dutch "mainstream and most-read newspapers" (p. 940), ter Wal et al. (2005) explored the following: general kinds of themes in the news as well specific ethnic issues, the extent of participation, roles and activities of minorities as they related to news, and finally whether the depiction of minorities were more negative. The kinds of stories selected ranged from issues that specifically addressed ethnic minorities such as "ethnic relations, migration, asylum or discrimination" (p. 940) as well as other news that did not have the above stories.

This study found a clear discrepancy between the coverage of general issues and minority issues: "minority actors were less present as main actors in ethnic stories and they were more often presented in negative news contexts and roles," "news about migrants and ethnic minorities was found to be more often negative than general news, and "minority actors were slightly more often the object of negative portrayal" (948).

The authors concluded that this confirms the stereotype of minorities being delegated specific places in societies ranging from crime to celebrities. On the other hand, when reporting "common people" the news focused on asylum and migratory related topics, whereas when it came to issues of minorities and identity, topics such as fundamentalism and religion received more attention. In such reporting, minorities were not consulted for their opinion. News covering crimes showed ethnic minorities negatively. Discrimination was frequently discussed, but only when it related to crime and was often discussed by famous minority figures. Certain stories that required more investigation on the part of reporters included topics of religion and fundamentalism. However, the same topics represented more than half of the stories reported and contained negative portrayal of minorities. Finally, a general lack of context in reporting was noted. The authors concluded that "this finding is a confirmation of the importance of news selection mechanisms, and of news and public agendas on the portrayal of minorities in the media" (p. 948).

### *Summary*

Given that most people have been exposed to a biased and military-based media coverage of the war in Iraq, this research attempts to provide the context to elicit the voices and perspectives of Iraqis living in Canada. The research question explored is: *"How have Iraqi adult immigrants living in Vancouver, Canada, experienced the recent North American media coverage of their culture, people, and country?"*

Prior research on the effects of war has looked at the impact of war and resulting trauma through PTS and Acute Stress of DSM-IV-R criteria. Similarly, witnessing war through the media has also been linked to developing acute stress and PTSD, in studies

conducted after the event of September 11 (Speckhard, 2002; Strug et al., 2003).

However, such diagnostic criteria have been thought to reflect a Western ontology, separating the individuals from their contexts. They are also limited in their use with non-Western groups (Bracken et al., 1995). The present study took a strength-based perspective by empowering the Iraqi community to share their understanding of the above issues.



### CHAPTER 3: METHOD

This qualitative study explored the following research question: How have Iraqi adult immigrants living in Vancouver, Canada, experienced the recent North American media coverage of their culture, people, and country? A qualitative research design, utilizing interpretive description as a method in the form of interviews, provided the means of inquiry to the above research objective.

The following section includes details on the qualitative paradigm, interpretive description, interviews, data collection and procedures, data analysis, researcher's process of reflexivity, as well as information on ways to enhance trustworthiness.

#### *Qualitative Research Paradigm*

A qualitative research design was pursued in this study to explore the experiences of Iraqi adult immigrants as they have witnessed the depiction of their culture, country and people through the North American media. Qualitative approaches are useful for a variety of reasons. They place importance on the "lived experience" of participants, acknowledge the role of various contexts, challenge the status quo, and encourage new ways of understanding the world by acknowledging multiple perspectives (Barnes, 1992; Morse, 1991; Sandelowski, 1996; Smith & O'Flynn, 2000).

More over, this form of inquiry is particularly relevant to this topic because it is inductive and provides an emic description of the experiences of participants. It also places importance on both the uniqueness and commonalities of human experiences (Eisner, 1991; Hoepfl, 1997; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). "A primary purpose

of qualitative research is to describe and clarify experience as it is lived and constituted in awareness" (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 138).

Qualitative designs are increasingly used in public health research such as nursing and counselling in order to better understand people's thoughts, behaviors, and experiences by acknowledging multiple realities of experience (Hills, 2000; Morse, 1991). An additional significant feature of qualitative research is generating knowledge of practical importance and placing emphasis on utility. This aspect relates to the tradition of pragmatism in psychology that aims at looking at "the consequences of actions based upon particular conceptions" and that research is closely linked to the social, political, historical, and other particular contexts in which it occurs (Cherryholmes, 1992, p. 13). Therefore, the pragmatic tradition has been largely popular in counselling psychology, particularly, in the field of mixed-method research. Hanson and colleagues (2005) assert that one should place more importance on the research question than what method to work with or theory and paradigm to operate from. The essential component is how best the research question can be investigated and understood and what kind of practical information is needed or simply "what works" (p. 226). Finally, pragmatists also do not rank order one research approach or method over another, but rather emphasize the contextualized outcomes that are of practical significance. This particular element fitted well with this study's chosen method for conducting research.

### *Interpretive description*

Focusing on the emic perspective of Iraqis in Canada, a qualitative research paradigm provided description and interpretation of data using the interpretive

description method in the form of semi-structured interviews. The emic perspective refers to “constructs or behaviors that are unique to an individual, sociocultural context that are not generalizable” (Ponterrotto, 2005, p. 128). In other words, an emic perspective aims at describing the insider’s perspectives or the voices of the participants.

Interpretive description has the methodological and theoretical soundness that other qualitative methods present, and therefore, served as an appropriate method for this study. Ponterotto (2005) referred to counselling psychology researchers as *bricoleurs* (i.e., “Jack of all trades” or a “handyman”). This aspect is uniquely observed in interpretive description method as it borrows its means of inquiry from ethnography, phenomenology, and grounded theory. Phenomenology aims to explore the essence of every day human experience, while attempting to find the underlying enduring characteristics or structures that can describe a particular phenomenon or an experience. Grounded theory, on the other hand, explores the influence of social processes and contexts on human interaction and behaviour. Finally, ethnography aims to investigate the commonalities and variations in human experience (McLeod, 2001). The essential themes that interpretive description borrows from the above discipline include: an emergent design, constant comparative analysis, emphasis on utility, bracketing one’s assumptions as a researcher, a reflexive attitude, and attention to the influence of various contexts on the research process.

Interpretive description originated within the discipline of nursing in attempts to gather practical information that can be utilized to explain and understand complex clinical issues in order to develop appropriate interventions and assessment tools. The aim was to develop a qualitative method that was flexible, open, and not bound to any

particular theoretical foundation. It was a move from “enforcing methodological orthodoxy” towards “methodological approaches designed to fit the kinds of complex experiential questions that they [nurses] and other applied health researchers might be inclined to ask” (Thorne, Kirkham, & O’Flynn-Magee, 2004, p. 2).

Interpretive description, for example, has been used to study the educational needs as well as the experiences of patients undergoing a cancer treatment (Stajduhar et al., 2000); how individuals with multiple sclerosis describe and explain what is helpful or unhelpful communication with regards to their health (Thorne et al., 2004); and how men experience and handle cancer diagnosis while being fathers at home (Elmberger, Bolund, & Lützén, 2002). Other studies have examined how people with various illnesses get involved and make decisions when it comes to self-care management of their health conditions (Thorne, Paterson, & Russell, 2003).

Some of the unique features of interpretive description as a qualitative method are that it produces a research product that brings forth an emic description of the experiences of participants, or the “insider point of view,” where participants are encouraged to elaborate on their own insights and experiences. In addition, this method is not driven by any predetermined categories making it more flexible and suitable to the proposed research. It also requires the researcher to make explicit his or her biases and assumptions, and to engage in an iterative process of data collection thus allowing an emergent process of inquiry. Moreover, multiple means of data gathering are encouraged to bring a comprehensive understanding of participant’s experiences, such as the use of journaling or personal reflections, participant observation as well as document or cultural artifacts. The essential aim of interpretive description is to produce discipline-related

practical knowledge that goes beyond traditional means of inquiry. In this study, I used journaling and field observations in addition to the interviews to get a better understanding of participants' experiences.

Thorne et al., (2004) described the philosophical foundation of interpretive description through Lincoln and Guba's (1985) work on naturalistic inquiry:

- (a) There are multiple constructed realities that can be studied only holistically. Thus, reality is complex, contextual, constructed and ultimately subjective.
- (b) The inquirer and the "object" of inquiry interact to influence one another; indeed, the knower and the known are inseparable.
- (c) No *a priori* theory could possibly encompass the multiple realities that are likely to be encountered; rather, theory must emerge or be grounded in the data. (p. 5)

The above philosophical foundations are also closely linked to some of the elements of the constructivist paradigm in qualitative research. These include the notion that multiple interpretations can be drawn and that reality is socially constructed by individuals within a particular context. Similarly, it does not posit direct causal linkages of phenomenon, but rather acknowledges that there are reciprocal and/or simultaneous influences for a phenomenon to occur or exist. Constructivism does not strive for generalizations but aims for understanding unique and shared contexts. It also recognizes the importance of the relationship between the researcher and the participants affecting the research process, and how the researcher's biases and assumptions can influence what is gathered (Appleton & King, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 2000)

There are two major parts to interpretive description. First, the researcher describes the phenomenon under study at the surface of words, phrases, and sentences. However, for the data to be of practical importance, interpretive description requires one to interpret the collected data using a strong analytic framework that ensures

trustworthiness and validity. This process requires the researcher to keep in mind the contextual nature of data and monitor his or her assumptions and biases. The product of interpretive activities is something that is based on “informed questioning, using techniques of reflective, critical examination, and which will ultimately guide and inform interdisciplinary thought in some manner” (Thorne, et al., 2004, p. 6).

It is important to distinguish interpretive description from “interpretive explanation” which “generates an entirely original and coherent new truth or metaphor.” (Sandelowski & Barraso, 2003, as quoted in Thorne et al., 2004, p. 7). In this study, I do not attempt to generate a new phenomenon, but rather I try to understand the experiences of Iraqis in Vancouver who have witnessed the prolonged North American media coverage of their country and culture. The analytic framework provides the basis for interpretation of the described experiences, thoughts, feelings, and insights. However, the process is iterative, encouraging the researcher to move from the initial framework, descriptions and interpretations and look for alternative understanding of the phenomenon under study (Thorne et al., 2004).

### *Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews (with open-ended questions), approximately 1 to 1.5 hours in length, were used to explore the Iraqi expatriates’ experience of the North American coverage of their culture, country, and people. All interviews were gathered between February and March, 2006. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. The open-ended format of certain questions not only attempted to encourage the participants to reflect, recall, and respond freely regarding the experiences they had, but also allowed for individual variations to emerge. Because there were no

predetermined responses, this gave the interviewer the opportunity to probe and explore issues within the interview guide (Hoepfl, 1997).

In-depth interviews are often coined as a “conversation with a purpose” (Kahn & Cannell, 1957, p. 149). This is when the interviewer aims to elicit specific, rich, and coherent description of participants’ experiences, while engaging in clarification and follow up questions to get the required relevant information (Kvale, 1996). The interview’s quality depends on the characteristics of the interviewer. Kvale (1996) recommended that interviewers need to be sensitive and empathetic to the interviewee, while listening for the “nuances of meaning described” (p. 149) and paying attention to both verbal and non-verbal communication by the interviewee. This process particularly helps the interviewer to monitor conversations on emotionally sensitive topics. Throughout the interview process, the interviewer is encouraged to clarify the nature and purpose of the study in order to elicit research relevant information (Kvale, 1996).

In this study, the interview began by a brief introduction by the interviewer about the purpose of the study in general. An informed consent form (Appendix C) was presented to participants that explained the purpose of the study, the nature of interview, confidentiality, the potential risks and benefits to the participants, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Because this study was on a sensitive topic, process consent was negotiated throughout the course of interview to reduce the potential for harm to the participant.

Kvale (1996) distinguished between a research versus a therapeutic interview; the latter’s function being to bring change on the part of the participant. The aim of this study, however, was to collect information about the participants’ experiences, beliefs,

thoughts, and insights. My personal reflections and observations were recorded for each interview. This process helped in guiding and informing the data analysis and the research as a whole.

The interview explored the following main question. (see Interview Guide, Appendix D)

*How have Iraqi adult immigrants living in Vancouver, Canada, experienced the recent North American media coverage of their culture, people, and country?*

After the interview questions were explored, the demographic questionnaire was administered verbally. This was followed by debriefing and sharing of a list of various multicultural services, and low-cost counselling resources available in the Vancouver Area (Appendix F). This was done in case participants felt distressed after the interview, wanted to talk to someone about the related topic, or if they knew someone in their community or family who might benefit from the list. One of the participants who worked in social services, advised me to change the word “distress” to something more neutral, as he felt that other Iraqi participants might not want to look at their interview experience as “distressful.” This important feedback was incorporated during the debriefing part of the interview and was replaced by a general statement of, “I have compiled a list of resources in the community that I thought might be useful for you. You can also share this list with others who you think might benefit from what is available in the community, in terms of support.” All participants seemed to appreciate the receipt of this list of resources. One individual, in particular, expressed that he wished he had had access to this list of resources in the initial phases of the war because he felt lonely and upset and wanted to talk to someone about his experiences.



As this study involved a sensitive topic, steps were taken to minimize the chances of retraumatization as a result of participation. Process consent was negotiated throughout the interview, thus allowing participants to withdraw in case of any reactivation of trauma. Some of the suggestions by Kavanaugh and Ayres (1998) were also utilized to minimize discomfort while engaging in research on sensitive topics. These included attending to both verbal and nonverbal indicators of distress in participants and maintaining a flexible structure within the interview process. Similarly, caution was taken not to make any assumptions about participant's behavior during the process without clarifying the reasons for their behaviour. Participants were also encouraged to direct and pace the interview process. Each interview session included a debriefing at the end. Other strategies involved giving participants a list of multicultural resources as well as low cost counselling services available in the community. (See Appendix F)

Thus, throughout this research, I strived towards ensuring the protection of participant's welfare, privacy and confidentiality. I have used pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants and excluded any information that would disclose the identity of my participants.

### *Participants*

A qualitative inquiry encourages the use of a relatively small purposive sample that provides rich and in-depth information, thus capturing the participants' perspectives and experiences. The aim of this study was to choose participants who would provide information on the central questions of this research as well as multiple perspectives that could be compared and contrasted (Patton, 1990; Polkinghorne, 2005). Polit & Hungler (1995) recommended the use of snowball sampling when access to participants is

relatively difficult, that is, Iraqi immigrants living in Greater Vancouver, Canada. This strategy was used as a way to collect a relatively homogenous sample with divergent experiences (Polit & Hungler, 1995). Because access to Iraqi participants was somewhat limited due to their small number in Vancouver, those who volunteered their participation for an in-depth interview were requested to invite other Iraqis. However, to be accepted into the study, the volunteer needed to meet the criteria for inclusion in the study. To avoid coercion, participants were asked to directly contact the researcher on their own.

Qualitative inquiry such as the proposed study is naturalistic, with a design that is flexible and dynamic, thus encouraging adaptation of inquiry process as more information is gathered from the participants and new topics are discovered during the process.

This study aimed to recruit 10 participants (19 years of age and over) who lived in Greater Vancouver Area. They individually met the researcher for an in depth 1 to 1.5 hour interview at convenient places mutually agreed upon by both the researcher and the participant. These locations included Vancouver Central Library, University of British Columbia libraries as well as St. Paul Hospital's meeting room. One female participant was met at home as she felt she had no other days to commit to the interview and could not commute due to time constraints.

Inclusion criteria for participation in this study included those adults who identified themselves as Iraqis, were able to reflect on their experiences, and were interested in generating knowledge that could enhance the understanding of the researcher, counselling professionals, as well as the Canadian public in general. Those Iraqis that were able to speak, understand, and read English were included. This was

because the researcher does not speak the language of the participants and is fluent in English. Because initial refugee years are complicated by many factors such as feelings of isolation, loss of validation sources, as well as culture shock, those participants who had lived in Canada for a minimum of 2 years were included. It was hoped that after 2 years, the participants would feel relatively settled in Canada. Additional inclusion criteria included those who were exposed to North American media (T.V, radio, the Internet, and newspapers). Similarly, those who were willing to meet individually were selected (See Appendices A and B for Research Advertisement and Recruitment for Potential Participants).

