

RIDLEY SCOTT'S *GI JANE*: *AN ARGUMENT FOR WOMEN IN COMBAT*

It is my contention that Ridley Scott's film, *GI Jane*, starring Demi Moore, can be analyzed as a kind of argumentative essay in that it presents a thesis that it defends through the use of supporting arguments and supporting examples. In addition, I also believe it follows many of the basic critical thinking rules in the presentation of its message. In class, we read three very different argumentative essays written on the subject of women in combat. They are: "Most Oppose Women in Combat" by Suzanne Fields, "An Officer and a Feminist" by James M. Dubik, and "Arms and the Woman" by Lou Marano. Each of these essays illustrates a contrasting attitude towards the idea of women serving in combat in the US military. I believe Scott created *GI Jane* so that it would covers many of the issues raised by authors such as these in order to support his thesis: women should be allowed to serve in combat. What I would like to show is that Ridley Scott offers arguments and evidence through his film that directly support his thesis in ways that follow our course models. In order to do this, I will show how *GI Jane* takes into account both the pro and con arguments put forth in each of the three essays.

GI Jane deals with the idea of female integration into one of the most elite units in the US military, the Navy SEALs. Lt. Jordan O'Neil, played by Demi Moore, is given the opportunity to enter SEAL training as a test case. If O'Neil is able to successfully complete this rigorous program, then other women would be given the chance of full integration within the military. This would enable women to enter combat, a key element for those who hope to rise in the ranks of the

military. As O'Neil states: "operational experience is the key to advancement." So if women are not allowed in combat, this is the same as saying they can't be promoted to the highest ranks of the military. The reason the SEALs was chosen as grounds or a test case due to its strenuous nature. Scott makes it clear that everyone expected O'Neil to fail. The film shows how she meets this challenge. With her teammates, the Master Chief Argyle, and those high in power all against her, O'Neil had to prove her valor through her own determination.

Assuming that the three essays by Fields, Dubik, and Marano offer the most common views on the subject of women in combat, if Scott is offering a strong argument to support his message, he should deal with the points brought up by each of these. I will try to show that he does this.

Suzanne Fields writes in "Most Oppose Women in Combat" that women in combat would interfere with the bonding of males that is necessary for combat and they would cause "sexual confusion" on the battlefield. She also claims that female prisoners of war would be tortured in ways that would cause the male prisoners to lose their cool and thus give forth intelligence information. Lastly, Fields contends that women are not able to meet the physical standards of men and that is one more reason women should not be allowed to fight.

Dubik offers a different point of view in his essay "An Officer and a Feminist." He noted that his experience with female cadets at West Point and his experiences with his own daughters growing up did not fit his "stereotype of female behavior." The female cadets under his command were serious and accomplished what they set out to do. They took charge and gave orders and stayed calm under extreme conditions. Dubik concluded that women of the present generation and the generations to come do not match the beliefs that were taught to him while he was growing up. So he accepted the fact that society must change its assessment of women. Marano, on the other

hand, disagrees. In his essay, "Arms and the Woman: Would a Sexually Mixed US. Army Lose Its Wars?", he argues an army that is even partially made up of women will be defeated. He claims that this belief is as "unsexist" a statement as saying that an army of younger men will defeat an army of older men. He further states that the need for the physical advantage of males still holds true today and that, contrary to the beliefs of others, "sexual distraction" is prevalent when women are in the military.

After comparing the film *GI Jane* to these three essays, I believe that Scott considered almost all of the points they raise in creating his film just as if he were writing a logical essay. I will discuss them in order. To begin with, the essay by Fields noted that women are physically weaker and, as a result, are not held to the same physical standards as men. In the film, I found that there are many examples that explore the idea that women are too weak for combat. This notion was first suggested by the male reporter who was covering the story of the newly established program to integrate women into all aspects of the military. His statement was challenged by a woman, Senator DeHaven, who asked him how strong one has to be to be to pull the trigger of a gun. After this, the military top brass agrees to let one woman try to qualify for the US Navy SEALs. Of course, they do not expect her to succeed. Senator DeHaven personally selects a US Navy intelligence officer, Lt. O'Neil, to be the test case. And as we find out later, even she does not believe that a woman can meet the rigorous standards of the SEALs.

However, when Lt. O'Neil was admitted into the SEAL program, the brass decided that she would be judged by lower physical standards than the male trainees. In other words, they established a double standard as an insult to her. These double standards included the possibility of doing knee •pushups as opposed to regular pushups. On the obstacle course, O'Neil was given white steps to