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Agency, Militarized Femininity and Enemy Others

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE WAR IN IRAQ

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Abstract

In this era of the increasing importance of gender, many conflicting images of women populate news headlines and political discourses. In the 2003 war in Iraq, Americans saw images of a teenage woman as a war hero, of a female general in charge of a military prison where torture took place, of women who committed those abuses, of male victims of wartime sexual abuse and of the absence of gender in official government reactions to the torture at Abu Ghraib. I contend that several gendered stories from the 2003 war in Iraq demonstrate three major developments in militarized femininity in the United States: increasing sophistication of the ideal image of the woman soldier; stories of militarized femininity constructed in opposition to the gendered enemy; and evident tension between popular ideas of femininity and women's agency in violence. I use the publicized stories of American women prisoners of war and American women prison guards to substantiate these observed developments.

Keywords

Abu Ghraib, Feminism, Iraq, Jessica Lynch, military, torture

In the 1991 Gulf War, the United States deployed women soldiers to a combat zone for the first time. At that time, Cynthia Enloe (1993: 202) observed that women soldiers received an incredible amount of media attention, disproportionate to the relatively small percentage of the US force that was female. This asymmetrical attention, she argued, signaled that women's participation in making and fighting wars was accompanied by rising political salience of the concept of femininity (Enloe 1993: 202–3). This salience, according to Enloe (1993: 207), took the form of new 'militarized femininities'; stories

about women's roles as soldiers told on the basis of their gender. Women soldiers were not *soldiers* but *women soldiers*; their gender marked their identity on the battlefield.

If the 1991 Gulf War saw an unprecedented number of female soldiers in the war zone, the 2003 war in Iraq represented another milestone. In 1991 7 percent of the US force was female; that number increased to 14 per cent in 2003 (Enloe 1993; womennews.org 2003). Not only was a larger percentage of the United States military force female in 2003, women soldiers' stories accounted for a substantial percentage of the media coverage of the war. The politics of gender, especially gender in the military, have garnered increasing attention in domestic, regional and international politics over the last two decades.

In this era of the increasing importance of gender, many conflicting images of women populate news headlines and political discourses. In the 2003 war in Iraq, Americans saw images of a teenage girl as a war hero, of a female general in charge of a military prison where torture took place, of women who committed those abuses, of male victims of wartime sexual abuse and of the absence of gender in official government reactions to the torture at Abu Ghraib.¹ I contend that several gendered stories from the 2003 war in Iraq demonstrate three major developments in militarized femininity in the United States: increasing sophistication of the ideal image of the woman soldier, stories of militarized femininity constructed in opposition to the gendered enemy and evident tension between popular ideas of femininity and women's agency in violence. I use the publicized stories of American women prisoners of war and American women prison guards to substantiate these observed developments.

MILITARIZED FEMININITY

Gender is a concept that does not lend itself to easy interpretation; it is a complex and intersubjective construction. Feminists interrogate the implicit naturalness of the categories of *male* and *female* that we use to label both sex and gender (Peterson 1999: 38). Biological differences between people classified as male and people classified as female can be understood as *sex*, and socially constituted differences between these categorized groups can be understood as *gender*. It is often difficult to tell which differences are biological and which are socially constructed, however (Fausto-Sterling 2005). Ann Fausto-Sterling (2005: 1493) argues that, in thinking about gender, it is imperative that we consider the sexed body as a producer of some of the factors generally understood as social, such as professional success and sexual promiscuity. She instead argues for a life-course understanding, applying dynamic systems theory to the relationship between biological sex and social gender (Fausto-Sterling 2005: 1516). Fausto-Sterling's complex understanding of the construction of gender as interactive with biological sex is

important, but incomplete. Even the biological dichotomy between male and female is the product of the social construction of simplicity where complexity exists.

Sex is not limited to those people classified biologically as 'male' and 'female'; there are persons who fall into the biological categories of asexual, intersexual, transsexual and hermaphroditic. The dynamic construction of sex and gender is generally divisible into *masculinities* and *femininities* – stereotypes, behavioral norms and rules assigned to people based on their perceived membership in sex categories. Gender, then, is not static, but a contingent and changing social fact and process.

The complex construction of gender does not mean that it is artificial; quite the opposite is true. Genders are lived by people throughout the world. Still, it would be unrepresentative to characterize a *gendered experience* as if there was something that all those perceived to be men or all those perceived to be women shared in life experience. Instead, each person categorized as a woman is different: she has her own culture, body, language, identity and personality. Gender is lived differently in different places, bodies and locations. Genderings are diverse, as are their mechanisms and processes (Hooper 2001: 25).

Gender is a set of discourses that represent, construct, change and enforce meaning (Gibson-Graham 1994; Connell 1995). Even though gender representations differ, the prevalence of gendered discourses in global politics shows the importance of gender as an analytical concept. One place where the prevalence of gendered discourses is obvious is in accounts of women's relationships with the US military.

One story about women's relationship to the military characterizes women as in need of the protection that the military can provide them (Elshtain 1987). The women in these stories, as Elshtain (1992) notes, are Beautiful Souls, not involved in war-making but reliant on war to survive. Women's vulnerability justifies fighting wars. Another account is one where women are resources that militaries use to win wars (Moon 1997). Some women sustain the economy at home while men are away at war; while others serve the men fighting those wars – as nurses, as entertainment and as prostitutes (Moon 1997). A newer story about American women's relationship with the US military is of women soldiers (Enloe 2000). Women soldiers are depicted not as the trench-based, gun-shooting fighters that men are, but as soldiers in lipstick and high heels – feminine, but militarized (Enloe 2000).