Access to the participants was sought by sending the research advertisement and recruitment letter to various agencies (See Appendices A and B). The agencies contacted were mainly non-profit organizations dealing with immigrants or refugees (e.g., Immigrant Services Society, Canadian Arab Justice Committee, MOSAIC). The researcher also contacted all Arabic professors and teachers in Greater Vancouver Area and University of British Columbia by emailing the recruitment letter and research advertisement. The researcher also attended an Arab Festival introducing herself to the organizing committee and requesting their help in terms of recruitment. The organizing committee indicated that they would help me distribute my research advertisements to Iraqis within the Arab community. Research advertisements were also circulated in various mosques in Greater Vancouver Area. Various student bodies were also contacted, such as Arab Students Associations and Muslim Students Associations. In order to avoid coercion by the agencies or contacts, the advertisement encouraged the potential participants to directly contact the researcher by phone or email.

Eleven individuals contacted me and expressed their commitment to the research. One female volunteer was not included as she indicated that she only watched Arabic news coverage of the Iraq war. Recruitment was ceased after 10 participants met the inclusion criteria for this study.

After the analysis of each individual interview, participants were sent a one-page summary of their interview. Initially, I wanted to have 1/2 hour face-to-face interview with each participant upon the receipt of the summary. However, the majority of the participants expressed that their work limited the amount of time they could dedicate to the research in person, thus offering to participate by phone. Therefore, participants were contacted by phone to verify the preliminary themes that originated from their specific individual interviews. They were also asked to add or eliminate information that they felt was necessary.

Therefore, in this study, the aim for the second contact with the participants was two fold. The first component included asking participants to verify the accuracy of the provided information. The second component encouraged the participants to offer suggestions as to how the generated knowledge could be utilized and who would be the suitable audience or recipient of the research information. The researcher provided suggestions (i.e., counsellors, or other health professionals). However, the discussion was open to include additional audiences, for example, writing a letter to various media outlets in order to enhance culturally sensitive and anti-discriminatory coverage, or a letter to the senator of the British Columbia.

The majority of the participants indicated that the 1-page summary had captured the main themes of their interviews with me. One participant requested that certain

information about his profession be eliminated, while 2 other participants talked about the experiences of witnessing the recent sectarian conflicts in Iraq. These two individuals' feedbacks was incorporated into their individual interviews and analyzed for themes.

### *Data Analysis*

This study involved ongoing analysis of the transcripts. Various steps suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) were utilized that encouraged an evolving process, cyclical in nature, thus reducing information load and promoting accuracy. Data gathered consisted of transcribed individual interviews that were audio-taped, field notes as well as the researcher's personal reflections through journaling as recommended by Thorne and colleagues (1997). It must be recognized that the researcher strived to remain aware of any positive impact that the media might have had on participants and made detailed notes in order to be open to unanticipated descriptions of experiences.

The data came in terms of words and their meanings and the contexts in which they were used by the participants as well as the researcher. For gathering field notes, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested using a "Contact summary sheet" for coding and analysis, which will contain "focusing or summarizing questions about a particular field contact" made by the researcher (p. 51). Following were some suggested questions by (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 51):

- What people, events, or situations were involved?
- What were the main themes or issues in the contact?
- Which research questions and which variables in the initial framework did the contact bear on most centrally?
- What new hypotheses, speculations, or hunches about the field situations were suggested by the contact?
- Where should the field-worker place most energy during the next contact, and what kinds of information should be sought?

According to Miles & Hubermans' (1994) suggestions , field notes were compiled immediately after the contact. This helped the researcher to "reorient" herself to the field during various phases, such as planning, analysis, and write up (p. 52).

For gathering personal reflections, the process involved journaling my own reactions, feelings, and thoughts about the research process. I also consulted my research supervisor frequently to discuss interviewing style and analysis. Regular journaling and debriefing helped me adjust the interviews accordingly. Similarly, the above helped me to stay cognizant of ways that my own assumptions and expectations might have been imposed on the participants, how I reacted to the comments made by the participants, or whether I was leading them to say particular things during the interaction.

Miles & Huberman's (1994) analytic framework fitted well with interpretive description methodology because it was emergent, iterative, detailed and comprehensive. Similarly, this analytic framework enabled me to collect practical information that would be of utility to counselors and other health care providers.

*Coding collected data.* To select words, phrases, and sentences as meaningful, and later coding them, I went through a selection process indicated by Miles & Huberman (1994). Codes are defined as "tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study" (p. 56). Codes have different levels of analysis that lie on a continuum, from descriptive to inferential, and general to specific. These levels evolve as the research process and data gathering evolve. The analysis phase involved revisions of old ones, or creation of new sets of codes. Codes are important as they enable us to describe, interpret, link themes, and thus analyze the gathered information in a systematic way. To ensure that codes were deciphered

easily, I supplied a brief explanation or definition of what each code entailed so that information was not lost as the time elapsed. The names given to codes were concise and close to the concept they attempted to stand for (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Because my research encouraged me to stay open to the process, there were no predetermined codes prior to my initial field contact. Codes were developed as the first set of data was gathered and transcribed. Once the data from various sources were collected in written format, ongoing reading of the data took place. Strauss and Cobin (1990) as cited in Miles & Huberman (1994) recommended that the written data be read line by line and codes generated by hand that will be contained within a paragraph by the side margins. All transcripts in this research were transcribed by the research and hand coded. In order to understand the complex nature of what themes might be inherent in codes, Bogdan and Biklen's (1992) scheme as recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994) was used. These were as follows: (p. 61)

1. *Setting/Context*: general information on surroundings that allows you to put the study in a larger context.
2. *Definition of the situation*: how people understand, define, or perceive the setting or the topics on which the study bears.
3. *Perspectives*: ways of thinking about their setting shared by informants ("how things are done here").
4. *Ways of thinking about people and objects*: understanding of each other, of outsiders, of objects in their world (more detailed than the above)
5. *Process*: sequence of events, flow, transitions, and turning points, changes over time.
6. *Activities*: regularly occurring kinds of behaviour.
7. *Events*: specific activities, especially ones occurring infrequently.
8. *Strategies*: ways of accomplishing things; people's tactics, methods, techniques for meeting their needs.
9. *Relationships and social structure*: unofficially defined patterns such as cliques, coalitions, romance, friendships, enemies.
10. *Methods*: problems, joys, dilemmas of the research process-often in relation to comments by observers.

The coding procedure, as indicated above, involved revising codes as new data emerged. Similarly, the earlier coded data were linked to the new data in order to find patterns; which, in turn, involved creating new codes that could explain these new patterns (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994). This process continued until no new information was gleaned from the data (i.e., when the codes reoccurred regularly).

To ensure accuracy and reliability of coding, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested comparing one's codes with a different person during the research process. I sought help from an individual who had served as a qualitative research assistant in the past and was familiar with coding (a confidentiality agreement was sought before the person had access to the data). The individual was requested to code 2 transcribed interviews. Comparisons were made between his coding and my own (e.g., coder-coder reliability). The coder was Caucasian, and belonged to the mainstream culture, thus bringing a different perspective to the study. One major discrepancy noted in our coding consisted of the factors that participants attributed their emotional experiences to. I felt that most of their challenging experiences were due to the North American media coverage of the Iraq war, while the other coder alerted me to be more aware of the possibility of additional influences that did not specifically relate to the media. This important feedback was taken into consideration and I reviewed my coding.

My first attempts at coding involved putting participants' responses into three distinct categories (i.e., cognitive, behavioral, and emotional). However, as more data were gathered, I realized that the above three categories were not only limiting but also unrepresentative of their responses. Upon consulting with my research supervisor, we



decided to avoid limiting the participants' responses into three categories and keep revising it until more comprehensive themes emerged. This enabled me to keep track of the earlier codes as well as the old and emerging insights during the process of study.

### *Ensuring Trustworthiness of Data*

Shenton (2004) talked about four major criteria that Guba (1981) described in qualitative research. These include: "credibility," transferability," "dependability," and "confirmability" (p. 64). *Credibility* refers to internal validity within a positivist paradigm and is an effort to confirm that the findings reflect the reality of the participants. To ensure this, adoption of a well established method is recommended. The interpretive description method satisfied this criterion. Furthermore, credibility also requires understanding and familiarity with the culture of the participants. In this study, the background of researcher (religious, cultural and political) closely resembled those of the participants. Credibility also requires that opportunities for full participation be provided. Even though random sampling was not consistent with this qualitative research, every opportunity for participation was provided. Credibility also needs "triangulation" (p. 65) which refers to implementation of different ways of data gathering. In this study, data came from the audio-taped transcripts of the individual interview sessions, field notes (containing description of participants interaction and behaviors, verbal and nonverbal behaviour, pacing, description of contexts), as well as my own reflections and journaling (Thorne et al., 1997).

Frequent debriefing with my research committee also supported credibility. Other options to ensure credibility in my study included "honesty" in information that meant allowing the participants to participate voluntarily and withdraw at any time freely (p.

67). Another way that this study ensured credibility was by “iterative questioning” (p.67), which included clarification of responses, elucidating contradictions, rephrasing, and so on. Credibility was also facilitated through my own “reflective commentary,” as recommended by Shenton (2004), which helped me be aware of my own prejudice and assumptions as a researcher (p. 68). Credibility also requires member checking to ensure that the data gathered and transcribed is accurately recorded. This step took place when the individual interviews were transcribed and participants were provided with a one-page summary of their interview. This facilitated verification of the themes and inferences made during the analysis of each transcript.

To ensure possible *transferability* of the data, which is closer to the concept of generalizability, adequate information regarding the context, sample, procedures, and design is recommended (Shenton, 2004). I believe this study has strived to maintain this approach. To ensure *dependability*, that often is closer to the concept of reliability, requires a detailed description of various procedures and the design. According to Shenton (2004) the following three things need to be kept in mind: “*the research design and its implementation*, describing what was planned and executed on a strategic level;” “*the operational detail of data gathering*, addressing the minutiae of what was done in the field;” and “*reflective appraisal of the project*, evaluating the effectiveness of the process of inquiry undertaken” (P. 72, his italics). This study has provided adequate information and background to meet the requirements of this category.

In order to ensure *confirmability*, which is often compared to objectivity, it is important to provide an “audit trail” of how the data were gathered or on what basis the

recommendations and implications were placed (Shenton, 2004). Again, this study has attempted to meet this criterion throughout the process.

### *The Process of Reflexivity*

Throughout this research, I was amazed by the warmth and willingness of Iraqi expatriates to participate in this research. My background as a child of war from Afghanistan, an immigrant and a refugee, gained participant's trust and helped in term of establishing rapport. The limitation of this commonality will be acknowledged later in this section. All participants continuously showed their sympathy about the challenges of doing research with minorities. They also expressed that they would be happy to assist me to get my MA thesis done by accommodating my tight schedule and traveling from further places to meet with me. I believe that generally, in most Middle Eastern cultures, when a woman needs help, men are often more forthcoming to take the responsibility to look after the woman or to provide assistance. As a younger woman, seeking Iraqis collaboration in this research, the participants showed a lot of kindness and care towards me. Physically looking Middle Eastern and having a basic understanding of the Arabic language and culture, enhanced the attention and care that I received throughout this research.

Participants also showed curiosity about my own background as an Afghan and often asked me about when and how I settled in Canada, or at times, they asked me about my opinion about the current political environment in Afghanistan. I was expecting these kinds of encounters as I come from a similar culture where it is considered courteous to show interest in the lives of the people/strangers you meet, rather than just getting right down to business. In order to maintain my own confidentiality, I shared those pieces of

information that I felt could facilitate the interview process rather than hinder. In order to make the best use of our time together during the interview, I encouraged such conversations at the end of the interviews. Given that the majority of the sample was men, at first, I was myself hesitant as to how I would be perceived and treated. I had my own assumptions about Middle Eastern men that had been tainted by my own experiences as a woman raised in a patriarchal society as well as my experiences with Islam. Admittedly, my own contact with the Middle East and Iraq came predominantly from the North American media, having lived in Canada for 10 years. At an unconscious level, I had associated those regions with Islamic fundamentalists, and men with guns ready to kill themselves or others. Yet, there was a part of me that strongly and proudly shared their culture, history and traditions and really wanted to hear their experiences. In order to maintain my role as a researcher, I engaged in frequent debriefing with my supervisor. At times, as a counsellor, I could sense some of the challenges that this sample experienced due to ongoing conflict in their country of origin. Sharing the list of resources in the community helped me to address this concern.

I wanted to encourage the participants to share their stories and perspectives as some frequently expressed that the North American media had not given them a chance to do so. I did not want to be another source to silence them. However, it was also important to keep the interview focused and relevant to the research questions. Upon discussing this concern with my supervisor, we decided that sharing this issue with the participants would be a good way to solicit their help in terms of keeping the research focused. At the same time, they were encouraged to share their thoughts and concerns at the end of the interview. Participants seemed to appreciate when the enormity of the Iraq

war in their lives was acknowledged in the beginning, followed by the researcher's limitations in exploring all aspects of the above reality.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this section, I provide general demographic information about the participants, followed by the analysis of qualitative interviews and the generated patterns and themes. Some of the categories were constructed in response to specific questions (e.g., recall of images/stories from the North American media coverage of Iraq), whereas others were constructed more generally from across several questions in the interview.

The themes of the present study are divided into two main parts. The first part explores the participants' exposure to the North American media coverage of Iraq, their overall perception of how their culture, people, and country was portrayed in the North American media, followed by their recall and interpretation of specific images/stories, and their subsequent responses. Since participants have been exposed to prolonged coverage of the Iraq war, there seemed to be a distinction in how they responded to the earlier coverage of the war versus the ongoing coverage. The themes under the first section, Responses to the North American Media Coverage of the Iraq War, explore the initial impact and the ongoing impact, as well as two additional themes that include coping and a desire on the part of the participants to present alternative stories through the media about their culture, country and people. (see Table 1)

Table 1. Themes for the Findings of this Study

<b>EXPOSURE TO THE NORTH AMERICAN MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE IRAQ WAR</b>	<b>RESPONSES TO THE NORTH AMERICAN MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE IRAQ WAR</b>
<b>1. Overall Perception of the North American Media Coverage of the Iraq War</b>	<b>1. Initial Impact</b> <i>a) Experiencing Signs of Depression</i> <i>b) Relationships Affected</i> <i>c) Compassion for Families and Iraqis</i> <i>d) A Sense of Powerlessness/Helplessness</i>
<b>2. Images/Stories Recalled: Interpretations and Responses</b> <i>a) Presence of the US Army in Iraq</i> <i>b) Images of Iraqis Affected by War</i> <i>c) Presentation of Iraqi Society, Culture, and History</i> <i>d) Unclassified Images/Stories</i>	<b>2. Ongoing Impact</b> <i>a) Cultural Distinctiveness</i> <i>i) Others Lack of Understanding/Compassion</i> <i>ii) Comparison of Worth</i> <i>iii) Challenges of Being an Iraqi</i> <i>iv) Making Sense of One's Cultural Identity</i> <i>b) Changes in Worldview</i>
<b>3. Perception of the Portrayal of Iraqis in the North American Media</b>	<b>3. Coping</b>
	<b>4. Desire to Show Other Stories</b>

### *Demographics*

Ten participants (8 male; 2 female) living in the Greater Vancouver Area, BC, Canada were interviewed individually between February and March, 2006. In order to maintain the confidentiality of participants, given their small number in the community, demographic information is reported in ranges and general terms. The ages of participants ranged from 31 to 59 years with an average age of 44. Nine Iraqis were born in Iraq, and 1 outside Iraq. All settled in Canada between 1974 and 2000 (average year of settlement, 1988). The average length of stay in Greater Vancouver Area was 15 years. Nine participants indicated that they were Canadian citizens, while 1 was currently going through immigration process. Of the sample, 8 identified themselves as Arabic whereas the other 2 as Kurds. Seven belonged to the Sunni sect, whereas the remaining identified themselves as Shittes. Five were married, 2 single, and 3 divorced (3 male). The average number of children reported was 2 (average age of 14). In terms of living arrangements, 4 lived by themselves, 1 with parents, 2 with a spouse and 3 with a spouse and children. The level of education in the sample consisted of 6 Bachelors, and 1 Masters degree, 2 Diploma, and 1 High school graduate. Prior to immigrating to Canada, one was a student, the other unemployed, 1 in health services, 2 in technical fields, 1 in management, 1 in social services, and 1 in the field of engineering. Nine participants reported being in full time employment (5 self-employed) and 1 part time. The occupations ranged from 3 participants in sales/trade; 3 in social services; 1 working as a volunteer; 2 in technical fields and 1 in a health related occupation.

