

Coming of Age and Love in Post 9/11 America part 2



Shanthy Marie Blanchard is a MSc student at the London School of Economics and Political Science and studies Gender, Policy and Inequalities. In this essay, she uses the concept of intersectionality as a tool to unpack her understanding of her area youth's transition into adulthood which transpired after 9/11 in her small rural Midwestern town. This post is the second post in a two post entry. The first post can be found [here](#).

This week in our Militarization course, we are reading an article by Iris Marion Young entitled '[The Logic of Masculinist Protection: Reflections on the Current Security State](#)'. The article resonated with me soundly, as it depicted the male that developed in many of my generation's rural, Midwestern boys during our coming of age. The masculine protector was the ideal identity given to us by our government when we sat in the classrooms that September day wondering what it all meant, trying to understand how to navigate this event as we simultaneously started the navigation of our own identities into adulthood. Maybe underlying it all, it resonated so strongly with me because on the other side of Young's analysis of the post 9/11 American man, laid the role of the post 9/11 woman. This was a role I realized that I hadn't and couldn't fulfill. It was the conscious deterrent of this fulfilling this role that caused me to lose my childhood love.

In the argument, Young draws on Hobbes' [Leviathan](#) to make her argument about the 'masculinist protector' within the 9/11 context, which acts as a benevolent but ultimate authority over the family structure in securing the safety of the American people. Under Hobbes' depiction of the state of nature, "people live in small families where all believe others envy them and desire to enlarge themselves by stealing or conquering the group" (Young, 2003). They live in constant fear and insecurity and thus, give ultimate and unquestioned authority to the Leviathan, which "fosters and maintains security" (Young, 2003).

In Young's gendered lens of the post 9/11 America, the Leviathan was a benevolent male protector, a man who chivalrously self-sacrifices himself to protect the ones he loves. His actions stem from this compassionate and fatherly care, in the same way that a pastor cares for and leads his congregation. He commands that same form of pastoral power- a power filled with love and guidance- leading his family through his ultimate and unquestioned rule. This requires a submission from the group to his reasoning. But he rules with only the most benevolent care in this higher calling to protect the potential threat of the home, and the ones he loves.

Bush was our Leviathan. In return for this protection, the subordinates of our American home gratefully adore their protector and defer to his judgment for the promises of protection he offered. Our generation of boys came to understand themselves through the ideals taken from Hobbes' state security, which were exemplified by our government, the head authority to which the heads of our own households – our fathers, brothers, teachers, and coaches – beseeched their own power. Perhaps the most resonating thing for my rural Midwest generation was when he said, "My most important job as your President is to defend the homeland, is to protect the people from further attacks." (Young, 2003). It set the tone for a nation of vulnerable bodies and a generation of impressionable minds. The government became our father, the patriarch of our home. He became the self-sacrificing man; protecting those he loved by going into a land filled with danger and evil in order to save the helpless back at home. To not be patriotic to his cause was un-American. To not support his military efforts was blasphemous. If we did not support the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, we did not love America.

Why did this resonate so strongly with the rural Midwestern population? I suppose it suits us so strongly because [an essential part of our rural upbringing stems from our ties to the evangelical church; nearly half of us attend services each Sunday](#). To us, under the religious context of 

Midwestern culture, our father, our true father, is the head of the Protestant church. Our ultimate father is God. And God is the one taking care of us, protecting us, and fighting evil because he loves his children. The sacrifices he makes for us are enormous, and he does so solely because we are special to him. To question God is not just disrespectful or un-Christian, it is spitting on God's love. The president can be seen as another kind of father, another kind of God whose love is not to be spat on. He lead us through our country's greatest trial in the same way a shepherd leads his flock.