Militarized femininity is militarism that relies on control of femininity generally and women specifically (Enloe 1993: 174). The integration of women into the US military is adding women to the forces, but the process has paid little attention to the discursive and performative elements of gender dichotomies. The result has been the preservation of the discursive structures of gender subordination even in a gender-integrated military. This project uses gendered lenses to see the gendered images in the 2003 war in Iraq as a product of the histories of militarized femininities and a producer of future understandings of gender roles.

Militarized femininity is represented in the gendered accounts of women soldiers in the 2003 war in Iraq. These narratives include those of female POWs, the female general in charge of Abu Ghraib, the women who abused prisoners there, photographs of the abuse of male prisoners and political discourses about the torture that omitted gender. After exploring these stories, I argue that these gendered images demonstrate the increasing sophistication of the ideal-type of the woman soldier, the addition of the gendered enemy into narratives of militarized femininity and the struggle over the tension between ideal femininity and women's violence.

THE TOLD AND UNTOLD STORIES OF GENDERED POWS

Only a few days into the war, the story of Private Jessica Lynch was all over every news source in the United States. Lynch was widely believed to be the first American prisoner of war to be taken by the Iraqi military, even though four other prisoners were taken at the same time. The 19-year-old girl ostensibly went down fighting, was injured in battle and was tortured in captivity (*LA Times*, 24 March 2003). The military's story is of a daring rescue. A battle was created for diversion and gunfire erupted in a hospital. Lynch was just a country girl who became a hero and a household name (*Time*, 17 November 2003).

Lynch was characterized as brave beyond her femininity (fighting) but limited by it (needing an elaborate, public rescue). I argue that the *forefronting* of Jessica Lynch's story was not gender liberation but gender marginalization in disguise. Certainly, the portrayals of Lynch were far from the traditional understanding of women as non-participants who need protection. Jessica Lynch was a *soldier* and a fighter. She went down fighting, was brave through interrogation and endured torture and rape, so the story says.

Still, a number of similarities between the portrayal of Jessica Lynch and the traditional just war understanding of Beautiful Souls are evident (Elshtain 1992). That Jessica Lynch went down fighting was described as remarkable even though it would be expected of most soldiers. *That a girl fought* was emphasized as anomalous. Women soldiers do not fight. Lynch, like many reservists, was said to have 'joined the army to see the world' (Bragg 2003). Her choice, then, was not to fight, or to go to war, but to be a tourist. Instead, she was a *girl* who wanted some adventure and just happened to end up in an army supply tank with a gun in the desert in Iraq. Lynch was also *fought for* instead of fighting in much of the story – she was helpless, a captive in an Iraqi hospital. The soldiers needed to *save her*. She was so helpless that she needed to be rescued before the four other prisoners captured along with her. In fact, her rescue was so intricate that it required *faking* a battle. The most publicized rescue mission in military history followed. Of course, Lynch had to be saved – *war is about protecting innocent women*. She needed to be saved not just because she could be tortured, but because her

being a *woman* meant she was vulnerable to sexual violence. Iraqis could not get away with inflicting sexual violence on American *women*. Jessica Lynch was at once presented as a glorified war hero and an innocent woman – a Beautiful Soul who could not escape the mold, even though she carried a gun and wore a uniform.

As if this story about Lynch were not gendered *enough*, it turns out that the majority of the story was a contrivance, presented by the US military. As John Kampfner (2003: A1) documents, the coverage of the Jessica Lynch story was a feat of news management by the Pentagon. In fact, Lynch had not gone down fighting – her gun had malfunctioned (Bragg 2003). She had not been shot at; she was injured in an automobile accident before the Iraqi ambush (Bragg 2003). She surrendered to Iraqi troops willingly (Bragg 2003). Unlike those captured with her, Iraqi troops took Jessica Lynch to a hospital and treated her injuries (Kampfner 2003). She was assigned one of only two nurses in the hospital (Kampfner 2003). By her own account, Lynch was injured, sick and delirious, but well cared for (BBC News 2003). The Iraqi military abandoned the hospital, leaving Lynch there with the medical staff (Bragg 2003). She has no memory or evidence of rape; instead, a nurse sang to her and talked about her boyfriend (Kampfner 2003). The medical staff at the hospital attempted a rescue of their own, putting Lynch into an ambulance sent to a US checkpoint (Kampfner 2003). The US military, unaware of the ambulance's contents, fired on it. The next day, US troops entered an unguarded hospital and recovered Lynch (Bragg 2003). The rescue was filmed; though no violence is ever shown, it is implied in the edited tape.

Lynch herself objects to this portrayal of her rescue. She characterizes herself as just another soldier and then just another prisoner of war (Bragg 2003). Lynch calls the elaborate rescue attempt unnecessary, and complains about being used as a symbol of American gender roles (Bragg 2003). The portrayals of Lynch as a woman of extraordinary bravery; as a victim of Iraqi cruelty and sexual violence; and as an innocent woman in need of saving were all stories constructed by the US military and the media that published their press releases to achieve an idealized image of the militarized woman.