Participants settled in Canada, after having lived as immigrants or refugees in different countries in the Middle East. Some lived in refugee camps, while others had



more stable careers in those countries. However, the lack of stability in those regions, the difficult circumstances of refugee camps, the lack of status in the host countries and concerns regarding the future of their children for the married participants, motivated them to seek asylum in Canada.

Almost all participants had immediate or extended families currently living Iraq. In the past conflicts, some participants had lost their close family members as a result of their opposition to Saddam's dictatorial regime. These participants, in turn were unable to visit family and relatives in Iraq, for a long time. However, with the fall of the regime during the recent war, several participants went back to visit their families. Several other participants went back to Iraq after the year 2003 to see the situation in Iraq with their own eyes, or to help their families move to a safer place. Two other participants went back to Iraq, during the war, to explore ways that they could participate in the rehabilitation of the war-ravaged country. (see Table 2)

Table 2: Demographic Information

Variable	Description
Average Age	44 (31-56)
Gender	8 male; 2 female
Ethnicity	8 Arab; 2 Kurd
Religious Sect	7 Sunni; 3 Shittes
Country of Birth	9 Iraq; 1 in Europe
Marital Status	5 married; 2 single; 3 divorced (3 male)
Average Number of Children	2
Average Ages of Children	14
Living Arrangements	4 living alone; 1 with parents; 2 with spouse, 3 with spouse and kids
Education	6 Bachelors; 1 Masters; 2 Diploma; 1 High school
Occupation prior to Immigration	1 health; 2 Technical; 1 Management; 2 None; 1 Student; 1 Transportation; 1 Social Services; 1 Engineer
Occupation in Canada	3 Sales/Trade; 3 Social Services; 1 Volunteer; 2 Technical; 1 Health
Nature of Employment	9 Full-Time (5 Self Employed); 1 Part-time
Status in Canada	9 Canadian Citizen; 1 Immigration in Progress
Average year of settlement in Canada	1988
Average length of stay in Greater Vancouver Area	14.5

*Exposure to the North American Media Coverage of the Iraq War*

The recent war in Iraq (March 2003 to present) came to Iraqi expatriates through various means, with the North American media being one of them. For all participants, the coverage of the Iraq war, from the initial phases until now, served as a powerful experience. The majority of participants felt that the North American media coverage prepared them for the Iraq war before the US attacked Iraq. This anticipated war brought increased concern, worry, and fear for family members, relatives as well as the country in general. Others perceived that the North American media was somewhat celebrating the war in Iraq, thus leaving them angry and frustrated. For some, this was an echo of what they had witnessed or experienced in the previous conflicts in Iraq. When the war began in March 2003, contact with family members and relatives in Iraq was lost in the initial phases of war, due to the destruction of telecommunication channels. This exacerbated the anxiety, frustration, worry and concern on the part of the Iraqi expatriates. This was also a time when the media in general, became an important source of information for the participants. One participant expressed that the "media goes inside of you" and determines how you interact with the world. For some, the sounds, images or stories of war looked "surreal" and "chaotic." Others indicated that watching the war, felt like a split between reality and fiction. While listening to the sounds of missiles hitting Iraq, on CBC radio, one participant described it as a "shock and awe campaign," as if one enters a different dimension or reality.

Participants engaged in various behaviors associated with the following of the North American media coverage of the war. As expressed by participants, the initial phases of war brought about intense and sustained watching, listening and following of

the news. One participant even taped a documentary and some news clips for later use. Most participants indicated that they could not care about other things, except to find out about the events in Iraq.

For some, exposure to previous conflicts in Iraq, affected their perception of the recent conflict. Some remarked that their experiences of following the news of the previous conflicts in Iraq had been debilitating, thus preparing the participants to be more aware of their news consumption. Nevertheless, their concerns for family and relatives back home kept them glued to the media sources. One participant equated the following of the news to an addiction.

So it was like, when you listen to it, you just get upset and angry, but if you don't listen to it, there is like this gap that you want to fill, so it is. You need your shot of, how many deaths happened that day..., or how much more destruction happened you needed that shot, so it was like, this addiction that you couldn't get rid of. (Rajab)

Three major themes emerged as participants talked about their experiences of being exposed to the North American media coverage of the Iraq war. These include: (a) Overall perception of the North American media coverage of the Iraq war, (b) Images/stories recalled: Interpretation and responses, and (c) Perception of portrayal of Iraqis in the North American media.

#### *Overall Perception of the North American Media Coverage of the Iraq war*

A major theme that was consistently brought up by all participants was their perception of the biased coverage of the Iraq war by the North American media sources. Almost all participants felt that the severity of the situation in Iraq, and the resulting

humanitarian crisis, was not communicated to the public. Some felt that journalists lacked understanding of the Iraqi culture and history, were only interested in covering what could benefit the American politician's involvement with the region, or reported from "the seat of their pants" without researching and accessing accurate sources. Most participants indicated that they had lost their faith in reporting and the media in general as a result of such coverage of Iraq. Participants repeatedly mentioned that the media hide things from the public, or "manufacture and fabricate" events. They continued to question the credibility of the media and its perfunctory nature. One participant stated that often those who have a better understanding of the history, culture or language of Iraq, such as reporter Robert Fiske (a British reporter), gets ignored, ridiculed or marginalized. Three participants attributed the sectarian divide in Iraq to the ways that North American media exaggerated the differences between the Shittes and Sunnis. Similarly, these participants indicated that such emphasis on differences gave the world the perception that Iraqis were unable to coexist with one another, despite the fact that they had done so for centuries.

Others mentioned that the biased North American media coverage of Iraq had led to creation of "haters against the United States." Almost all participants highlighted the difference between the US and the Canadian media, with the former focusing more on politics, killings, and bombing, and later focusing on the humanitarian issues. Two participants felt, however, that the Canadian media was a repetition of CNN and hoped it could become more independent of the US media. Participants highlighted the lack of context in reporting as well as the sensationalization, magnification and exaggeration of the war in Iraq by the North American media, as it focused itself with bloodshed,

terrorism, insurgencies, suicide bombers, explosions, bombs, and killings. Participants remarked that little attention was paid to capture how an average Iraqi's was being affected by the ongoing war. As the Iraqi death toll was not reported or counted, this left participants further more frustrated and angry with the media.

One major theme that three participants emphasized was, the way that North American media was portraying the war as an "infomercial," "play-by-play update of a game like football," or a "commercial." They felt that this reflected insensitivity on the part of the journalists as well as a trivialization of the crisis in the region.

It is like, there is this total insensitivity to the culture, so you are seeing it through the eyes of what they want you to see Iraq as. As (inaudible) as evil guy as Saddam is, we are just gonna go in, and just take him, and it is this simple, and we will just put our tanks in. And that is not the full story. So you are just gonna get a snapshot of the story. Cause they, it was like a sales job, it is like watching a, what do you call those, infomercials. You are sold an infomercial on how, this was the only way to get rid of Saddam, and look we are doing it and you are sold on it, and they keep getting reinforced by the messages. (Rajab)

Others used terms such as "game," "lottery," "brainwash," "a lie," or "skewed" to describe the North American media. Terms such as "morons" or "idiots" were used to describe journalists, and finally terms such as "sensationalization," "magnification," "shallow," "crappy," or "exaggeration" to describe the overall portrayal of the war in Iraq. In contrast, one participant mentioned that he is noticing a positive shift in the media now, as more of the humanitarian issues are coming to the forefront. Some preferred the political discussions on Iraq and found it more stimulating.

#### *Images/Stories Recalled: Interpretations and Responses*

When asked to recall a specific image or story, approximately 30 different images/stories from various North American media sources were recalled. CNN and CBC were the predominant channels watched, whereas some participants listened to CBC

radio. Below are four major themes that images or stories fall under, followed by their interpretations by Iraqi expatriates and their subsequent responses pertaining to those images/stories. (see Table 3, for a complete list)

*Presence of the US army in Iraq.* This theme contained nine images/stories that were mainly recalled on CNN, and CBC. These referred to the very initial phases of war when the first images/stories came to Iraqi expatriates in the form of missiles, and various explosions in different regions, including Baghdad. Responses to these images/stories ranged from concern, disbelief, relief, doubts, happiness, anxiety, to stress. Some interpreted these images/stories as surreal, or looking like “fireworks,” thus reducing the severity of the crisis in Iraq.

The recall of American troops and their tanks entering Baghdad, brought feelings of relief and doubt because this indicated an end to Saddam’s dictatorship. However, due to previous negative experiences with the US involvement in the region, participants were doubtful as to how the US government will ensure security and stability in the region.

Another image that brought somewhat similar reactions on the part of Iraqis was that of Saddam’s statue being brought down and covered by an American flag. The other images/stories recalled were of the situations when Iraqis (civilians or soldiers) came in close contact with the US army. This message was interpreted with happiness for some as it indicated the end of Saddam, however, others were concerned how the soldiers would negotiate the cultural differences with Iraqis (not having the language and cultural information about Iraq). Others responded with disbelief and feelings of being occupied by the Americans. Iraqis interpreted these images/stories as an end to Saddam, as well as

the occupation of Iraq by Americans. The images of little children waving flags to welcome American troops brought similar feelings. Another image was that of Saddam Hussein being examined by doctors after being captured. Two participants felt that this was humiliating and degrading for all Iraqis. Feelings ranged from threat to a sense of being defeated.

*Images of Iraqis affected by war.* Six images/stories made up this theme and came from CBC, CNN, and CTV television networks. These images ranged from Iraqi soldiers burned and killed in the war, to a little boy losing his limbs and parents, a car with a family being targeted and killed by the US troops, families and children fleeing the war zone, to abuse and torture of prisoners and a group of teenagers by US and British soldiers. Despite the fact that some participants appreciated being informed of the humanitarian crisis, the range of responses as expressed by the participants included: shock, disbelief, worry, confusion, crying, sadness, feeling disgusted, disappointed, and skeptical. These images/stories were interpreted as “loss of respect for humanity,” “why should this young child suffer,” and “how come Americans who are used to humanitarian rights and issues are causing so much harm?”

*Presentation of Iraqi society, culture, and history.* Six images/stories fall under this theme and were recalled from CBC and CNN television channels. One was the coverage of Weapons of Mass Destruction that brought feelings of confusion for one participant. However, after following various media sources including the above, the same participant indicated that she felt angry and mad at the false claims that were made that led to this war. Another participant interpreted the images of poor neighborhoods in Iraq as unrepresentative of Iraq and reported being concerned that others will generalize



and assume that all of Iraq looked that poor. For another participant, a documentary about the effects of previous wars on Iraqis brought feelings of guilt and responsibility. He indicated that this image haunted him and even led to his decision to risk his life to go back to Iraq and do something to make a difference. Another participant felt that two reports about the life of Iraqis under Saddam's regime and the history of Saddam's rule were untimely and should have been replaced by the stories of the humanitarian crisis. His reported responses were those of distrust, confusion, and not being impressed. Two participants highlighted that they preferred the political discussions about Iraq and found them more useful. A major image/story that was recalled by three participants was that of the Baghdad museum and its looting by Iraqis. This image/story was interpreted as a lack of responsibility on the part of US soldiers to protect the heritage site, as a potential association of Iraqis to thieves and danger to non-Iraqis, and as a legitimization of war. The range of responses included shock, disgust, anger, distrust, disappointment, feeling bad, concerned, anxious, worried, and upset.

*Unclassified images/stories.* This theme was created by inclusion of six images that could not be grouped together and were recalled on CNN and CBC television networks and the Globe and Mail newspaper. One was the story of sectarian divide, which was mentioned by three participants. All three participants felt that the religious differences were exaggerated and highlighted by the media. They interpreted this as a cause of more trouble for Iraq thus responding with concern, fear, and worry. Another image in this category was that of a peace activist being taken hostage by Iraqi insurgents. This was interpreted as media's exaggerated attention to capture negative incidents and as a potential source of stereotyping of Iraqis to "wild animals."

Range of responses reported included: feeling ashamed, disappointed, doubtful, sad, having headaches, not wanting to watch, anxious, stressed, and unable to work or function. Another image recalled by two participants was that of US soldiers' deaths. This was interpreted as a magnification and increased attention of North American media of the value of US life versus Iraqi life. The range of responses included, anger, frustration, distrust, feeling hurt, feeling broken and sad. Another participant recalled a newspaper survey by Globe and Mail that looked at Canadian's support for the Iraq war. As she had participated in many anti-war rallies, she felt that a huge percentage of Canadians were against the war. However, she felt that the Canadian media in general supported the war. She expressed shock and sadness as she felt that the media was not "in tune" with the public.

Table 3: Images/Stories Recalled from the North American Media Coverage of the Iraq War

<b>Images/Stories Recalled</b>	<b>Media Source</b>	<b>Interpretation of the image/story by participants [some descriptions are summarized]</b>	<b>Reactions and Responses</b>
A group of Shittes going to a holy place. (Munir)	North American media in General	Media is focusing on religious separation. The media wants to show that they have liberated the Shittes, giving the impression that they couldn't co-exist with other groups in the past. It is a misconception that keeps repeating itself.	Wants to tell others that it is not true, anger, frustration, found it bothersome and depressing.
Bringing down the Statue of Saddam. (Anwar, Rajab)	CNN, CBC	Does it mean, American Era? (Rajab), US is not there to help or rescue us. (Anwar)	Disbelief, bittersweet feelings, hopefulness, feelings of relief, fears of what might happen next, and happiness (Anwar, Rajab).
Documentary on the negative effects of the Gulf War on Iraqis. (Rajab)	CBC	Even if the war is over, it is not.	Haunting, "fired me up", couldn't sleep, sense of responsibility "I gotta do something", feeling mad, and feeling patriotic,
Kids jumping around with little flags to welcome American troops. (Rajab)	BBC, CBC, CNN	There is a lack of context. It will give others the impression that Iraqis are uncivilized, just jumping and shouting.	Feeling frustrated and angry.
Saddam captured and examined by doctors (Rajab, Akram)	CBC, CNN	What does it say about the rest of us, Iraqis? (Rajab and Akram)	Sense of humiliation (Rajab, Akram) threat. (Akram)
American Army entering Iraq. (Hakim)	CNN	This means freedom and an end to Saddam's regime. America has its own interest in the region.	Feeling grateful, appreciating that America is taking Saddam out, happy, relieved, skeptical and doubtful.

Images/Stories Recalled	Media Source	Interpretation of the image/story by participants [some descriptions are summarized]	Reactions and Responses
Story on sectarian divide [Shittes and Sunnis] (Hakim, Munir, Nasim)	CNN	Why is there so much concentration? The media is exaggerating the divisions. There will be more trouble in Iraq. (Hakim, Munir, Nasim)	Concerned, "there will be more trouble and disagreement", anxious, worrying about family and other Iraqis, (Hakim, Munir, Nasim) feeling terrified (Hakim).
Iraq's Media Minister running away from the US army. (Hakim)	CNN	Iraq's army is going to lose to Americans, but they are pretending that the Iraqi army is winning while in fact American army is winning.	Wondering, found this somewhat funny that Iraqi Minister was pretending, happy, anxious, and fearful.
Abu Gharib Prison [Abuse of Prisoners] (Hakim)	CNN	America is used to democracy and respect of human rights, why are they abusing and torturing Iraqi prisoners?	Found the image "disgusting", surprised that American troops could do such a thing, and feeling doubtful.
Iraqi teenagers captured by British soldiers and tortured (Hakim)	CNN	Why are they showing this now, and not when it happened two years ago? American and British soldiers can't be trusted.	Shocked, surprised, disappointed and skeptical.
Looting of the Baghdad museum. (Zeina, Anwar, Jameel)	One of the North American Channels- couldn't specify (Zeina) CNN (Anwar, Jameel)	Why are they repeating that Iraqis are stealing and not showing that the soldiers are stealing too? This gives the image that Iraqis are poor and that they go around stealing. (Zeina) US doesn't care, they are just standing there and watching, despite being warned initially of this happening. (Anwar) They will show others that we are a bunch of thieves. This will affect Iraqis' reputation in the world. We are not like this (Jameel).	Couldn't watch it anymore, found it upsetting, found the image "disgusting", feeling angry, and distrusting the media. (Zeina). Disappointed, lots of concerns for family back home, worrying and anxious (Anwar). Feeling bad, concerned, disappointed. (Jameel)

<b>Images/Stories Recalled</b>	<b>Media Source</b>	<b>Interpretation of the image/story by participants [some descriptions are summarized]</b>	<b>Reactions and Responses</b>
A political discussion on affairs in Iraq. (Zeina)	CNN	None	Found it interesting how others think about the situation in Iraq.
Images of poor neighborhoods in Iraq. (Zeina)	CNN	Others will have a negative impression of Iraq, and they might generalize that the whole of Iraq looks like "Hastings Street" i.e., a poor neighborhood in Vancouver.	Feeling mad and angry.
Discussion of current affairs in Iraq and Saddam's regime. (Aziz)	CNN	One of the participants is "putting his finger on the point"	Agreeing with one of the participants, surprised, feelings and concerns somewhat acknowledged by one of the discussants.
Report on the lives of Iraqis during the Saddam's regime. (Aziz)	CBC	What is the point of this report at this difficult time? What is behind all this? Saddam is gone now and the focus should be on Iraqis who are suffering as a result of this war.	Wondering, distrust of media, not impressed.
A little boy, (Ali) losing his limbs and his parents. (Aziz)	CNN, CBC	This is a good coverage because they are showing the humanitarian crisis. Why should this young child suffer as a result of this war?	Crying, feeling hurt and sad, "it is not fair".
Aerial Images of Baghdad being bombed. (Hadiya)	CBC	Where are these bombs being launched? Who is being hurt? It gives others an impression of "fire works", or a videogame, this could lead to minimization of the humanitarian crisis in Iraq. There is no portrayal of what is actually going on there. We don't matter.	Worry and concern regarding extended family and other Iraqis. Found images depressing and disturbing, found it surreal and feeling angry.