This example of God the father, humanized in our president, was a model of how our boys encompassed their embodiment of masculinity as it drew from the structures already in place within our everyday lives: the Evangelical Christian home. As stated by the Christian Family Movement's official prayer, "we believe you (God) wish our families to reflect your heavenly community (CFM)." The heavenly community being God the father, the heavenly Leviathan, protecting us – his family. We emulated this structure in our earthly families as ordained by the church- our own fathers- carrying on God's duties on earth as the heads of our households, our own Leviathans. The evangelical church follows this inscription of gender roles within the family unit that the Young's understanding of the Leviathan lays out, in which the benevolent male patriarch earns, secures, and protects the family unit as the leader, **otherwise known as the Divine Order of Marriage**. The basis of this idea stems from the concept that, **"a husband is required to love his wife as Christ loved the church, and a wife should respect her husband and willingly submit to his leadership of the family."** (CFM). This subordination provides the secure order needed to protect the home, just as required in Young's version of the Leviathan and Bush's leadership under post 9/11.

Each concept fit so perfectly and so tragically into one another. It was a culture waiting for its next noble mission, a generation of men waiting to show their love to the country and to their lovers in some way. This became the ideal example of how the young boy was to grow into a man. This boy would reach adulthood because he would come to realize that his journey into manhood meant that he would have to sacrifice in the same way the father of our nation did for him, the way God did for his people. The boy would come to believe that the greatest thing he would come to understand and accept would be to protect the ones he loved from the great evil. This was his ultimate purpose. He was chivalrously and sacrificially facing the evil forces of the world to protect the women, children, and nation he cared so much about.

And for the part of those women and children at home, for the subordinates...for my part...anything less than returning this love, anything that demanded more of this boy-turned-man, anything more than just to honor him and be grateful for sacrifices he was making for us, for me, for my country, was more than dishonorable and unpatriotic. It was heartless and cruel. To question him meant I questioned his manhood, the foundations that our families stood upon, the foundations of the God we prayed to. To question him meant I didn't fulfill my role as a woman. To question him meant I didn't love him.

I was thirteen the first time I met the boy I would fall in love with. He was sixteen when a recruiting officer first approached him. We were seventeen the first time he told me he loved me. He was nineteen when he joined the army. I was twenty-two before I could try and be complacent with his decision and rekindle a relationship with him. But I couldn't stop questioning the identity that the American army had given him as a man of our country. I couldn't stop questioning the actions of the army, their missions, or their relations with the people they claimed to be benevolently helping. Maybe selfishly and more personally, I couldn't stop questioning my place as a woman in that world with him.

I was twenty-three when I realized that he was a product of 9/11. We both were. We just had drastically different experiences of how it became a part of our lives. I ran away from it because I had the opportunity to do so. He ran towards it because for him, there was no other way. No amount of understanding, support, discussion, or questioning, would help him see it from an outside perspective, or navigate him to turn away from it. This post 9/11 man was who he ~~was~~ now.



Ten years later, I still live with the effects of 9/11. It is, and always will be an essential part of my identity, an essential part of what influenced me as a person, influenced my adolescence, and influenced my experiences and ideas about the world. We only had a few years of running next to the serpentine stream in the woods before we ran off to join a higher cause. Only a few years to dream before the regulations of how we were to live our lives were handed to us on a pamphlet. Those boys have forgotten how we used to laugh during our lunches at the thought of wearing glorified suits of armor in the blazing desert and pointing guns at people who probably cared more about having enough to eat than our democratic ideals. They won't remember that under their senior picture they were quoted as saying, "Will write an academy award winning musical score." They forgot those dreams the moment the first machine gun was laid into their hands. They only know of their higher purpose now; and their identities as these post 9/11 men.

I'll go back to the Midwest someday -maybe in the fall when the leaves turn their dusty shades of red and the cornstalks from the harvest have dried with age. I'll lay under the star filled sky and think about how we spent those days of our youth dreaming about what life would be like when we were old and twenty-four. I'll remember the misplaced dreams of a generation. But no matter how hard I try to forget, a part of me will always weep for the boy I loved, who lost himself to a greater cause.

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