These constructions are all the more problematic in the face of the irony that the story told about Jessica Lynch was not true of her, but much more substantially resembled the plight of another American woman soldier. Shoshana Johnson was a member of Jessica Lynch's company, and one of the four other prisoners of war that the Iraqi military captured that day. She was an African-American single mother of two. Unlike Jessica Lynch, she did go down fighting (Douglas 2003). Unlike Jessica Lynch, Johnson was injured in battle – she was shot in both ankles (Douglas 2003). Johnson was kept in a prison guarded by the Iraqi military (Douglas 2003). And unlike Jessica Lynch, Shoshana Johnson's story is all but unknown. William Douglas (2003) wonders if Shoshana Johnson's relative obscurity is because she did not have the right face to serve as the heroine for a new militarized femininity.

Shoshana Johnson was not the only relatively obscure face with a similar story to the one that the military told about Jessica Lynch. There was another woman in Jessica Lynch's company. Lori Piestewa was a Native American female private who was killed in the same battle where Lynch and Johnson were taken prisoner. She has received substantial attention within the Native American community and in her home state of Arizona, but the search for Jessica Lynch overshadowed the announcement of her death in the mainstream media. Piestewa and Johnson (and perhaps other women) could not be made into the ideal, militarized woman – so their stories were marginalized. A false story about Lynch's capture overshadowed the true stories of others' tragedies in the interest of mainstreaming a certain image of the militarized woman and her role in the fighting.

THE STORIES OF GENDER AND ABU GHRAIB

A high-ranking female military commander was removed from her post in a combat zone as a prison supervisor because a group of American soldiers, equally men and women, engaged in and photographed systematic sexual torture of male Iraqi inmates. The gendered stories of Abu Ghraib include that of General Janis Karpinski, of the female prison guards involved in the abuse, of the male Iraqi prisoners in the pictures and of the USA's political reaction to discovering these events.

General Janis Karpinski, or 'Gender in Command'

In June of 2003, Janis Karpinski, an Army reserve general, was appointed the head of sixteen US military prisons in Iraq. Karpinski was the only female commander in Iraq. She had served as an intelligence officer with the Special Forces in the First Gulf War. Her command included 3,400 Army reservists. Neither Karpinski nor most of her reservists had any training or experience running military prisons.

When she was appointed to combat command, a number of newspapers ran stories about the remarkable nature of the combination of Karpinski's gender and her position. The *St Petersburg Times* characterized her as a 'caring' woman who 'loves' her soldiers like her children (14 December 2003: A8). As she took command of war prisons, her maternal nature was emphasized. Karpinski spoke with pride about her observation that the military has come to treat female soldiers like male soldiers.

News coverage interested in this first high-level combat appointment of a woman was followed about six months later with breaking stories of the torture that happened under her command. This abuse was perpetrated by members of the 800th military police (MP) brigade who, with Karpinski in charge, served as prison guards at Abu Ghraib prison. Abu Ghraib prison

had been Saddam Hussein's prison, notorious for abuse of Iraqis. It had been shut down due to looting before the US military started using it to detain POWs in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion. Months after Abu Ghraib had been re-opened, photographs and stories of abuse of prisoners by the US military began to emerge. There was evidence of physical force (discomfort, starvation) and sexual abuse (rape, sodomy).

Investigations, both internal to the army and conducted outside of the military's official inquiries, have been unable to ascertain whether the perpetrators were directed to engage in the abuse or made the choice on their own. General Karpinski insists that she had no knowledge of the torture until it was investigated, and then was asked to keep quiet (Karpinski and Strasser 2005). In her book, *One Woman's Army*, Karpinski (Karpinski and Strasser 2005: 15) claims that she was chosen as a scapegoat because she was a woman and because she was a reservist. She admits to poor leadership, but questions the possibility of effectively managing an inexperienced and disorganized force charged with the specialized task of governing prisons (2005: 106). She argues that she was not only a convenient scapegoat, but also used to produce a 'new image of what happens when women go to battle' and to slow the gender integration of the military (2005: 108).

The response to the fact that this torture occurred under a woman's command has been three-fold. The first has been a mainstream criticism of Karpinski's leadership skills, which is not explicitly gendered. General Antonio Taguba, who investigated the events at Abu Ghraib, characterized Karpinski as a poor leader who failed to establish rules for her command. The second reaction has been a (less mainstream but still very public) skepticism about a woman's suitability to command a prison police brigade in a combat zone. The most widely disseminated version of this gendered criticism was Jack Wheeler's, in the *Washington Times* on 21 May 2004. Wheeler (2004: 18) contends that the fact that Karpinski was not fired means that 'political correctness trumps national security, even in wartime'. He argues that others are being blamed for something that was really Karpinski's fault, and that we should 'be assured that if Gen. Karpinski was a man, demands for his accountability would be loud and clear' (2004: 18). Wheeler (2004: 18) also complains that Karpinski reacted to the 'scandal' like a woman – 'whining, making excuses and complaining that it's not her fault'. Wheeler calls on women to condemn Karpinski as reinforcing stereotypes about women's incompetence.

Wheeler characterizes Karpinski's mistakes as a wider problem of feminizing the American military; in this view women are not competent in leadership roles within the US military. He explains that 'war is not woman's work. It is man's work – not because men are more brutal or stronger, but because they can endure the stresses of combat and be accountable for the failures those stresses inevitably create'; men's characters, in short, are superior to women's for the purpose of fighting wars (Wheeler 2004: 18).