<b>Images/Stories Recalled</b>	<b>Media Source</b>	<b>Interpretation of the image/story by participants [some descriptions are summarized]</b>	<b>Reactions and Responses</b>
The story of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) (Hadiya)	CNN	May be they exist since they are focusing on it so much. Now I realize it is a lie, and no media is challenging the false claims they made that WMD exist. I am used to this propaganda.	Not sure in the beginning, but later, distrust of media. Frustrated that the media sources don't acknowledge that the claims they made were false. "Here we go again", the same propaganda.
A poll about whether Canadians support the Iraq war. (Hadiya)	The Globe and Mail	The media doesn't seem to be in tune with the public. The media is trumping up the war.	Shock, sad, depressed, and losing trust of the media.
Continuous coverage of terrorism and insurgencies. (Hadiya)	General Media	Why don't they focus on the humanitarian crisis? The reality of war is not being portrayed.	Lack of trust in the media, and frustration.
Initial attack on Baghdad by American soldiers. (Anwar)	CNN	Saddam will be gone.	Relief and happiness.
American tanks in Baghdad (Anwar)	CNN	Saddam's regime is over. US is not coming to help or rescue us.	Happy, but also concerned, some doubts. How would Americans deal with the cultural differences?
People welcoming the US troops. (Anwar)	CNN	US soldiers are portrayed as heroes or liberators. Why is CNN showing only this, and not the casualties?	Concern, disappointment, questioning, and doubts.

<b>Images/Stories Recalled</b>	<b>Media Source</b>	<b>Interpretation of the image/story by participants [some descriptions are summarized]</b>	<b>Reactions and Responses</b>
Peace activists being taken hostage by some Iraqi group. (Anwar)	CNN	This is going to give others an impression of Muslims as wild animals, and how they are treating other nations. Islam is a religion of peace, but it is being seen by others as dangerous. This will affect how I will be treated. Media exaggerates the negatives (i.e., blowing up, suicides, and killings).	Feeling ashamed, disappointed, doubtful, sad, having headaches, don't want to watch, anxious, stressed, can't work, can't function.
History of Saddam's life. (Nasim)	CNN	One day the US administration say, Saddam is good (in the past they supported him), the next day they say he is dangerous. Media plays with your head.	Confusion, distrust of media.
US Soldier's death. (Nasim, Akram)	CNN	Why is the soldier's death magnified and not the deaths of Iraqis? (Nasim) Iraqi life is less important than an American life (Akram).	Anger, frustration, feeling hurt, distrust of media (Nasim). Feeling broken, sad and frustrated. (Akram)
A burnt car with a Republican guard dangling from it. (Jameel)	CBC	I am gonna lose my humanity if I continue to watch these images. What will happen to civilians if the powerful ones face this?	Shock, disbelief, concerned, worried, and confusion.
An Iraqi soldier on fire. (Jameel)	CNN	"Oh my God", what will happen to civilians?	Shock, disbelief, and couldn't listen to anything.

### *Perception of the Portrayal of Iraqis in the Media*

Participants were asked about their perception of the portrayal of Iraqi home, culture, and people. Participants expressed a sense of frustration with the media's negative portrayal of Iraqis. They felt that they were misrepresented, demonized, or belittled. They also felt that they were shown as extremists and not as ordinary human beings going about their daily lives. The following descriptions were used: peasants, inferior to Westerns, bunch of thieves or criminals, dangerous, not capable of running their country, terrorists, uneducated, behind, need to get liberated, 2<sup>nd</sup> class citizens, wild animals, radicals, suicide bombers, and so on. No positive interpretations were made.

The picture we get, is that it is a terrible place, people go about killing each other and get killed at will. So it is, in that respect, a very agonizing, to only hear or see the bloodshed. (Munir)

Such misrepresentation of Iraqis seemed to have accentuated their distrust of the North American media. Participants felt that such negative portrayal was not only linked to the justification of the war in Iraq, but also to a feeling of being misunderstood or stereotyped by others.

That Iraqi people, they are just bunch of criminal, thieves, dangerous people. I think, in CNN, they want to give some excuse, you know, look, those people, we are not able to leave them alone, because they can't govern themselves. (Jameel)

### *Responses to the North American Media Coverage of the Iraq War*

As the North American media coverage of the Iraq war continued, participants responded in various ways. The initial phases of the war brought up some distinctive experiences and responses. Many described this period as intense, shocking and depressing, where participants seemed "glued" to their television sets or the internet, with their minds preoccupied with worry, anxiety, fear, stress, and unable to function in their



normal day-to-day activities. One participant described this period as being “off-balance,” where one’s psychological and physical health was negatively affected. The major theme “Initial Impact” describes this phase in detail.

As the war continued, participants seemed to grieve not only for the human losses, but also for the social and cultural destruction of their country. The 3 years of war and its pervasive media coverage brought a new set of responses and challenges for the participants. The theme “Ongoing Impact” explores the various responses that surfaced as a result of the prolonged exposure to the North American media coverage of the Iraqi culture, people, and country.

### *Initial Impact*

The images/stories of war conveyed by the North American media brought a mixture of hopefulness, doubt, and “bittersweet” feelings for several participants. Participants described this phase as full of “mixed feelings.” Feelings of relief and happiness reflected the end of Saddam’s regime, particularly for those who had lost their families to the regime or had been directly persecuted by Saddam’s government.

So when they started and we knew through CNN that Americans had entered Iraq, we were almost sure that it is, that is the end of Saddam Hussein, and we were actually flying of happiness. (Hakim)

However, other images, such as the American flag covering Saddam’s statue, the looting of museum, or the treatment of Saddam by the American doctors brought feelings of doubt, humiliation and distrust of the US involvement in Iraq.

One that stands out, when they took Saddam's statue down, that was the big one, I guess that represented some of the hope, and it was also mixed, because that image itself, of them taking Saddam down. Before they did that, the US Soldiers put the US Flag, covered Saddam’s face with it. So I was like, hope Saddam is

gone, but there is US hand in there, so there is the image of, an old era is gone yes, and question mark, what the heck the new era is gonna look like. (Rajab)

The theme "Initial impact" contained various other themes that further elaborated the earlier responses. These included: (a) Experiencing signs of depression, (b) Compassion for families and Iraqis, (c) Relationships affected, and (d) A sense of powerlessness/helplessness.

*Experiencing signs of depression.* The majority of participants stated the phrases such as "it is depressing", or "I am/was depressed" as they witnessed the North American media coverage of the Iraq war. For some, feelings of depression were a reaction to the reality of war, whereas one participant indicated that he has been diagnosed with depression and is currently taking anti-depressants. This participant felt that his depression was somewhat linked to the Iraq war. Depression signs were evident in the ways that some of the participants felt a general lack of motivation to engage in activities, whether social or physical.

And I don't have energy and I don't know, going to exercise and may be, so it sort of giving me, playing a negative role, towards a bad health. (Hakim)

Some of the participants indicated a loss of appetite, particularly when they would watch the graphic images on TV. Others seemed to experience sad moods that not only marked the earlier phases of war, but which have also persisted as the war in Iraq has continued. The sad moods were marked by crying and "feeling hurt." Some participants were able to express these sad feelings with their families, while others struggled with it at work.

Well, the first day of the war, I was really depressed. When I went to work and then during the day, I had to keep going to the washroom, because I was crying, and go to a meeting and smile to people. (Hadiya)

Other participants seemed to isolate themselves due to the increased concern and worry about their families. The pervasive media coverage of the events in Iraq seemed to reinforce this state for them, as most participants found themselves watching television or reading the news on the internet, in order to find some information about the state of their country or their families' whereabouts. One participant reported that during the initial phases he lost touch with his friends in Canada, as he was preoccupied with the safety of his family back home. Finding information seemed to have more priority for him than spending time with others. One participant mentioned that there was not any thing normal about Iraq that he could share with others. It seemed that since he did not have any thing positive to share, he preferred to stay away from other people. Such isolating attempts may have further led to participants' feeling confused and lonely, particularly for those who lived on their own and did not have their immediate families to share such feelings with.

Participants felt that some of their depressive moods were associated with increased anxiety, stress and headaches, particularly when they would find themselves following the crisis for hours on end. This further affected their basic routines, such as driving a car or engaging in work. Participants linked some of this anxiety and stress to the negative portrayal of Iraqis and some of the racist incidents they had experienced as a result of being an Iraqi.

Again, I get stressed, I get anxiety, sometimes I can't work, sometimes, I can't function the way I should to, because I am disappointed because it is effecting my life, because you know, if I were to go and walk somewhere, and I would say, I am Iraqi, that would definitely put a question mark, right in front of that. And that is one thing that makes me disappointed. (Anwar)

The majority of the participants also indicated that the images/stories and the thoughts of war interfered with their concentration as they could not stay present or focused. One had to postpone his professional exams as he could not concentrate. One participant described such preoccupation as follows:

It is just on your mind. So you go about and doing your day to day life, it is kind of backdrop of your mind, you know like, it becomes part of the self talk, it feels like, I don't know. You always have thoughts in your mind but becomes part of that pool of thoughts, like, the anger that you are feeling, the injustice, and, like and again you can't do anything about it too. (Rajab)

*Relationships affected.* The initial phases of war seemed to have affected how participants responded, interacted, or related to others (both family or non-Iraqis). Some experienced "tension" in their daily interactions with their family and colleagues at work. One participant mentioned that old relationship patterns and unresolved issues with family members were brought to the surface as he and his family found themselves preoccupied with the war coverage. Another participant remarked that she had to explain the situation back home to her child who was asking questions about the insurgencies, Saddam Hussein, and George Bush. Because the situation in Iraq was sensitive and complicated, the participant tried to be aware of her daughter's emotional and developmental stage and had to respond accordingly. This seemed to have taken a lot of courage, creativity and sensitivity on the part of the participant to explain the situation to her child, while continuing to attend to her own emotional state.

The oldest is 11. When the war started. We were, in first and second day, all depressed and sad. You know, she just, she kind of sense that something bad has happened, so she just started crying, so I could see how it was affecting her. She asked me why I was sad, and I said, well, because people are dying in Iraq and she wanted to write a letter to George Bush. So it is difficult. She hears something on the radio and then she asks me questions and then I have to explain it to her in a way that she will be able to understand without trivializing, without making it

seem like Good guys and Bad Guys, because there is not really good guys and bad guys. Every one is a bad guy in that whole situation...(Hadiya)

As the Iraqi home, culture and people seemed to receive a negative portrayal by the North American media, some of the participants experienced feelings of shame or embarrassment in front of others. Being an Iraqi often attracted attention and curiosity on the part of non-Iraqis. During these occasions, participants found themselves educating others about the situation back home, demystifying the stereotyping and the negative portrayal, or at times getting into arguments with those whom participants felt were ignorant and insensitive about the situation and politics of Iraq. One participant indicated that she refused to talk to others about Iraq because each time these encounters would aggravate her sad and angry feelings about the war in Iraq. One participant indicated that during the meetings at work, she had to put on a smile and appear strong. During these times, she would go to the washroom to cry or to manage her emotional reactions to the war. One participant indicated that the last 3 years of war might have been a potential factor in bringing up conflicts within his marriage. He felt that his preoccupation with war and the news often kept him away from his family.

Some positive experiences with others were noted. These included compassion on part of one of the participant's manager (a non-Iraqi) who sympathized with the difficult situation in Iraq, thus giving the participants a couple of days off from work.

I am still working with my company and even my service manager saw that, he said, well, I know you guys. He knows I am from Iraq, and another guy working with me is from Iraq too. And my service manager is Canadian, he said, I am gonna give you a couple of days off. Because he saw that. I mean, we, I can not drive, if you look at the way, I mean, that the war, is you know that the armies going to Iraq, cities by cities, and he said, I think your mind is not present in this time, so I think you should go and take some rest, even if you wanna watch the news, just go ahead, but I gave you. I took a couple of days off, honestly. (Aziz)

Another participant seemed to have appreciated a moment when one of his friends expressed his concerns and awareness about the North American media's negative portrayal of Iraqis. Such positive encounters appeared to have lessened some of the negative interactions that participants had experienced with others, thus enabling them to notice that others were sensitive and aware of some of the challenges they were experiencing.

*Compassion for families and Iraqis.* Participants continued to feel concerned about their families and other Iraqis back home. All participants had either immediate or extended family in Iraq. As the war progressed, participants engaged in various ways of connecting with their families (e.g., phone calls, emails, chatting or even risking their lives to go back to Baghdad to move their families to a safer location). One participant described his concern and worries as "going crazy" and felt it was unfair for innocent people to be the victims of such war. Two participants indicated that the randomness of missiles, as well as the unrecognized images of civilians killed, increased their concern for their families. It seemed that they could not predict or determine whether their families might be the target. Additional reported responses were feelings of guilt and responsibility.

Actually I couldn't sleep for like, two nights after that, thinking like, I gotta do something, I gotta do something, I gotta do something. I am sitting here, I gotta do something about what has happened back there, I gotta do something.... There is all these people back there, relatives, and friends, and family, and they are caught in it. So there is this kind of guilt... Here I am, sitting, in this comfortable place, and they are in hell and they are the ones who will have to pay the price, for quote and quote freedom. I am not paying no price, sitting here. (Rajab)

Iraqi expatriates continued to worry for their fellow Iraqis back home. All participants indicated disappointment with the prolongation of war, and the resulting

humanitarian crisis. Many participants indicated that this war affected the availability of basic services. They sympathized with civilians who seemed to be caught in the middle of Iraqi insurgencies, and the US army.

I mean your country getting bombed, try to imagine your own country, try to imagine and people living without electricity with out water, without food, without anything, running to survive, so try to imagine. (Zeina)

All participants indicated that there was a lack of coverage of these events in the North American media, and thus sought alternative sources of information to decrease their level of anxiety and concern. CBC covered more images of civilians, which seemed to have increased their concern for Iraqis (e.g., families running away, or a family being shot in their car by the US army while escaping from their city). Multiple participants emphasized the need for the North American media to cover Iraqi civilians' stories so that the world could appreciate their suffering.

Why we are not, why we are not, trying to help them, not to give them something, but to help them with the media, to cover their stories, to bring their stories to the rest of the world. We should respect them, because they are human being. (Aziz)

The language of journalists in describing the war casualties as "friendly fire" added to the sense of compassion as well as frustration on the part of one of the participants. It seemed that since the humanitarian crisis did not receive much attention by the North American media, participants felt responsible to stay compassionate and concerned about their fellow countrymen and women and sought out various sources of information that could capture the reality of war and its impact on civilians.

You know, there is no respect for humanity. Really there is no respect for human being. May be yes, may be not. I said, okay, we are sorry, by mistake. Like they kill lamb. (Jameel)

*A sense of powerlessness/helplessness.* This is the last theme that describes the initial impact of the North American media coverage of Iraq. Several participants indicated that they struggled with their own lack of power in changing the circumstances back home as they witnessed the coverage of the Iraq war. Even though some participants had initially thought that perhaps the situation will improve, but as the war continued, they experienced disappointment, shock, and surprise. For one participant the notion of civilians being caught between two forces, i.e., Iraqi republican guard and the US army confirmed his lack of ability or power to change the circumstances back home. As the war progressed, many participants indicated feeling like they have no control over what would happen to their loved ones or Iraqi people back home. Images of burnt or killed Iraqi civilians, also seemed to exacerbate this sense of powerlessness. One participant indicated feeling like his "hands were tied," whereas another participant mentioned feeling weak and having no words to express this sense of powerlessness.

For most participants this state of powerlessness/helplessness appeared to be associated with feelings of being immobile, withdrawn, and a lack of choice or a solution to help their loved ones. This state seemed to have taken most of the participants out of their comfort zones and away from their basic daily routines.

I think, believe me. I think, is the worst moment to end one, when he think he can do nothing. Yeah. And sometime, when you feel you can do nothing for yourself, it is not so bad. But when you do nothing for all your family and sometimes, your family, they die or they have some hard time. You cannot do any thing. It is so hard. (Jameel)

I feel like I am in Canada, I have no problem, you know, I am fine. But there is lots of my family members, friends and other people, poor people in Iraq who suffer so much, under the rule of the dictatorship, now they are still, suffering, in a different way. And when will that end, when will, I, we, including my self,



experience some happiness and stable life, and have a taste of life you know.  
(Hakim)

Additional factors that seemed to have magnified this state were the negative portrayal of the Iraq, the continuous coverage of missiles and explosions, severed connections with families, their loved ones being stuck in a war zone and sandwiched between the Iraqi and US forces, or their pleas not heard when going to rallies.

### *Ongoing Impact*

This is another major theme that falls under the responses to the North American media coverage of the Iraq war, particularly to the prolonged and pervasive coverage of the war that has continued from March 2003 to present (i.e., March 2006). When participants were talking about their experiences, most of them were making distinctions between how they responded when the war began to how they were relating to the war in Iraq now.

This period was marked by frustration and anger towards the operation of the war by the US military in Iraq, and the biased coverage of the events by the North American media. Participants perceived that the media trivialized and simplified the situation back home, while at the same time demonizing the Arabs, Iraqis or Muslims. Participants expressed their anger towards the Western societies in general and their political administrations (i.e., US, British, and Canada). Participants used terms such as “injustice,” “disrespect towards human life,” and a “lack of compassion” to describe their attitude towards the current affairs in Iraq. Several participants remarked that the US invaded Iraq not because they wanted to help Iraqis, but for their own political and business interests (e.g., accessing the oil in the region, or securing a strategic place in the Arab world). It seemed that the negative portrayal of the Iraq, the military based and

biased coverage of the Iraq war fueled the anger and frustration towards the situation back home.

It angers me because it is what I consider is a lie, is a misconception that keeps repeating itself over and over and over. (Munir)

I see when they talk about Iraq, this is ours. This is our oil. Right. This is our oil. And since it is our oil and nobody talks about oil, really. I mean the whole, I have to use vulgarity here, to express, the whole thing is about oil, and nobody is fucking talking about oil. (Akram)

As the situation in Iraq worsened and more stories of sectarian divide, insurgencies and suicide bombing got covered, most of the Iraqi expatriates expressed their disappointment and anger towards their own people and the damage they were doing to one another. They strongly felt that the chaotic and volatile situation in Iraq gave rise to such insurgencies. The North American media's sensationalization of the sectarian differences in particular, brought the reality of a possible civil war closer to participants' attention.

Two themes *Cultural distinctiveness* and *Changes in worldview* in this section, aim to further elaborate the ongoing impact that the witnessing of the North American media coverage of the Iraq war has entailed. Two additional themes, *Coping* and *Desire to show other stories* also fall within the responses to the North American media coverage of Iraq.

*Cultural distinctiveness.* This theme emerged as Iraqi expatriates highlighted the cultural differences between the East and the West. Some of the participants seemed concerned about how the US military was negotiating the cultural and linguistic barriers in Iraq. They felt that such cultural barriers might be linked to the humanitarian crisis and the destruction of Iraqi social and cultural fabric.

Because all of the participants have been first generation immigrants, it appeared that the extended coverage of the war, and the negative portrayal of Iraqi culture, people and home, brought about challenges about their Iraqi cultural identity. Four themes emerged that elucidates the theme of cultural distinctiveness. These include: *Others' lack of understanding/compassion, Comparison of worth, Making sense of one's cultural identity, and Cultural Challenges.*

*Others' lack of understanding/compassion* emerged as several participants expressed that others (non-Iraqis) could not completely appreciate the severity of the situation in Iraq. Often certain remarks made by colleagues or strangers (such as "cool," or "poor American soldiers suffering in the dessert") seemed to confirm this feeling on the part of the expatriates.

You know, or people would crack jokes, oh, did you see the war coverage, oh, wasn't that cool, tanks, all those tanks they were shaking like this. (Hadiya)

Often, participants seemed to feel lonely in their struggles. Because they had experienced several wars in the past, they felt more different from non-Iraqis. One participant indicated that those who lacked previous experience of a war could not fully sympathize with the Iraqi situation. This was further intensified when the Iraqi death toll and the losses did not receive much attention by the North American media.

For another participant, the coverage of the Iraq war, brought memories of the time when he first immigrated to Canada and was faced with various linguistic, social and cultural barriers. This participant referred to this as "feeling like a new immigrant,"

where one feels that the other has no understanding of his or her culture, thus bringing feelings of homesickness, displacement and cultural shock.

Cause it brought on a lot of things that I felt were resolved, even personally, that feeling of, people here really don't get it, like I just felt like an immigrant again. It has been 15 years, felt like, oh here we go again. I have just moved in here again, no body gets it and the culture is different and, cause people watching things in the news and they just don't get what is really happening...it made me kind of miss home again and miss being there and even watching missiles going....I wanna be there. It just felt like I just moved into this country and like I had no choice again cause I had no choice when I became an immigrant. (Rajab)

Another participant, who was currently experiencing immigration related problems, also emphasized this feeling. It seemed that participants often engaged in educating non-Iraqis about their culture, religion and history. However, when these attempts were not encouraged or validated, participants felt more disappointed and withdrawn. Some of them seemed worried that non-Iraqis had already developed certain negative assumptions and stereotypes due to the biased North American media coverage of Iraq.

*Comparison of Worth* repeated itself across all participants. While witnessing the North American media coverage of Iraq and recalling images/stories, participants engaged in a comparison of Iraqi lives versus US soldiers' lives.

The fact that nobody counts, nobody makes an effort to count the Iraqi death toll, right. There is like a known, specific number of how many Americans have died, but nobody pays attention to, nobody even tries to even count, how many Iraqis have died. There is different estimates from 15-20,000 to 150,000, you know, depending, there are different people different organizations, have come up with different estimates for how many Iraqis have died, since this last war, as the average number of this last war. And it is not like, again, it is like, nobody cares, when an Iraqi people dies, well, (puff), who cares, it is something, that matters? It is not valuable. These people didn't have families, or people loved them, people who grief for them. (Hadiya)

Such comparison seemed to have been reinforced by the North American media's dualistic tendency in reporting (i.e., "us" versus "them"). According to the participants, the portrayal of Iraqis as "extremist," "violent," and "terrorists" seemed to show them as threats to the Americans, thus legitimizing the war in Iraq. It seemed that the military and one-sided coverage of the Iraq war magnified the value of American life, while undermining the suffering of Iraqi deaths and crisis. Descriptions used by one participant were, "people of a lesser God," "collateral damage," "hypocrisy," or "feeling occupied."

As the book is called, the people of a lesser God...One American soldier gets wounded and it is, you know, the whole world, it is an issue to them. One person gets caught, as a hostage, and the whole world is, on their tippie toes, trying to. But a thousand Iraqis die, oh well, you know who, cares...The media is trying to convince the Americans that this is the right thing to do. And this oil is ours and the American lives are important. On the other hand, the other, images or the other pictures that comes out, I could see, collateral damage. Iraqis die, it is okay. Kids, their brain is scattered all over the place, this happens, right. (Akram)

*Challenges of Being an Iraqi* emerged as participants shared various unpleasant incidents when they felt discriminated against and stereotyped. One participant mentioned being strip-searched and interrogated by immigration officers, and discriminated against while doing business or interacting with others. Often, just the mention of "I am Iraqi," brought feelings of suspicion, threat and intense interrogation on the part of others encountered during travel, custom check, or when crossing the borders.

You know, I was in Japan, in 2004, and I have a Canadian passport, you know. Because we don't need a visa for Canadian passport. The guard asked me where I am from, and I said, Iraq. He took me to a special room almost, strip-searched me, and I had to stay there for a half an hour. And that has an effect, because the Japanese guy, who is sitting there, watching the news, and the news he would watch would be CNN. He is not gonna watch, something else, probably watch Japanese media, which is like, CNN, is part of it too. (Anwar)

The psychological outcomes of such encounters seemed to consist of anger,

shame, embarrassment, increased anxiety, worry, inability to express one's feelings to others, a lack of interest to engage socially, loss of meaning in Islam, feelings of being exposed or vulnerable, and a lack of trust. Often times, participants seemed to have appreciated the attention and curiosity by others. However, they experienced difficulties when others would question them about their political views or involvement regarding the situation in Iraq. For example, one participant was surprised by his colleague's joke regarding the looting of Baghdad museum:

One of them, he is nice, he don't mean it. But he told me this one. He told me, Jameel, did your family; they saved one vase for you [referring to Baghdad Museum looting]? In that time, I couldn't explain, because the media is more strong than me. If I talk to next day, they. I said, yeah, I asked them, they said don't worry; we have saved one for you. But inside of me, I feel so bad. Iraqi people, they are not like this. (Jameel)

Often, these cultural challenges seemed to reinforce the feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness on the part of expatriates, making them more withdrawn from the Canadian society.

But to think of other Iraqis, it changed their way, in the sense, is, they probably be less open about going to the mosque, less open about going to their community activities...(Munir)

There was a sense that the participants seemed concerned about the long-term consequences of the negative portrayal of Iraqis and Muslims, and often expressed their powerlessness towards the North American media's prevailing influence on other people's perceptions and attitudes.

The moment you say, you speak Arabic, or where are you from, you know and when you Iraq, then, a big question mark you know. You might not be, even interviewed, or accepted. And that is something that effects us directly. But indirectly, probably in a long term, god knows which will happen. (Anwar)

*Making Sense of One's Cultural Identity* pertains to the current affairs in Iraq (e.g., insurgencies, retaliations, suicide bombings, and the sectarian divide). Most participants felt comfortable with their lives in Canada and often described themselves as Bicultural, belonging to both the East and the West. It seemed that they appreciated the various cultural exchanges and exposures that they had experienced. One participant felt that living in the West had made him a better person and more open-minded. However, the negative portrayal of Iraq and the Muslim religion, various cultural challenges personally experienced in the west (i.e., racist incidents), and their concern regarding the humanitarian crisis in Iraq, brought them much closer to their Muslim, Arab/Kurdish, Sunni/Shiite, and Iraqi identities.

With the exploration of early experiences of the Iraq war, participants expressed frustration and anger towards the US military meanwhile acknowledging their pride in being an Iraqi or a Muslim. One participant highlighted that the Western culture feels superior to the eastern cultures, and wants to impose its own ideologies on Iraqis. However, as more of the current experiences were explored, participants reported frustration with Iraqis engaging in hurting one another as well as the shame and humiliation of being a Muslim or Iraqi (e.g., when hostages were taken by some Iraqi groups back home).

I am very very ashamed and I am very very disappointed to see those images in the TV. I am very ashamed even to be a Muslim, because of what I see there. Because what they are showing, the media, so now this is a good point that you remind me. (Anwar)

Participants emphasized being torn between their Muslim and Iraqi identity as well as their bicultural identity in Canada. Participants felt that their diversity and

differences were not viewed as ordinary by the media, but rather portrayed as intolerance and threat, thus fueling their anger towards the situation back home.

Others perceived that Iraqi-Canadian children were often reserved about revealing their identity to others.

They give a general term "I am from the middle east, I am a middle eastern" and that shows you... They inside might be proud of their heritage, and I think a lot of them are not, because that is what they see in the media. But even if they are proud of their heritage, or their ancestry, or their parents, or whatever it is, they feel ashamed to express that to the outside world, so they try to avoid where they are originally from. And that is reflecting, a reflection of the media coverage that we don't really see much positive coming from that part of the world, from Iraq. (Munir)

One participant's experiences seem to elucidate the confusion that most of the participants felt about their Iraqi, Muslim, and Canadian identities. While talking about earlier phases of war, this participant expressed feelings of anger towards the US military.

It is a threat, it is a definitely, not a modest approach. It is definitely rubbing our noses in it. When I say our noses, the Middle East, as a whole the Arabs in general... Well, when you associate yourself with it, as the, Iraq is defeated, I personally feel defeated. As Iraq is being degraded, I feel degraded. Even with Saddam Hussein being degraded I felt degraded with him, although I don't, I don't like the man. (Akram)

However, as more stories of insurgencies and sectarian divisions emerged in the media, this same participant felt angry towards the ways that Iraqis were hurting each other and tarnishing their reputation in the world. He experienced feelings of confusion about the US involvement in the region by saying:

You know, we are uneducated people, honestly, we are selfish, selfish in a very small scale... I honestly think perhaps we are better off, under the Americans. Even if they are foremost, you know, occupiers but perhaps they will treat us better than Saddam did. (Akram)



And then at the same time, this participant would express that he is glad that the Iraqis are fighting back.

I am so proud to say I am Iraqi, because Iraqis are fighting back, as Iraqis. Well, you see the confusion, the different understanding. I really am happy that Iraqis are fighting back, although the result, I know...(Akram)

It appeared that often participants struggled with their feelings and did not know what to think of the situation back home or how to feel. The North American media's emphasis on sectarian differences seemed to reinforce their feelings of ambiguity, as one participant referred to this as "media mixes you inside," leaving you wondering and confused.

*Changes in worldview.* This theme emerged as participants indicated how their overall view of life had changed due to witnessing of the prolonged coverage of the war in their country of origin. A general lack of optimism was noted when participants shared their experiences. Initially some of the participants indicated that they felt hopeful as Saddam's regime was toppled. However, as the war progressed and things continued to get worse, it seemed that their hopes and expectations were replaced by a general feeling of pessimism. One participant said that he had already prepared himself for the worst because he found the situation in Iraq too messy and chaotic to be resolved. Another participant indicated that her hopefulness disappeared the more she found out about the situation in Iraq. It seemed that the watching of the stressful news served as an extenuating factor in terms of confirming their sense of pessimism, particularly the stories of the abuse of prisoners by the US and British Army in Iraq, as well as the ongoing insurgencies and sectarian divisions back home. These incidents also seemed to diminish the expatriates' hopefulness with regards to the future of their country as well as

their personal lives. For example, one participant felt that the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Iraq might take years, adding to his lack of optimism and hopelessness.

Enthusiasm towards happiness, or hopefulness slows down, and resentment. I feel sort of angry and you know may be feel resentment towards life generally, till when and why, this has to continue, it is continuing. (Hakim)

Another change in worldview was a general mistrust of all kinds of media sources, as well as the human society or human nature. It seemed that for participants, "truth" did not exist. There was a sense that participants oscillated between states of confusion, questioning, wondering, guessing, and searching for the accurate information regarding the situation in Iraq. For example, one person described this feeling as "turbulence:"

I am really questioning every thing and nothing that we have been taught is real and correct. It is all crap. And every thing you hold, it has many other meanings and you know look at it, from this point of view, it is something, you look at from that point of view, it is different. So there is no right or wrong, no correct and just, your emotions goes between this and that (going side to side), this turbulence if you will. True, true, true. (Akram)

Some participants indicated that they had come to the conclusion that any form of media lacked truth (e.g., media is "manipulation," or "brain wash"). As more cases of the humanitarian crisis got reported in the media, other participants indicated that human nature was about power and not respect. Some said that they had lost their conviction of the neutrality of the media or the Western society.

So that has changed, from a person who was fully convinced of the total freedom, the beautiful things about western societies and all that... Being exposed to the media more than any time before, I am less convinced of that. (Munir)

*Coping.* This theme emerged in regards to how Iraqi expatriates dealt with the biased coverage of the North American media as well as the reality of war back home.