A third reaction to the events at Abu Ghraib has been less public, but still politically and symbolically significant. Very few stories have doubted

General Karpinski's claim that she did not know what was happening. A small minority, however, tell the story that Karpinski did know what was going on at Abu Ghraib and was directly involved in some way. These people characterize Karpinski as tough, masculine and even inhuman. A Google search, which is fast becoming the pulse of American culture, turns up more than a dozen results questioning Karpinski's sexual preference. More specifically, these blogs, newspapers and websites call her a *dyke* or a *bull dyke*. General Janis Karpinski has been married for thirty years. This characterization of her sexual preference is not about whether or not Karpinski *sleeps with women*. Instead, it implies that Karpinski is somehow less of a woman; less pure and therefore less female because she coordinated prisoner abuse. The depiction of Karpinski as a *dyke* because of her (alleged) involvement with prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib implicitly characterizes *real women* as incapable of that sort of violence.

Female (Sex) Torturers

Her face is familiar to millions of people around the world as one of two smiling American soldiers seen in a picture standing behind a group of naked, hooded Iraqis stacked in a pyramid. . . . Harman is accused by the Army of taking photographs of that pyramid and . . . of Iraqis who were told to strip and masturbate in front of other prisoners and guards.

(AP 10 May 2004)

Feminism has long been concerned with sexual abuse in wartime. Sexual abuse of men, though it has doubtless occurred, has been addressed less than wartime rape of women. Abuse by women has received even less attention, if it has ever happened before. Yet three of the seven military police officers confirmed to have been involved with the abuse at Abu Ghraib were women: Megan Ambuhl, Lynndie England and Sabrina Harman. The pictures that crowded Senate hearings and newspapers were mostly taken on Sabrina Harman's digital camera.

The stories of the women who abused prisoners had barely surfaced in the United States before the question of Lynndie England's agency in her violence received substantial media attention during her 2005 trial.² A brief interview with Harman after she was charged reflected a similar focus on the question of agency. She claimed that she was not responsible for following orders (CNN.com 23 May 2004). After that, very little mainstream publicity has been focused on Harman, her fellow female perpetrators or on the crimes with which they have been charged. It is Harman's photographs that are being published all over the world as proof of the prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib. Yet Harman's role is generally not the subject of reporting or conversation. While Americans all 'know' the faces of the women who were involved from the wide publication of the photos, details about these women and their lives were not the subject of mainstream reporting. The place the female

perpetrators at Abu Ghraib are most famous is in the world of Internet porn, where their abuse is replicated for entertainment purposes.

These women were witness to massive abuse of the prisoners at Abu Ghraib. They forced Iraqi soldiers and civilians to strip and to masturbate (they claim, as a way of keeping them awake). There are pictures of multiple forced sex acts. There are three pictures which are particularly disturbing: one of Sabrina Harman leaning over a pile (pyramid?) of naked, hooded Iraqi prisoners with a suggestive smile; a second of Harman smiling over the corpse of a prisoner who arrived at the prison healthy; and a third of Lynndie England with a prisoner on a leash. Who led these episodes of abuse is unclear, but it is undeniable that they had some agency in their actions. At the very least, they chose to allow their pictures to be taken, to smile for the camera and not to report the abuse.

Jessica Lynch's hero story was plastered on the television, in newspapers, and even in a made-for-television movie; her gender-role story could be made to fit an ideal-type of militarized femininity. The women at Abu Ghraib by contrast were swept under the carpet, or more accurately, appeared only in so far as they were compared (unfavorably) to Lynch. It is not that their behavior was typical of women soldiers, or that it had anything to do with their being women. Instead, the media, the USA and a world full of socially constructed and reinforced gender stereotypes *were not ready* for the reality of women sexual abusers; I will flesh out this argument later in this article.

Abused Men

If women abusing prisoners is an atypical image, so are photographs of sexually abused men. There were female prisoners at Abu Ghraib, though we do not know how many.³ There are two options to explain the gender disparity of victims in the pictures: first, that only men were tortured; or second, that the photos of the women who were tortured either do not exist or were not released. The American Civil Liberties Union's Freedom of Information Act lawsuit is likely to reveal the content of the unreleased photographs, but is currently held up by government appeal (alcu.org 2005). Regardless of any content of those photographs, any abuse of women that existed has been downplayed in official and media accounts.

There are a number of reasons why women's abuse might be downplayed. First, however strange it is to see women abusing men, it is likely even odder to see women abusing women, if indeed that was the dynamic. Second, in the Muslim world, women's worth is tied to their honor, and sexual abuse is the ultimate insult to that honor. Strong Iraqi retaliation is a foreseeable consequence of admitting abuse of women. Third, many of the Iraqi women themselves may prefer to keep their experiences private. In the only mainstream media piece about women prisoners at Abu Ghraib, the *American Prospect* (February 2005) reports that women who had been formerly held captive at Abu Ghraib

refused in interviews to answer questions about sexual abuse because of the social ostracism that would result from the publication of their experiences. Finally, abuse of male prisoners can be framed as interrogation of combatants, no matter how brutal; abuse of female prisoners is seen as necessarily gratuitous. Though roles have changed, we maintain an image of women in war as those whom *men protect*, rather than those whom *men and women attack*. In choosing which photographs to release, the military may have chosen those which would disrupt these assumptions the least.

Governmental Reactions

An official response to the torture at Abu Ghraib can no longer be found on the White House website; the US President has characterized the abuse as the 'deviant acts' of 'a few soldiers' (*Washington Post* 25 May 2004). In more than 200 entries into the Congressional record concerning the abuse at Abu Ghraib, gender words are not used *at all* except in thanking our 'service men and women' for their continued sacrifice. Though there have been eight official investigations completed at the request of the US government of the abuse at Abu Ghraib, only two of them have been leaked to the public: those written by General Taguba and by Major General George Fay. The Taguba report uses gender words less than a dozen times over thirty pages, and then only to identify the gender of those abused, in phrases such as 'male prisoners threatened with sodomy'. International reactions, while strongly condemning Americans' behavior at Abu Ghraib as an abuse of imperialist license, generally do not mention the gender aspects of the torture.⁴ Direct textual reactions from inside Iraq have been almost impossible to obtain.

Feminists analyze the content of what is said in politics to find what is neglected, 'searching for silences'. Hilary Charlesworth (1999: 381) understands that 'all systems of knowledge depend on deeming certain issues irrelevant, therefore silences are as important as positive rules'. Feminisms search for the things that the traditional study of political science does not see (Maynard and Purvis 1994). Searching for silences uses questions, discourse analyses and histories to see what *is not* discussed in the making or analysis of national or international policy. In the context of feminism, texts that *do not* mention gender are making a statement about gender as clearly as those that are focused explicitly on gender – it is a statement that gender is unimportant. This statement, made by the majority of governmental and intergovernmental policy statements concerning the prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib, clearly conflicts with the observations that I have made thus far in this project about the multiple (coexisting and sometimes contradicting) gender influences on the events at Abu Ghraib and their portrayal. The absence of gender in the policy response to the torture at Abu Ghraib is in itself a *gendering* of international policy.

Still, one official report genders by commission as opposed to by omission. Another investigation by the US government, the Fay report (2004), does use

gender words frequently throughout the document. When characterizing torture inflicted by or in front of female soldiers, interrogators or translators, the Fay report specifies the gender of both the torturer or witness and the detainee. For example, there are numerous descriptions in the report of 'a female soldier did X to a male detainee'. Curiously, however, these gender words disappear when the report discusses an attack perpetrated by a man on another man. These events are simply characterized as 'soldier did X to detainee'. In fact, in the Fay report (2004: 23), the fact that a certain act of sexual abuse occurred *in front of women* is what made it 'humiliation' and therefore a violation of the Geneva Convention. Here, the female torturers and the female audience was *what was bad* about what happened at Abu Ghraib because it is special humiliation for a man to be tortured by and in front of a woman. The Fay report all but announces that gender matters in determining the severity of sexual torture. Still, this report is in the minority in official government discourse and was not even intended for release to the general public. The majority of official discourse on the torture at Abu Ghraib omits gender altogether; the minority that mentions gender implies that female torturers and observers add a dimension of severity to the commission of sexual torture in the interrogation process.

IDEAL-TYPE OF MILITARIZED FEMININITY

In the 2003 war in Iraq, the ideal-type of militarized femininity was constituted in the story that the US military told about Jessica Lynch. The Jessica Lynch story was a constructed discourse that lent discursive validation to a subordinating ideal-type. The effects of this construction were far-reaching: news headlines were no longer about the massive damage done to Iraqi cities, or the Iraqi civilians killed in the war. Instead, the USA had a hero(ine) and a cause to continue to fight the war. After all, the USA *needed* to keep fighting to save Jessica Lynch. She became at once a cause for the war, a justification for the war, and the human face of the war. The war was no longer a story of the USA *conquering* Iraq. Instead, it was a story of six courageous men who went deep into enemy territory to save one helpless woman (soldier).

The 2003 war in Iraq gave a name and a face to the Beautiful Soul – a liberated woman, fighting in the war; still feminized, still a victim and still marginalized. The marginalization here may be more subtle, but that subtlety is in itself insidious. After all, Jessica Lynch at first sight *looks like* a woman who is being held equal to (even above) men. It is only by looking deeper that it becomes obvious that this is a twenty-first century reformulation of the traditional understanding of women as the innocent who need to be protected by a war. The appearance of normalcy encourages complacency; complacency allows gender subordination to continue.

That women have the same jobs as men in the American military does not mean that the organization is somehow gender-equal or gender-neutral

(Cockburn 1991; Cockburn and Zarkov 2002). Instead, these women are allowed to participate in a military force still dominated by masculinities. Discourses of gender subordination constitute the self-perpetuating exclusion of women's agency from the political arena. The masculinities that win discursive contests perpetuate the symbolic order by discursive validation. In the US military, the language of sport and sexual domination of the enemy continue, along with the practice of sexualizing warriors (for example, by showing pornographic movies before missions are to be executed) (Enloe 2000: 184). Women became American soldiers in the Gulf War, but they became members of a military that was a men's world, governed by men's behavioral norms (Decosse 1992). A woman soldier, then, is a woman who can make it as a man; not because masculine values have been questioned or changed, but instead because she adopts those masculine values and participates with them, becoming masculine. In this context, masculinity is based on social norms and behaviors more than on biology. If a woman can meet the traditional requirements of masculinity while maintaining her femininity, she is allowed to be a part of fighting a war.

Still, the burden of proof to demonstrate masculine capacity is higher on a woman (who is assumed to be incapable until proven differently, while a man is assumed to be masculine until his masculinity is questioned). D'Amico and Beckman (1995: 8) make the argument that women who succeed in politics do so by *emphasizing* masculine values even more strongly than their male counterparts do, in order to prove their capacity to govern. One explanation for the behavior of women at Abu Ghraib may be their extreme adaptation of the masculine conduct of their male counterparts in the military in order to prove that they fit in with the men. This is not to say that the women involved had no agency, an argument that I will discuss later. Instead, I bring up the possibility of adaptation to explore the question of the socializing effect of the gendered military on its members' gendered behavior (Enloe 2000).