Several participants indicated that they kept themselves busy with work. Some coped through staying connected with their families back home via phone or actually going back to Iraq to see the situation for themselves. Others engaged themselves with the Iraqi community in Greater Vancouver area, whereas one participant founded a charity to help Iraqis back home. Several others indicated a change in their relationship with the media. Some continued to follow alternative sources of media. This helped them compare and contrast various sources in order to glean more accurate information regarding the situation back home. In contrast, some limited their exposure to the media, such as completely stopping watching TV, or not owning TV to protect themselves and their kids from disturbing images of war. Others identified a change in their attitude in terms of how they perceive the media now. One participant indicated that he enjoyed reading "between the lines" when it came to news about Iraq. Others acknowledged the limitations of media and journalists in covering the war. One participant mentioned that he could sense a positive shift in the media, since he thought that the media was covering more of the things that he would like to see happening (e.g., the coverage of the humanitarian crisis).

For most participants staying politically active was a means to cope with their lack of control or powerlessness. Some went to Calgary to vote for the elections in Iraq, while others continued to go to rallies and anti-war protests. Additional coping included talking to others (family and friends) about the situation back home, joking, interacting with other Iraqis over the Internet, or turning to their faith. One individual was particularly active in terms of corresponding to the media, expressing her thoughts about the situation, filling the gaps, or providing historical or cultural contexts for the events

being reported. However, after being disappointed with the Canadian newspaper editors, she decided to develop her own web-blog. For her, this effort seemed to provide a channel to express her thoughts and feelings about the war in Iraq, an opportunity to interact and network with other web-bloggers, and to educate others about the situation back home.

To me, it is that effort that makes me feel positive, is that the truth comes out somehow through other means. And that is what gives me kind of hope or gives me a sense of, some sense of empowerment. (Hadiya)

Several participants indicated that perhaps their older age helped them to make a better sense of what was going on, versus if they were younger and had to face such circumstances. For others, previous exposures to conflicts in Iraq seemed to buffer them against being negatively affected by the graphic images on the media or the war back home. One participant described this as “being used to media’s propaganda,” and “developing a thick skin” over time. One individual tried to make sense of the events through acknowledging the nature of human beings and others when it came to survival or power struggles.

But now, I really realize it is only human nature. You know, we have done the same thing. Muslims and the Arabs, they have done that, after expansion of the Islam, they can (inaudible), and now just, we are seeing it from the other side of the coin. Right and it is a matter of who is strong. The trees work on that same principle and the animals, and the birds, and you know, cockroaches. They all work on that principles, and so as human beings. (Akram)

Similar participant stated that he had to break his “idealism” as a way to cope with the events. It seemed that as the Iraqi expatriates realized the negative influences of intense media watching/following, they worked towards regaining their sense of choice and control.

But don't get kind of pulled into it, and feel like I have a choice. If I don't wanna listen to it, I don't have to listen to it, which is different from before. I don't need to know what is happening now I know what is happening there, so I can turn the TV on and off, it is like you have control back. (Rajab)

For others, acceptance of their limitations seemed to reduce some of the powerlessness/helplessness they were experiencing. There was a sense that participants consistently thought of "balance" and self care in their lives, and minimized their news consumptions for a certain period of time to "get back on track."

It is a difficult decision, but I have to find a balance sometimes. Well, you know sure, if I had the power to end it, like I would, but I know I cannot, and it is not the effort of one person, it is the effort of the whole humanity. So I will just do and say, what I can do and what I can say. I have to take care of myself, somehow, to ignore, even temporarily, few hours or may be a day, just to get back on track and do the things that I have to do. (Hakim)

*Desire to show other stories.* As part of the interview, participants were asked if they would like to have shown other stories about Iraq through the North American media. Participants seemed to appreciate this question and were eager to share their thoughts and feelings about alternative stories that they would have liked to have seen, read or heard on the North American media. There appeared to be a general consensus around the media to cover stories that go beyond destruction, bombing, killing, and insurgencies. For example, participants indicated that media should cover the efforts of communities, people and humanitarian organizations to rebuild Iraq, or those that are helping the war victims. There was a sense that participants would like to play a more proactive role with the Canadian media. Some wished that the media could show the positive things about Iraqi culture (e.g., Iraqis' warmth, peacefulness, kindness, and helpfulness). However, some felt that the coverage of Iraq's political and cultural history was more important and educational. Another participant felt that the contributions of

Iraqis need to be acknowledged. Participants seemed to want the media to show Iraqis as mainstream and as ordinary human beings, going about their daily lives rather than showing them as extremists, violent, dangerous and threatening.

Because the North American media seemed to have given little attention to the humanitarian crisis in Iraq, participants acknowledged that media needs to cover the Iraqi losses so that the severity and damage of the war could become apparent to others. There was a sense that participants hoped the media would cover the short-term and the long-term consequences of war on people.

No they are people too, just like anyone else in north America, they have dreams, and they have aspirations, and they have hopes, so just linking, bridging, the commonalities, by getting the people to see themselves as Iraqis, not just all these distant people there. Like oh I could be there, I could be one of them, and kind of getting people in Iraqis' shoes... So there is a missile just came up, just hit, okay great, like, what they normally show is all death and killing and crater, okay, but what actually happens afterwards, after all the media is gone. What happens to the family, how are people lives changed, rather than, even if the war is over, how has people lives affected. What is it like for these people there, so not just that echoing of, oh, explosives, great, oh look it is bad, what is that, okay, how many families are destroyed now because of that, what does it look like for them. So more of the background to what is happening, not just the outside stuff. (Rajab)

## CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

This study explored 10 Iraqi expatriates' experience of the North American media coverage of the recent Iraq war. Findings of the present study revealed that the prolonged and pervasive North American coverage of the events in Iraq created various experiences, responses and challenges on the part of the Iraqi expatriates. Participants expressed concern around the lack of historical, social, cultural and political contexts in the coverage of the events in Iraq by the North American media. The biased, military based, and the unbalanced coverage of losses as well as the negative portrayal of Iraqi home, culture, and people brought a variety of responses. Some of the responses pertained to the initial phases of war and included feelings of shock, anxiety, worry, confusion, anger, powerlessness/helplessness, and various depressive symptoms. However, as the political situation in Iraq deteriorated, and the North American media continued to portray Iraq in a negative light, participants faced various cultural challenges, such as being stereotyped and discriminated against by others. The ongoing impact of witnessing the media coverage of Iraq seemed to be linked to new challenges, including confusion and ambiguity around their cultural identity. Similarly, they perceived that non-Iraqis lacked a general understanding of their struggles, making them feel lonely in their pain, or feeling like a "new immigrant". This period was also marked by a general lack of optimism about life, the situation back home, loss of faith in reporters, a general mistrust of the media or other sources of information. Nevertheless, participants seemed to have developed various coping strategies that enabled them to deal with their challenging

experiences. They also expressed a strong desire to show alternative stories through the North American media about their culture, people and country.

This section discusses the findings of this study and their fit with existing literature. The findings are situated within the interpretive description's aim for practical information. In addition, implications for research, counselling psychology, and the media are discussed. Participants' suggestions about the recipients of their stories are explored followed by suggestions for future research.

#### *Fit with Existing Literature*

The majority of studies looked into the effects of war and trauma using PTSD criteria to assess the level of psychological reactions and responses. The present study, however, focused on bringing forth the experiences of Iraqi expatriates and giving space for their perspectives to be heard.

#### *Media and portrayal of Iraqi culture, home, and people*

The Iraqi expatriates' perception of the North American media coverage of the recent Iraq war, were consistent with the report by Miskin et al. (2003) that indicated that the North American media coverage of the war in Iraq was military-based, unbalanced and biased. Similarly, the participants' views regarding the negative portrayal of Iraqi, home, culture and people were reminiscent of the findings by another report by Farhoumand-Sims (2003) which indicated that the North American media coverage of Islam and Muslims was linked to stereotyping, stigma, discrimination and various psychosocial outcomes on behalf of the Muslim community living in Canada. An additional study that is also relevant to the findings of the present study, is by ter Wal et al. (2005) who found that ethnic minorities were often presented and portrayed negatively



in mainstream EU and Dutch news. ter Wal et al. (2005) highlighted that that topics such as religion and fundamentalism comprised of 50 % of all stories that pertained to ethnic minorities. In the present study, Iraqi expatriates expressed the following concerns regarding the North American media coverage of the Iraq war: lack of context in coverage; lack of knowledge of the history and culture of Iraq; inattention to the humanitarian crisis in the region; extensive coverage of the US military operation; unbalanced coverage of losses (i.e., US soldier's death received more attention than the death of an Iraqi civilian); biased coverage of Iraqi home, culture, and people leading to discrimination, stereotyping, and an overall negative portrayal of Iraqis as perceived by participants. Examples included descriptions such as "fanatics," "uneducated," "thieves," "2<sup>nd</sup> class citizens," "wild animals" and so on.

Some of the cultural challenges that Iraqi expatriates experienced were also similar to those expressed by Muslim women who sought counselling post September 11 incident (Inayat, 2002). These women reported a change in their worldviews as it pertained to their faith and life in general. Responses ranged from a need to examine the injustices committed in the name of Islam and the need to be different from those that engaged in such activities, and to loss of life or meaning of Islam. Participants in the present study experienced similar shifts. One participant expressed that he often experienced shame to call himself a Muslim and wanted to differ from those who engaged in killing of peace activists or taking hostages in the name of Islam. Another participant's confusion was evident in the ways he expressed pride in Iraqis' retaliation towards the US and then later on indicated that perhaps Iraqis were uneducated and therefore deserving of such fate. Another participant expressed frustration and sadness at

the recent sectarian divide and retaliations and thus emphasized that he would like to be different from other Iraqis.

*Compassion and Media's Coverage of Human Suffering*

Hoijer's (2004) four categories of compassion as they relate to the media coverage of human suffering are of relevance to this study. I describe each category with examples from the present study. First, (a) "Tender-hearted compassion" was noted on the part of the participants as they continued to express their compassion and empathy to the humanitarian crisis back home. For example one participant expressed his concern when the media showed the images of a little boy being injured, by saying, "I cried with my wife, about what is going on, and why he lost his arms..." All Iraqi participants seemed to feel concerned, hurt, or saddened about their families and civilians caught in between the Iraqi and the US army. Second, "Blame-filled compassion" is felt when anger and bitterness are expressed towards the undue suffering of the victims. Anger was expressed by a participant when he shared the image of a family being killed in a "friendly fire" by saying, "Really there is no respect for human being...Like they kill lamb." As participants watched the North American media coverage of the events, they continued to feel angry towards the randomness of attacks and the resulting humanitarian crisis, the negative portrayal of Iraq, and towards the US army's lack of ability to bring stability in the region. Third, "Shame-filled compassion" according to Hoijer (2004) is connected when the audience witness the suffering of others from their own comfortable space. For example one participant in this study remarked, "Here I am, sitting, in this comfortable place, and they are in hell and they are the ones who will have to pay the price for quote and quote freedom." Feelings of guilt were noted by the Iraqi expatriates

as they witnessed the humanitarian crisis in Iraq. This response led to several of participants risking their lives to go back to Iraq to either see the situation for themselves or to be of some help to their families. Fourth, "Powerlessness-filled compassion" according to Hoijer (2004) is apparent when audience feel helpless/powerless and limited in their ability to help the victims of crisis or to reduce their suffering. This category was consistent with the findings of this study as indicated by one participant saying, "You are sitting here, absolutely no control, you yell, you scream, you cry, you have political arguments, makes no difference. ...So there is this hopelessness, like your hands are tied." This feeling was shared by all participants in this study. It is interesting to note that, despite such strong feelings of compassion, participants repeatedly indicated that they would like the North American media to show more of the humanitarian crisis versus tanks, armies or soldiers. The reasons that were linked to participants wanting to see more of the human stories could be due to the North American media's more coverage of US losses versus Iraqi losses, the feelings of patriotism on the part of Iraqi expatriates, or due to participants' direct connection with the region in terms of having their immediate or extended families caught in a war zone.

A separate category that Hoijer (2004) identified was "*Distantiation from compassion*" that included strategies by audiences in the form of taking a "critical propaganda perspective," limiting exposure, or feeling numb or remote. This category is also consistent with the findings of this study. Initially many participants engaged in continuous following of the Iraq war. This was a strategy to gather more information about the situation in Iraq in order to reduce their worries and concerns about their relatives back home. This activity seemed to be maintained by responses of empathy,

guilt, responsibility, and feelings of patriotism. However, given the continuous coverage of the Iraq war for the last 3 years, participants seemed to have developed different responses that served as coping mechanisms. Some of the behaviors closely resembled the category of "Distantiation from compassion," whereby individuals decreased their exposure to coverage. For example one participant stopped watching to "protect" herself, while another participant felt that this was necessary to "protect" her children. For another participant, limiting exposure was equated with gaining back his sense of control and choice as he had referred to his news consumption as "addictive." For some, limiting exposure was linked to having more time to focus on other activities, such as work or business.

Hoijer's (2004) "critical propaganda perspective" is reflected in participants' use of terms such as "infomercial," "play-by-play update," "commercial," "game," "lottery," "brainwash," "a lie," or "skewed" for North American media. In addition, terms such as "morons" or "idiots" were used for journalists, whereas terms such as "sensationalization," "magnification," "shallow," "crappy" or "exaggeration" were used for the overall portrayal of the war in Iraq. Hoijer's "*Gendered Compassion*" category was not reflected in the findings of the present study as the sample consisted of 8 men and 2 women, making it harder to do any such comparison.

A number of consistencies exist between the findings of this study and the study by Kinnick et al. (1996) that looked at compassion fatigue and its relation to media's communication about social problems. The notion that compassion fatigue is "issue-dependent" was apparent in this study, as more participants showed less compassion towards the images of the US soldier's dying or caught in crisis. Participants repeatedly

expressed their anger and frustration over media's selective and pervasive coverage of the US soldiers' deaths, and its lack of coverage of Iraqi losses. This could also relate to the story or images of US losses reaching a point of saturation for these participants, leading to compassion fatigue. The above could also be linked to Hoijer's (2004) "Distantiation from Compassion" and the "Critical Propaganda Perspective." In contrast to images of US soldiers or the military, participants continued to show compassion and concern for the Iraqis back home, as evident in the specific recall of images/stories as well as the overall responses. Kinnic et al. (1996) pointed out that compassion fatigue is an individual or multidimensional phenomenon, leading to responses varying from hypersensitivity to sensitization. In this study, it seemed that participants showed hypersensitivity to the coverage of Iraqi humanitarian crisis by repeatedly mentioning that North American media needed to show more of the Iraqi stories. Desensitization was observed with images/stories that pertained to the overall US involvement in Iraq.

The above findings elucidate the powerful influence of the images and the media in participants' every day lives. Given that the war in Iraq and its news coverage persists, the Iraqi expatriates might continue to go through a range of feelings from powerlessness/helplessness to anger and information over load. The "critical propaganda perspective" seemed to have served both as a coping mechanism as well as a source of anxiety for Iraqi expatriates. It was helpful for participants to be aware of biased North American media coverage by seeking further information and acknowledging that there were positive improvements in the region. However, it also seemed that the majority of the participants anticipated significant losses and humanitarian crisis back home and remained relatively pessimistic about the current state in Iraq. In addition, they seemed to

be concerned about how their culture, home, and people might be negatively perceived by non-Iraqis. Some participants expressed that such media coverage might have led to a lack of compassion on the part of Canadians, thus increasing their worries and hopelessness.

Moeller (1999) asserted that "our experience and our understanding of a crisis is weakened, diluted or distorted" when "pain is commercialized, wedged between the advertisements," or when "suffering becomes infotainment" (p.35). Participants raised a similar concern regarding how the war in Iraq was treated as an advertisement or infomercial by the North American media, thus bringing with it feelings of confusion and concerns about the trivialization or disregard of the Iraq war by others.