The 2003 war in Iraq demonstrates that the ideal-type of militarized femininity is increasingly sophisticated. The militarized woman is, like the Jessica Lynch story, tough, but not violent like the women at Abu Ghraib. She is brave, but not self-sufficient. She is masculine, but not above femininity. She is frail, but not afraid. She knows how to use a gun, but needs to be rescued when she is not strong enough. She is sexy (like Lynch), but not perverse (like England, Ambuhl and Harman). She can fight and be fought against, but cannot be tortured or inflict torture. She is maternal, but strong. She is a soldier and a participant, but, at bottom, innocent; a Beautiful Soul. The new militarized femininity expects a woman soldier to be as capable as a male soldier, but as vulnerable as a civilian woman.

MILITARIZED FEMININITY AND THE ENEMY

In narratives about the 2003 war in Iraq, the ideal-type of militarized femininity is held in opposition to the enemy, Iraqi masculinity. The abuse of Iraqi men

by female American soldiers highlights the racial dimensions of competition between masculinities.

As Nancy Huston (1983) explains, a narrative is a story; a dominant narrative is history. A dominant narrative is an integral part of war (Huston 1983: 271). The plot of a war narrative includes the *good guys* fighting the *bad guys* for valorous reasons, and, after overcoming extreme hardship and personal suffering, winning the good fight. Dominant narratives of war both serve as models for individual wars and make war possible. Given the role of dominant narratives, 'the actual number of victims – and *a fortiori* their innocence and guilt, are secondary considerations; what counts is the capacity to kill the triumphal narrative of the enemy' (Huston 1983: 273). Women's visible participation in the US war effort and in the prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib was a vital part of the USA's capacity to kill the triumphal narrative of Ba'ath Iraq.

Feminist scholars have repeatedly shown that gender operates at various levels at which it intersects with 'class, ethnicity, race, nationality, and sexuality to produce and reproduce an intricate web of inequalities between and among men and women' (Marchand and Runyan 2000: 8). The war in Iraq was not just between men and women but between Iraq and the USA, a relationship that was in itself fraught with genderings.

The relationship between the USA and Iraq was gendered from the top down. It was a forum for the revitalization of manliness through competitive conquest. More than that, however, it was a competition between masculinities. R. W. Connell (1995) discusses the distinction between hegemonic masculinities and subordinated masculinities, where hegemonic masculinities *feminize* other masculinities in conflict, maintaining their power and control. To *feminize* something or someone is to engage in intentional subordination, because things that are feminized are lower on the social hierarchy of gendered power than things that are neutral or masculine. The most obvious illustration of this is the feminization of a man raped by another man – the man who is raped has not become 'a woman' but has been *feminized* – treated in ways that show the power of the 'masculine' over the 'feminine'. This is not to say that, in the face of multiple masculinities, femininities are singular – quite the opposite – multiple masculinities simply continue to trump femininities in terms of social power. Stories of competing masculinities dominate the global political arena.

In the relationship between the USA and Iraq, each government told stories of emasculation about the other (Elshtain 1992). This kind of story-telling increases the violence in war-fighting and creates abstraction that allows the 'other side' to be considered as less than human (Elshtain 1992; Vaux 1992). Steve Niva (1998) explains that American masculinity here is the standard that is to be met by or enforced on subordinated masculinities in Iraq. In the relationship between the USA and Iraq, 'the contrast between the tough but tender and technologically sophisticated Western man and the hypermacho Arab villain from an inferior civilization owes its considerable pedigree to the discourse of Western superiority that Edward Said called Orientalism' (Niva 1998: 119).

The story of the conflict was not only told in terms of American manliness, but in terms of the victory of American manliness over the mistaken and inferior masculinities of the Iraqi opponent. American masculinity was *winning* over Iraqi masculinity and terrorist masculinity, both of which were inferior. The *masculine* American was a soldier who was fighting terrorists, bestowing democracy and making the world a safer place. The *masculine* Iraqi was a person who, despite the obvious mistakenness of his position, supported both Saddam Hussein and terrorist organizations, in defiance of reason and rationality. American masculinity (courage, benevolence and self-sacrifice) was better than Iraqi masculinity (defiance, lunacy and random violence). This sense of superiority of American masculinity may have created social space to allow the occurrence of the torture, which feminized the inferior masculinity.

Nothing feminizes masculinity like being *beat by a girl*, as the old playground adage explains. The images of the prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib silently tell a story of the ultimate humiliation of Iraqi masculinity because Iraqi men were deprived of their manliness by American women. The result of this social dynamic is pictures of American men and women raping Iraqi men. In studying the wartime rape of women, Judith Gardam (1993: 351) observes that rape remains a part of a (connotative and covert) air of permissibility in the treatment of women in war. Claudia Card (1996: 5) traces passive permissiveness about wartime rape back through ancient times (see also Elsh-tain 1994). Wartime rape has been characterized by feminists as terrorism (Card 1996: 6), aggression (Goldstein 2001: 364), dominance (Card 1996: 7), genetic imperialism (Card 1996: 7), strategy (Hansen 2001: 59), torture (Schott 1996: 23) and gender oppression (Gardam 1993: 363; MacKinnon 1993: 38). Gardam (1993: 363–4) explains that, ‘indeed, feminists have argued that in one sense, rape is never truly individual, but an integral part of the system ensuring the maintenance of the subordination of women’.