*Media and its relationship to trauma and depression*

It is interesting to note several similarities between this study and that of Speckhard (2002) who studied the responses of the American expatriates in Belgium to the tragic images of September 11. Speckhard attempted to directly assess acute and post traumatic responses in contrast to the present study. Many participants' responses fell under several categories of PTSD or acute stress that Speckhard highlighted. Participant's description of the images/stories of war as "surreal" or "entering a different dimension" fits Speckhard's definition of Derealization and Dissociative symptoms respectively. As was noted in American expatriates responses, Iraqi expatriates exhibited anxiety and difficulties in concentrating and sleeping. The following categories by Speckhard were not present in this study: Sense of threat/increased startle or Panic/increased agitation/physical indicators of arousal, Uncertainty/ fears about future or Reactivation of PTSD. This could be due to fear of future terrorist attacks on the part of American

expatriates. Iraqi expatriates did not indicate feeling unsafe; however, they did point to feeling fearful, anxious, and concerned about their families back home.

Categories that went beyond PTSD symptoms and looked at effects on family (including marriage and children), "extended family considerations," or "cultural challenges" in Spekhard's study were consistent with this study as well. All Iraqi expatriates expressed concern and worry about their relatives, families, and other Iraqis back home. One participant mentioned that his marriage was negatively affected by his preoccupation with the war, whereas another participant felt concerned about her young kids and the impact that the media coverage had on them. As mentioned before, several participants experienced discrimination, or stereotyping and racist incidents. However, at the same time, negative comments about Western culture or the US administration were also expressed by the Iraqi participants, which is similar to Americans' expatriates experiencing racist feelings towards Arabs. The themes of "Survival guilt" and "Grief reactions" from the study of American expatriates were also found in this study. Some participants expressed that they continue to feel guilty about being in a safer place as compared to their family members or other Iraqis. Grief reactions were noted as participants indicated a sense of loss when they witnessed the destruction of Baghdad museum and other neighborhoods.

Speckhard (2002) distinguished between dysfunctional and functional coping. In this study, coping was not labeled as such and emerged as a theme as the participants talked about various strategies that helped them make a better sense of the coverage of the Iraq war. Iraqis' coping mechanisms involved limiting exposure to news, connecting

with their families and communities, focusing on their work, keeping faith, staying politically active, writing, and joking about the situation back home.

Various coping mechanisms that were noted in a group of older Hispanics after 9/11 (Strug et al., 2003) were somewhat similar to the ones employed by Iraqi expatriates. These included: utilizing their religion/faith, watching less television, connecting with their families, and accepting their limitations in solving the situation back home. Despite the fact that in the Hispanic sample participants felt they had been affected more by 9/11 events due to their older age, there was an opposite attitude in the Iraqi sample. Many Iraqi participants felt that because of their age and maturity, they had been able to make a better sense of the situation back home as well as its extensive coverage by North American media.

Strug et al. (2003) used the phrase, "a depressed community and feeling vulnerable" to describe the general mood of the Hispanic sample and the overall community. In this study, participants felt particularly depressed during the initial phases of the war, with one participant currently on antidepressant medication and another indicating that he experienced bouts of depression more often than before.

A study by Dutta-Bergman (2005) found that those who had more depressive symptoms engaged more in following news coverage of 9/11 than those who did not report having depression. This strategy was equated to a potential coping strategy for these individuals to deal with their surrounding stressful situation. Similarly, the former group exhibited more difficulties concentrating and sleeping or engaging in their normal day-to-day activities. Several Iraqi participants in this study expressed feeling depressed or finding the images/stories depressing. They also reported some of the characteristic



signs of depression such as isolation, fatigue, lack of motivation, difficulty concentrating, crying, sadness, anxiety, stress, worry, and loss of appetite while witnessing the media coverage of the Iraq war. However, they indicated that these responses were more frequent when the war first started. As the war has progressed and continued until now, participants seemed to have developed various coping strategies as mentioned earlier. One activity was quite dominant for all participants in terms of news consumption. Iraqi participants still continued to seek news about Iraq, but seek out different sources because they found the North American media coverage of Iraq depressing and upsetting.

Depression was not directly assessed in this study. The majority of the participants reported that their depressive symptoms were more characteristics of the earlier phases of the war and its coverage. Therefore it is difficult to say whether the participants had depression prior to the coverage of the Iraq war, or whether they developed it during the war coverage, or whether they experience depression now (with the exception of one participant currently diagnosed with depression and another participant diagnosing himself as depressed).

This study did not address previous trauma and its reactivation when individuals are exposed to traumatic images, as was done by Toren and colleagues (2002), in their study of trauma reactivation (in a control group and a group of Israelis who had witnessed previous Scud missile attacks), and Kinzie and colleagues' (1998) study of Cambodians and US Vietnam veterans' activation of trauma to various stressful images. Despite the fact that almost all of the Iraqis had witnessed previous Iraq-Iran war and the Gulf conflict (in person or through the media), this was not explored in this study, and participants did not report having trauma from these exposures.

Toren and colleagues (2002) stated that more symptoms of anger were noted for those with prior history of trauma or exposure to trauma and these symptoms persisted even as the time elapsed. In this study, the participants reported that they continued to feel angry about the North American media coverage of Iraq and how the war has been handled. Because this study did not explore prior trauma, it is difficult to say whether their anger is associated with past traumatic experiences (e.g., previous conflicts in Iraq) or other unexamined factors.

The literature on the impact of media coverage of crisis on individuals such as September 11 studies have only looked at the immediate impact (i.e., acute stress) as well as a one-time occurrence of an attack (e.g., 9/11 attack). The findings from these studies cannot be relevant to this group because Iraqis have faced pervasive and prolonged coverage of the Iraq war since March 2003 to present. Participants seemed to appraise the situation back home as a chronic stress in their daily lives. In addition to this, participants reported cultural challenges such as being stereotyped or discriminated against, further exacerbating the stress due to witnessing war through the media.

### *Implications for Practice*

This study has provided an understanding of the experiences of the Iraqi expatriates as they have witnessed the North American coverage of the Iraq war. Knowledge generation, consciousness-raising, and utility have been integral elements of this study. Given the biased, "sanitized," as well as military-based coverage of the recent events in Iraq by the North American media, this study examined the psychosocial impact of the media coverage on Iraqi expatriates as well as their responses to the media. The information gathered is hoped to provide counsellors and other health care service

providers with a deeper appreciation and awareness of the specific needs of the Iraqi expatriates. The findings of this study suggest that the feelings and concerns of the Iraqi expatriates need to be validated and normalized. Counsellors can help this community to understand that their confusion, anger, disconnection, helplessness, and depressive symptoms are normal reactions to abnormal events that are being amplified by the war. Counsellors could also clarify some of their confusion by linking participants' responses and feelings to what is happening to their country of origin and their news consumption.

Because Iraqi participants' sense of identity seemed to be closely linked to their country of origin, it is not surprising that they are facing challenges in terms of reconciling their Canadian and Iraqi cultural identity. This is also where the counsellors' multicultural competency and cultural sensitivity become important (Ishiyama, 1995). If the counsellor's cultural background is different from those of Iraqis, he or she could benefit by acknowledging this limitation and facilitating how both the client and the counsellor could work collaboratively to address specific cultural concerns.

Most of the Iraqis have been refugees, thus counsellors and other health care providers are recommended to attend to immigration and refugee-related factors. Even though most of the sample reported being settled and economically well established in Canada, one participant whose immigration was pending, experienced various challenges in addition to being exposed to the North American coverage of the war. Another participant indicated feeling like an immigrant again, even after being in Canada for 15 years. Given that Iraqis have lost various sources of their validation due to displacement and immigration, it is not surprising that their sense of Iraqi identity is somewhat threatened when the only images/stories they see are those of destruction and violence.

This warrants the attention of counsellors to educate themselves about the cultural and immigration related issues since it seems that witnessing war can reintroduce a whole series of acculturation challenges, even for those who report being settled.

Because some of the participants experienced discrimination and racist incidents, Iraqi clients could benefit from assertiveness and anti-discriminatory response trainings (Ishiyama, 2000). Counsellors could encourage Iraqis to assume a proactive role with media-related agencies to address these concerns. Similarly, counsellors could connect the participants with other Muslim advocacy groups who could work together to improve the media's portrayal of Muslims.

Counsellors who come into contact with individuals from the Middle East, Arab, or other Muslim countries need to be aware of the diversity that exists among the above groups. Understanding of the historical, cultural, social, religious, ethnic, and political contexts in the lives of the above group is also essential in better serving the above group. However, at the same time, counsellors need to balance this with being aware of the commonalities that Iraqis share with the rest of the humanity in their struggles to make sense of their lives. This could reduce further marginalization of the above group.

This study's findings also highlight the need on the part of the counsellors and health care professionals to monitor their own assumptions and prejudices while working with this group or those identifying themselves as Muslims. Critical analysis of the media's presentation of the above groups is one way for these professionals to be aware of how they are being influenced. It is also essential that counsellors utilize a diverse range of sources of information about these communities rather than focusing one source (e.g., North American media). Counsellors could also benefit from skills-based

workshops that addresses racism and discrimination, while maintaining contacts with other agencies serving these groups (e.g., Immigrants Services Society of BC) and becoming advocates for the above group.

Rather than using a clinical model, such as PTSD to assess trauma and reactions to witnessing of the war and conflicts, this study facilitated a reflexive and collaborative approach by giving space for the Iraqi expatriates' experiences to be shared. However, counsellors and other practitioners in the community are encouraged to be aware of the possibility of trauma-related symptoms and responses as well as the indicators of depression and anxiety in this population. Given that Iraqis have experienced multiple wars (some in person, others through other sources such as the media), it is important to acknowledge these stressors (i.e., the influence of previous wars, displacement and refugee related challenges) and provide support when they are faced with continued coverage of stressful situations in their country of origin.

In addition, the information gathered through this study might help in the provision and establishment of individual or group support for Iraqi expatriates. Due to cultural differences and upbringing, various ethnic minorities do not seek out professional help in the form of psychotherapy and depend on their families and communities to provide emotional support during crisis. However, due to immigration and displacement, Iraqis, including some of the participants of this study, do not have the kind of validation sources or support networks that they might have had in Iraq. Therefore, health care professionals could play an important role in connecting the Iraqi expatriates to resources within and beyond their communities.

During the debriefing part of the interview, one of the participants of this study made a pertinent remark when given the list of multicultural and low cost counselling services. He said he wished he had this list during the initial phases of war, as he felt so lost, confused, and lonely. This points to a lack of knowledge about such services in Canada by immigrants and refugees. It is important for counsellors to monitor whether they might have developed "compassion fatigue" themselves as a result of pervasive coverage of disasters by mass media (Moeller, 1999) Such an approach may enable them to stay empathic when seeing a person who is stressed by the media coverage of crisis in their country or in general.

Counsellors could develop a more proactive relationship with the media, as their expertise and knowledge in the field of trauma can be helpful in raising awareness for journalists and the media-related agencies. Similarly, they could educate these sources about the ways that stressful images or stories may make certain individuals prone to PTSD, retraumatization, anxiety, depression, and other cultural-related challenges (particularly if images/stories deal with ethnic minorities).

Due to the pervasive presence of the media, basic needs often can be ignored. This was apparent in this sample as participants' anxiety and concern about Iraq kept them glued to the news coverage, bringing forth isolation and various other depressive symptoms. Strategies to help these individual could include: limiting exposure to news, keeping routines, and developing a list of available support network. Two participants used the term "Here we go again" to indicate that this was something that they had already experienced. One participant mentioned that previous experiences with war and crisis have "toughened her" for this recent war in Iraq by developing a "thick skin," thus

protecting her from being negatively affected. Therefore, counsellors need to learn how to distinguish whether the reported depressive symptoms are situational or reactive depression (e.g., a response to the graphic images) versus clinical depression. Similarly, counsellors can help these Iraqi expatriates to find a balance between staying connected to Iraq versus overexposure to traumatic and stressful images/stories. Nevertheless, counsellors need to assess for prior trauma, delayed PTSD, or vicarious trauma (i.e., due to overexposure to graphic images of the Iraq war).

Another feature of the media is the “bad news syndrome” which is “exacerbated by the tendency of the media to present problems but not their solutions, contributing to feelings of inefficacy among media consumers” (Grunig, 1992 as cited in Kinnick, et al., 1996, p. 690). Most Iraqi expatriates reported feeling helpless when watching, listening or reading about the war. This is where counsellor’s collaboration with media agencies become integral. For example, counsellors could educate and suggest possible strategies to media sources in order to decrease this feeling of powerlessness (e.g., providing numbers for a crisis line or other low-cost services). Counsellors could also empower their clients by encouraging them to find ways that they could gain back their sense of personal agency. Some examples could include establishing short-term goals, clarifying choices, brainstorming ideas as to how they clients could help Iraqis back home (i.e., linking Iraqi expatriates with charity organizations where they could volunteer their help, raise or donate funds).

Even though the average age of participants in this study was 44 years, information from this study may still be relevant to children or younger adults. Schlenger et al. (2002) in their study of psychological reactions after the 9/11 asked adults to report

on their children's stress reactions. Parents reported that one or more of the children in their household had been upset by September 11 attack. Another study by Schuster et al. (2001) found that majority of parents had talked to their children about the 9/11 events, while several other parents had restricted their children's television viewing as they felt concerned about their safety. Ford et al. (2003) looked at young adults' responses and reactions towards 9/11 right after the attack and then 9 weeks later. It was found that young adults were affected by 9/11 event and reported reactions of distress and sadness.

The present study did not directly explore the impact of the North American media coverage of Iraq on children. However, one participant expressed that her daughter often questioned her about the meaning of the news or worried about the war and how her family was feeling sad about it. Another participant perceived that often the Iraqi children at the schools are afraid to identify themselves as Iraqis or Muslims and prefer a general term, "Middle Eastern" to describe their ethnic identity. It would be important for counsellors working with Iraqi parents to pay attention to the above concerns.

Speckhard (2002) when debriefing with American expatriates about 9/11 events provided them with pamphlets about disaster stress responses and symptoms. He found that this helped normalize some of the reactions for both the children and the adults. Such information can also be useful and empowering for Iraqi clients. Such pamphlets written in the first language of Iraqi clients, could be helpful in reducing some of the anxiety those reporting stress reactions.

### *Implications for Media*

In this study, participants showed eagerness to share their perspectives about the North American media coverage of Iraq. As reflected in the theme, "Desire to show other



stories,” participants highlighted the need for the North American media to acknowledge the efforts of various organizations, people and communities who were working on rebuilding Iraq versus focusing on bloodshed, destruction and violence. They felt that the media also needs to provide historical, political, and cultural contexts while reporting on Iraq. The media could benefit from highlighting the accomplishments and contributions of Iraqis in various domains. The media needs to focus on the short- and long-term effects of war (i.e., the consequences) and the general humanitarian crisis. Last, the media should avoid the negative portrayal of Iraqi home, culture, and people and bring forth their commonalities with the rest of humanity.

The above recommendations were consistent with those put forward by Farhoumand-Sims (2003), who conducted focus groups with Muslim women in Canada about the 9/11 media coverage of Muslims and their religion by the Canadian media. Farhoumand-Sims emphasized that the reporters and journalists as well as the media agencies need to acknowledge the complex and sensitive nature of issues being reported. They need to give a voice to experts from the Muslim community. Similarly, the media needs to “bring a human dimension to the story,” (p.20) and include images and stories of the communities in their daily lives. The media needs to acknowledge the diversity of Islam, provide both sides of information and avoid descriptions of “us” versus “them” that could single out these groups. In addition, the media needs to avoid concentrating on the divisions of various parties, or only reporting violent acts. According to Farhoumand-Sims (2003) the media needs to “avoid focusing on the suffering, fears, and grievances of only one party. This divides the parties into “villains” and “victims” and suggests that coercing or punishing the villains represents a solution.” (p. 41)

Farhoumand-Sims (2003) also recommended that journalists need to avoid “language that leads to a sense of powerlessness such as “tragedy,” “devastated,” “defenseless” (p. 41), and avoids the use of “demonizing adjectives ‘vicious,’ ‘cruel,’ ‘brutal,’ ‘barbaric.’” (p. 42)

The above comments point to a need for media-related agencies and personnel to be trained in ethical and responsible reporting. They need to exhibit cultural awareness and competency while reporting and learn to demystify myths about religions or particular groups. They could also engage in consultation with the community members and experts to verify the information before reporting, or to hire a cultural consultant in their agencies. In addition, they could be more aware of the psychological impact of the traumatic and graphic images and, in turn, educate the public about how to protect themselves from such images. This is also where they can utilize the expertise of health care professionals such as counsellors by providing numbers for crisis-lines, or free and low cost counselling and support services in the community. Finally, journalists and media agencies need to depend on accurate sources of information, and learn to provide more context and less sensationalized stories/images that could often lead to trivialization of the crisis (e.g., missile attacks looking “cool,” or resembling “fire works” as reported by one of the participants).

Moeller (1999) also argued that journalists need to distinguish between different crisis in the world, rather than engaging in “formulaic coverage” (p. 313), which could lead to compassion fatigue. International news should be given the same amount of care and attention as domestic news. More over, “news shouldn’t be marketed as a product” (p. 314), which was also expressed by the participants (e.g., “infomercial,” or “play-by-

play update”). Moeller also suggested that journalists need to avoid “Americanizing of the events” (i.e., explaining the events from the perspective of Americans). One participant of this study indicated that Canadian news was often a repetition of the American news, encouraging the Canadian media to become more independent of CNN.

#### *Additional Recipients of this Research*

One of the aims of this study was to encourage participants to identify who could most benefit from their stories. Two obvious audiences of this study were counsellors or health care professionals and the North American media as explored above. Participants identified the following additional recipients: school boards where there is a high concentration of students from the Middle East, as well as other ethnic groups such as the Indian Sub-continent and Afghanistan (e.g., Surrey, New Westminster, Burnaby), and Ministry of Children and Family Development in Canada, social workers, settlement counsellors, and those who work with immigrants and refugees such as Immigrant Services Society (ISS) and their Host Program that connects a Canadian family with a new immigrant or refugee family. Similarly, one participant highlighted an organization called “The People Law School (a government funded organization that, among its other activities, works on immigrant adjustments, understanding legal matters including welfare and treatment of children within families).” One participant who worked in social services remarked that career counselors might benefit from understanding the career transitions of the Iraqi expatriates that may happen as a result of the triggering effect of witnessing the war through the media. Another participant felt that the Canadian public in general would be the best audience as she emphasized that non-Iraqis need to understand the historical and cultural background of events in Iraq and depend on multiple sources of

information rather than just the North American media. Other sources included non-governmental organizations such as the Red Cross and charity organizations in general.

### *Implications for Conducting Research*

The findings of this study confirm the importance of news coverage of Iraq and its impact on the lives of those who have close ties with this region. The participants in this study were 10 Iraqi (8 men; 2 women) expatriates living in Greater Vancouver Area, Canada. Future research could look at gender differences in both their activities pertaining to the coverage of war as well as the impact of such activities on these men and women. In this sample, the average length of stay in Canada was 14.5 years, indicating a rather economically and culturally adjusted group with a higher level of education. Similarly, their higher level of English allowed them to process and follow North American as well as a range of alternative sources of media in addition to Arabic. Given that Arabic channels differ widely in their coverage of the Iraq war, it will be interesting to research the impact of such media sources on Iraqis in Diaspora.

Given the pervasive and prolonged coverage of the recent Iraq war, as well as the instability in the region, it will be interesting to follow up with the Iraqis and research the changes in their beliefs, behaviors, and feelings towards the war in Iraq. This study was conducted at a time when Iraq has been on the brink of a civil war, producing a different tension and concern in the lives of Iraqi expatriates. As the majority of the sample consisted of Arab Sunnis, inclusion of different ethnic and religious groups might bring forth different stories. Future research could also benefit from looking at the impact of war coverage with different age groups (in this sample, the average age was 44), as well as the impact on families as a whole. Because Iraqis are closely tied with their families

and communities, experiences of individuals alone can give us a limited understanding of the experiences of the whole community. It will also be important to study the impact of war coverage on those with PTSD or trauma-related experiences as well as depression, including Iraqi immigrants as well as non-Iraqis.

With regards to mass media communication, more research needs to look at the processes behind reporting and linking the impacts that certain traumatic and stressful images/stories have on general population. With collaboration with media agencies, researchers can explore how news media can move towards more responsible and culturally sensitive coverage.

### *Limitations*

The present study was embedded within a qualitative design aimed at bringing forth the experiences of the Iraqi expatriates as they engaged in witnessing of the North American media coverage of the recent Iraq war. Therefore, the intent of this research was not generalizability. Due to time constraints, only a single in-depth individual interview session was conducted with each participant. It is also recognized that each individual interview has its own unique characteristics, thus highlighting the fact that the opinions of the participants are not intended to represent the entire Iraqi community. The sample is also limited to the Greater Vancouver region, suggesting an influence of the geographic area on the participants. This sample was predominantly men (average age 44), who had settled in the Greater Vancouver area, for some time (14.5 years). This study did not look at gender differences, as there were only 2 women in the sample. However, from the overall analysis of transcripts, no specific gender differences were

noted. A further limitation in this study was that the sample consisted of well-educated, financially and economically stable individuals.

Similarly, interviews and the information gathered through this mechanism as well as the analysis of transcripts depended on the skills of the researcher and her own assumptions and biases. It is during these stages that researchers are required to pay attention to “expected and unanticipated aspects of an experience” and acknowledge the contextualized nature of data, while interpreting the transcripts (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 143). Journaling and debriefing with the research team helped reduce some of the above limitations.

An additional limitation of this study is that it produced data in the form of the voices of participants or in other words, self-report data. According to Polkinghorne (2005), self-report data depends on participants’ memory and ability to understand and reflect on various aspects of their lived experiences through language. Self-report data cannot be construed as “mirrored reflections of experience”(p. 139). Full access to participants’ entire experiences was not possible and the researcher had to suffice with “partial access” (p. 139) to such data. As suggested by (Polkinghorne (2005), this becomes particularly challenging in cross-cultural work, such as this study when participants’ first language was Arabic. For instance, some participants said certain phrases in Arabic and then tried to translate or paraphrase them for the researcher in English. There could have been many expressions and metaphors that might have not be fully translated or appreciated in a different language. Polkinghorne (2005) also cautioned researchers in attributing meaning or making inferences from the expressions given by those whose first language is different from that of the researcher. Despite the

above limitations, Polkinghorne (2005) asserted that "language is our primary access to people's experiences" (p. 139). It is hoped that researcher's personal reflections as well as detailed field notes on various aspects of the interaction during the interviews reduced some of such limitations.

Furthermore, the open-ended format of some questions created some challenges to elicit relevant research information. The researcher tried to focus the interview by spending more time at the outset of the study clarifying the purpose of the study. The statements used as probes were helpful in keeping the participants focused.

Another limitation could be that interpretive description is not committed to a particular theoretical framework. Therefore, the collected information will have "hues" or "overtones" from ethnography, phenomenology, or grounded theory (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 337). The aim, in this study, was how best to study an experience that is of a practical significance to a discipline and how we can best inform the counselling practice.

Throughout this research, it was difficult to distinguish between the impacts of war on Iraqis from the impacts of the media coverage of the war. Some level of difficulty was experienced when distinguishing between the earlier influences of the North American media coverage from the on-going influences, particularly for those who continued to utilize this source of media.

Last, the gender and the culture of the researcher were two factors affecting this research process and the kinds of data gathered (see The process of reflexivity).

### *Summary*

The present study brought forth the Iraqi expatriates' experiences of the North American media coverage of their culture, country, and people. Some of the concerns regarding the North American media coverage of Iraq included: an overall biased coverage of the conflict in Iraq, negative portrayal of Iraqi home, culture, and people, lack of cultural, political and social contexts in coverage, and inattention to the humanitarian crisis in the region. The initial phases of war coverage brought confusion, anger, shock, anxiety, concern, worry, surprise, helplessness, and a variety of depressive symptoms on the part of the Iraqi expatriates. As the war in Iraq and its coverage persisted, participants were faced with various other challenges. The ongoing impact of witnessing the coverage of the Iraq war involved cultural challenges, ambiguity around their sense of cultural identity, a lack of optimism, and a general mistrust of the media and other sources of information. Nevertheless, participants seemed to have strived towards finding a balance in their lives by engaging in various coping strategies including: returning to faith, political activism, limiting exposure to graphic images of war, seeking alternative sources of information, connecting with their families and the Iraqi community, writing web-blogs, sharing their feelings and thoughts with others, and accepting their limitations. Participants also showed a desire to show other stories through the North American media. They felt the media needs to pay more attention to the humanitarian crisis in the region, explore the long-term impact of war on people, avoid a negative portrayal of Iraqis and Muslims, bridge the commonalities of Iraqis with other human beings around the world, and provide historical and cultural contexts while reporting.



*I have always wanted to say, we are human beings, blood and flesh, like every body else, we have our fears, as well as our ambitions, we have our problems, we have families, we have children to raise and there are. We like, like every body else, the good things in life. We are really no different..., but we are victims of this. And I don't want to show that we feel victimized, but we are victims of a certain period, of certain circumstance. Part of it is our own doing, and part of it is influenced from the outside world. But because we are, like you, like every body else, there is nothing really to fear from, here I am, I live amongst you, I interact with you....So you have to understand we are, people, we have our feelings and all these things, and with dialogue you can understand us better, but your policy, in quite a sense, the media encourage it, the media hide the war against Iraq, and hide the fear of what Iraq can do, and all these things, so the only solution is go and bomb them. You know it is always confrontational.*

*(Munir)-participant*

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## APPENDIX B: Recruitment Letter to Potential Participants

Dear Sir/Madam:

I am conducting a graduate research study entitled "**The Iraqi Expatriates' Experience of the North American Media Coverage of Iraq**" as part of a Master of Arts degree requirement in Counselling Psychology at UBC, under the supervision of Dr. Beth Haverkamp. The purpose of this study is to learn how Iraqi adult immigrants, living in Greater Vancouver, Canada, have experienced the recent North American media coverage of their culture, country, and people since the war in Iraq began.

Your participation is welcome if you:

- *Identify yourself as an Iraqi, or Iraqi-Canadian;*
- *Are male or female (age 19 and over);*
- *Are currently living in Greater Vancouver Area and have been in Canada for at least 2 years;*
- *Are able to understand, read and speak English;*
- *Have followed the news about Iraq since the war in Iraq started, and*
- *Have been exposed to (e.g., seen, heard or read) North American media (T.V, radio, the Internet, and newspaper).*

Your participation would involve:

- Discussing with a female researcher, Hajera Rostam your experiences of media coverage of Iraq.
- A confidential, audio-recorded face-to-face interview for 1-1.5 hours at a mutually convenient location.
- A brief 15-minute telephone conversation to get your feedback on the summary of your individual interview.
- A brief 30-minute face-to-face follow-up interview to discuss the initial findings of the study and a chance for you to indicate potential recipients of the generated information.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your decision to participate in this is entirely voluntary and if you decide not to participate, it will not affect your current or future relationship with the University of British Columbia. You have the right to refuse to participate, to decline to answer any questions, or to withdraw your consent and terminate your participation in this study at any time without penalty of any kind.

### **Completely Confidential**

The information you will share will be kept anonymous and completely confidential and I will remove any information that could identify you. All documents and audiotapes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Although the transcribed interview data are on the computer, they will be password protected. Summary findings of the study will be



## APPENDIX C: Informed Consent

**The Iraqi Expatriates' Experience of the North American Media Coverage of Iraq**

**Principal Investigator:** Beth Haverkamp, Ph.D., Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education, (604) 822-5354.

**Co-Investigator:** Hajera Rostam, M. A (student), Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education, University of British Columbia, (604) 822-5354.

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This research is being conducted as part of the requirements for Hajera Rostam to complete a Master of Arts (MA) in Counselling Psychology program at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. This research is being supervised by Dr. Beth Haverkamp.

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**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to learn how have Iraqi adult immigrants living in Greater Vancouver Area, Canada, experienced the recent North American media coverage of their culture, country, and people. It is hoped that this research will give space for the voices of Iraqi immigrants to be heard. Similarly, it will help bring forth an understanding of the unique challenges that Iraqis in Canada have, as they have witnessed the prolonged media coverage of Iraq over the last 3 years.

**Study Procedures:** If you choose to participate in this study, you will be interviewed for 1.5 hour by the co-investigator, Hajera Rostam. During this interview, you will also be asked to provide demographic information. The interviews will be audiotaped, transcribed and later analyzed for patterns, themes, and meanings. A summary of the individual interview will be sent to you. After you have received the summary and have had a chance to look at it, there will be a 15-minute follow up telephone conversation for you to provide your feedback on the summary of your individual interview. Later, there will be a 30-minute face-to-face interview to discuss the initial findings of the study. During this time, you will also be asked to identify various agencies or groups in Vancouver who might benefit from the findings of this study. The total amount of time that will be required of you to participate in the study is approximately 2-2.5 hours.

**Confidentiality:** The records for this research will be kept private, in a locked cabinet by the principal investigator and the co-investigator. Similarly, no information will be included that will disclose the identity of the participants. Pseudonyms will be used to keep track of all the records. Although the transcribed interview data are on the computer, they will be password protected. Respondents will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study. The data will be destroyed after 5 years, and your identity will be kept confidential.

## APPENDIX D: Interview Guide

Dear <insert name here>,

**Thank you for participating in this study and volunteering your time. I am interested in learning how Iraqi adult immigrants living in Greater Vancouver Area, have experienced the recent North American media coverage of their home, culture, and people. Through this research, we hope to learn more about the Iraqi community, and bring forth their experiences and perspectives regarding the media coverage of Iraq.**

- **In order for me to understand the context of your experience in Canada, please tell me briefly the story of you or your family settling in Canada.**
- **Do you have any relatives or friends living in Iraq now? If yes, how do you keep in touch with them?**

*(These questions are included in the beginning to help establish rapport with the participant and bring more context to the questions pertaining to this study).*

Now I would like to ask you some in depth questions. Please take your time to reflect and answer them.

**I would like you to think about the North American media coverage of Iraq that you have seen. As you think about it, are there specific images or stories that stand out for you?**

*I will start with this open-ended question, and then follow with the following probes.*

- **Can you please describe the first image or story that came up for you?**
- **What is it about that image or story that caught your attention?**

*(I will ask the participants to share their experience about one image or story in detail, and then ask them if they could provide additional examples that will also be explored).*

- **What were the underlying messages about your culture, people, and country in the North American media?**
- **How did you respond to those messages?**
- **Can you tell me about ways that the North American media coverage of Iraq may have affected you in your day-to-day life?**
- **Having experienced the media coverage of Iraq, I am wondering if you could tell me about any ways that your thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors might have changed.**

*Additional statements that could help clarify participants' answers will include:*

- **How does that connect to your experience of the North American media coverage of Iraq?**
- **Can you recall the media source where you got that particular image or story?**
- **Please tell me more about....**
- **What do you mean by...?**
- **What does that mean to you?**
- **Can you give me an example of...?**
- **Is there anything more that you would like to add regarding...?**

*Finally, I will ask them the following question:*

- **During the last 3 years of the Iraq war, what would you have liked to show Canadians through the media, about your culture, people, and country?**

*After they have answered all of the questions, then I will ask the participants the following:*

Is there anything else you would like to add that might have been missed during the interview?

*As part of the debriefing process, I will share with them the following information.*

**Since we are talking about a personal topic, I would like to provide you with a list of various multicultural services in the community as well as low-cost support and counselling services that are available in Greater Vancouver Area. This is in case you feel distressed after our interview, or if you feel like you would like to talk to someone about this topic or your reactions to the interview.**

*Then, I will verbally ask them the specific details pertaining to the demographic information sheet.*

*I will then thank them for their participation.*

**Thank you for your participation. Once I get a chance to transcribe and analyze this interview information, I will call you to set up a half an hour individual appointment with you so that I could get your feedback.**

## APPENDIX E: Demographic Information

Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Gender

\_\_\_\_\_ Male

\_\_\_\_\_ Female

3. Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Could you describe your family? \_\_\_\_\_

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*(I will also inquire about their marital and parental status, number of children and general ages for children)*

5. Please describe your living arrangements.

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Are you: Unemployed \_\_\_\_\_ Employed \_\_\_\_\_ Full time \_\_\_\_\_ Part Time \_\_\_\_\_

8. What is your current occupation? \_\_\_\_\_

9. What was your occupation before coming to Canada? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Where were you born? \_\_\_\_\_

11. Are you a Landed Immigrant? Yes \_\_\_\_\_, No \_\_\_\_\_

12. If yes, when did you or your family immigrate to Canada? \_\_\_\_\_

Year

13. Are you a Canadian Citizen? Yes \_\_\_\_\_, No \_\_\_\_\_

14. How long have you lived in Greater Vancouver Area? \_\_\_\_\_