As first, it seems doubtful that feminist observations about the community effects of sexual abuse can be translated to the situation at Abu Ghraib. If sexual abuse is directed toward those identified as men, it is not an attack on women. When rape is directed toward men, it is a masculinity, or a group of masculinities, that is being attacked and subordinated. Here, the masculinity being attacked is that of Iraqi men (and, perhaps, of men generally). Male prison guards attacked Iraqi men’s masculinities not only by subjecting them to the torture of (often homosexual) rape but by allowing them to be subjected to torture at the hands of women – feminized by the feminine. Sexual abuse of Iraqi men by American women communicates (whether it was intended to or not) a disdain for Iraqi masculinities so strong that subordinated American femininities are the appropriate tool for their humiliation. Sexual torture is certainly about power, but were it only about power, there are plenty of non-sexual ways to express power over people. Sexual torture is about comparative *sexual power*; here, the sexual power of American masculinities and militarized/masculinized femininities over their understanding of Iraqi masculinities.

The discussion of the ideal-type of militarized femininity and its relationship to the enemy other are characterizations of women in the US military in the 2003 war in Iraq. What they do not describe, however, is the level of agency that the women participating in the war had in shaping both their behavior and their image.

At Abu Ghraib, there were three women soldiers who sexually abused prisoners, and who appeared to take great joy out of that abuse. They interrupt gender stereotypes about war: they are not the peaceful, war resistant, conservative, virtuous or restrained women that just warriors protect from enemies. They are women who likely committed war crimes; *these women* are the prisoners' enemy from whom they (men) need protection. Their story is an interruption of dominant discourses about women's roles generally and about women's roles in wars specifically; this interruption shakes inherited images of women. Therefore, their story is marginalized in political discourse. *It just might change the way that we see women.* Americans cannot hear the story of wantonly violent women; when they hear about the abuse at Abu Ghraib at all, they have to hear it in a way that denies the agency of the women involved.

Whenever the story of these female torturers is presented in mainstream media, it is as a way to *explain away* the possibility that they made a conscious choice to abuse prisoners and photograph it. No accounts of *the possibility* of their guilt appear in mainstream US media. In fact, Lynndie England was denied the right to plead guilty because a court determined that she could have been so manipulated by her boyfriend as to have lost her sense of right and wrong (Candiotti and Polk 2005). We go so far out of our way to excuse these women because current gender stereotypes are incompatible with their existence.

The field of law has been dealing with female offenders (and even sex offenders) for substantially longer than has political science. Law has produced an area of scholarship called feminist criminology in order to analyze the gendered nature of both women's crimes and women's punishment. Lauren Snider (2003: 354) writes about a paradox of gender and agency: assigning agency in a crime situation to a woman corrupts our image of women as both generally and specifically innocent. Where US laws do recognize women's agency in the commission of a crime, sex-role stereotyping is prevalent in the punishment structure for women's crimes (Keitner 2002: 39). This stereotyping is prevalent because a violent woman has committed a double transgression: the crime for which she is being tried and the disregard of a gender stereotype denying her capability to decide to commit such a crime (Keitner 2002: 40).

A woman who can decide to commit a [sexually] violent crime defies the stereotype of female helplessness even more so (Keitner 2002: 75). Instead of acknowledging the falseness of the underlying stereotype, our stories emphasize the singularity of violent women (Shapiro 2000: 427; Keitner 2002: 69). Since

Lizzie Borden,⁵ society at once denies violent women's capacity to commit crimes and demonizes them for having done so (Keitner 2002: 69). This internally contradictory heuristic is inadequate to analyze women's agency in their behavior during violent international conflicts. Instead, a feminist understanding of relational autonomy both sheds light onto the issue of women's agency in their violent behavior and on how to respond to women's violence.

An explication of relational autonomy necessarily begins with Nancy Hirschmann's (1989) understandings of obligation. She explains that obligation, in the liberal sense, is generally discussed as a limit on behavior, a requirement of non-action (Hirschmann 1989: 1227). Most theories of obligation are based on the idea of having consented to those behavioral limitations in some implicitly voluntaristic way, such as by a social contract (Hirschmann 1989: 1228).

Voluntary consent does not work in practical politics. There are many obligations in human lives that people do not choose, actively or passively. Feminisms reach this insight because they see the gender bias in this understanding of how obligation works (Hirschmann 1989: 1228–9). Hirschmann (1989: 1229) is not talking about a gender bias in the application of obligation. Instead, she defines structural gender bias as 'the bias of the very structure of obligation (its being defined solely in voluntarist terms, and the fact that *nonvoluntary obligation* is an oxymoron) toward a masculinist perspective which automatically excludes women from obligation on an epistemological level'.

The classic story of the social contract explains civil society as a protector of natural and individual freedoms. Freedoms perceived to be natural are not always gender-neutral in theory or effect. In an obligatory relationship, the obliged must recognize the obligor but not vice versa (Hirschmann 1989: 1239). Often, in social relationships, women are the obliged and men the obligor, a cycle which has self-perpetuated for much of history. Hirschmann understands that the feminine is obligated to recognize the masculine and the masculine is not obligated to recognize the feminine. Assumed consent to obligation thus becomes insidious and counterproductive, as Hirschmann (1989: 1239) explains, 'consent thus seems to save us from authoritarian coercion. But in reality it merely masks it'. Consent is non-existent for all but the select few. Femininities come to an unfair bargaining table with an unfair bargaining position. Hirschmann (1989: 1239) explains it as a trap where 'even acts of dissent are interpreted as acts of consent, and unfair bargaining positions belie the freedom implicit in free choice'. In this way, voluntarist theories of obligation are complicit in gender subordination and totalitarianism (Hirschmann 1989: 1240).

Hirschmann (1989: 1241) explains that feminisms can help sort out the conceptual mess of political obligation. She explains that a feminist understanding of the function of consent interrogates the assumption that all responsibilities are assumed freely. Instead, feminists see responsibility as *response*, an interactive, sometimes involuntary assumption of obligation. In this spirit, 'a fully consistent consent theory would have to include

(perhaps paradoxically) the recognition that not all obligations are self-assumed' (Hirschmann 1989: 1229). Feminists see obligation as always relational and sometimes coerced. Autonomy can be characterized in terms of freedom of action; relational autonomy is the recognition that freedom of action is defined and limited by political and social relationships.

Relational autonomy does not reject the idea of individual choice, but realizes that choice is not absolute in a world of power disparity (McKenzie and Stolgar 2000: 2). While arguments about the masculine atmosphere in the military, ignorance of international law and the influence of male voices taken as authority provide insight into the atmosphere in which Sabrina Harman, Megan Ambuhl and Lynndie England made their decisions to participate in the abuse and torture of Iraqi prisoners, the tendency to deny them agency in those decisions is one fraught with gender subordination. It is borne out of a discomfort with women's agency in acts of violence, stemming from a stereotype of women as innocent and incapable of violence (Snider 2003). The women soldiers at Abu Ghraib were not only capable of violence, but decided to engage in acts of sexual violence that would normally be characterized as rape. While their acts cannot be divorced from the context in which they were perpetrated, they also cannot be divorced from the perpetrators' agency in committing them (Keitner 2002).

AMERICAN MILITARIZED FEMININITY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

As the US military integrates women into combat positions, the militarization of femininity both in the military and in the media evolves. In their story of Jessica Lynch's capture and rescue, the US military described the ideal-type of the woman soldier: tough, but not violent; brave, but still in need of defense; adept, but still beautiful; a soldier, but still innocent. In our reactions to the abuse at Abu Ghraib, we learn what the woman soldier should not be: sexual or violent. The current ideal type of militarized femininity allows women to participate in war-making and war-fighting, but denies them agency in unwomanly decisions, like those to sexually torture prisoners at Abu Ghraib. Even in a world where constructed womanliness has a strong influence on decision-making, relational autonomy explains that women have agency in their choices. This agency extends to decisions to engage in violence, even sexual violence. While stories of militarized femininity assign little agency to female soldiers, these women's stories are still used as symbolic weapons to destroy the narratives of other, enemy masculinities. Iraqis must have tortured Jessica Lynch; real men do not torture women. The Iraqis tortured at Abu Ghraib were tortured by women; no self-respecting masculinity would stand for that. Narratives of militarized femininity are used to define women soldiers and their enemies; to project American masculinities around the world. The institutional exclusion of women from the United States military may be waning, but the discursive structures of gender subordination

that plague the military and extend to its targets are not disappearing but evolving in the face of that change.

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Notes

- 1 It has come to my attention that my inclination to call the acts at Abu Ghraib torture is not universally shared. Nonetheless, I make a conscious decision to use the word throughout this article, following MacKinnon's (1992) reasoning. Torture is a word of ultimate prohibition; sexualized violence perpetuates sex inequality; sex inequality prevents human equality. Even with MacKinnon's reasoning, however, there is a reasonable case for characterizing this abuse as torture. The UN Convention Against Torture (of which the USA is a member) defines torture as severe pain and suffering, either physical or mental, inflicted to obtain confession, to punish, to coerce or to discriminate by someone in their official capacity. The acts at Abu Ghraib were perpetrated by American soldiers in their official capacity and caused severe physical and mental pain.
- 2 Lynndie England attempted to plead guilty to the charges surrounding Abu Ghraib; a court determined her unable to assess her own guilt. At trial, the court considered the question of whether England knew what she was doing was wrong at the time or whether she was manipulated by the man that she was seeing so she did not have agency in her own actions. Her attempt to plead, and the surrounding questions about her boyfriend's manipulation, appeared in newspapers in the USA fairly consistently during her trial.
- 3 There is not any credible research suggesting a definite figure for the number of women who were imprisoned at Abu Ghraib. The Taguba report includes one incident where a woman was abused, but does not discuss how many women were imprisoned there. A report by the *American Prospect* in February 2005 includes interviews with three women imprisoned at Abu Ghraib. That article suggests that there were around three dozen women at Abu Ghraib, a figure that it presumably obtained from one of the interviews. Still, it does not document a source, and cannot be confirmed.
- 4 Sources reviewed included international newspapers, including the *International Herald Tribune*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, the *Financial Times*, *Prague Monitor*, *Copenhagen Post*, *St Petersburg Times*, *Mexico Daily*, *Santiago Times*, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *East African Herald* and the *Daily Mail and Guardian* (all English versions).
- 5 Lizzie Borden (1860–1927) was an American woman accused of the brutal double murder of her father and stepfather with an axe in 1892. She was acquitted at trial and no one was ever convicted of the crime, but the legacy of her story is in the intensive and sensationalistic news coverage of Lizzie's actions, including accusations of her homosexual erotomania, her psychotic tendencies and other facets of her personality.

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