GENDER UNDER TORTURE:

HOW GENDER SHAPES AND IS SHAPED BY TORTURE

by

MARITA GRONNVOLL

(Under the Direction of Celeste M. Condit)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an examination of media discourses pertaining to torture as an interrogation method in the "war on terrorism." The major focus is the circular relationship between gender and torture. The project scrutinizes the ways that gender norms have influenced perceptions of torture and torture has influenced what are believed to be acceptable gender behaviors. Through an analysis of both news media and popular entertainment television programs, this dissertation explores the implications for linking gender and torture when these concepts are taken up and disseminated through mass media. With the "enemy" in the war on terrorism being described in media and social discourses as demonically brutal, a cultural longing is revealed for a warrior hero who can effectively protect "us" from "them." This new hero is distinctly masculine, remorseful when *forced* to perform actions that cross the line into torture, but, at the same time, unrepentant. As one who fights for the side of good (Judeo-Christianity) against evil (Islam), this new hero is an archetypal messiah. The creation of this new hero in the shape of a messiah effectively guarantees that that shape will not be female. The culturally perceived defectiveness of women physically, morally, and mentally means that they could never rise to the level of messianic saviors. A messianic hero would necessarily recall the

image of Christ, thus requiring this hero to be male. A masculine, messianic hero is portrayed as being in a position to use torture effectively to save the world, but discourses circulating in mass media suggest that this is something women, no matter how professional and well trained, are incapable of. This project analyzes two case studies – prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay – and five American television programs depicting government agents engaged in counterterrorism. Analysis of these texts suggests that cultural space may have been created allowing for the perception of righteous male warriors who commit torture as demonstration of their heroism. Torture is, thus, placed on a hierarchy allowing for its potential legitimization and normalization as practice in the war on terrorism.

INDEX WORDS: Torture; torture and gender; messianic heroes; blood and war; Abu Ghraib; Guantánamo Bay; television heroes; La Femme Nikita; Alias; 24; Sleeper Cell; The Unit

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DEDICATION

To my mother, Sylva Gronnvoll.

Mom, I wish you knew how it all turned out.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project began with moral indignation. As I sat in my tiny apartment in Seattle and stared at the images emerging from Abu Ghraib, my blood began to boil. It was a slow simmer that continued in intensity as I relocated to Georgia to begin my doctoral studies. It wasn't until I sat in a graduate seminar on rhetorical criticism with Dr. Celeste Condit that I realized that these photographs and all they represented would become my life's work. However much the Bush Administration may dissemble, there was never any doubt in my mind that the country of which I am a citizen had endorsed torture of the Arab "other" in the name of "our" safety.

This project combines my two passions: My desire to see justice done by the elimination of torture, and my interest in feminism. I never would've dreamed that I could bring these two together, but thanks to the astounding developments in the "war on terrorism" and the curious obsessions of mass media, I found my niche. It is unfortunate that world events seem to guarantee that I can make a career of studying torture, but here is where I find myself.

I know now what every scholar who came before me knows: This project was not a solo endeavor. First and foremost, I wish to thank my advisor, mentor, and friend Celeste Condit. In more ways than I can ever recount, Celeste has provided a model for me to follow of what a scholar can and should be. I can only hope to live up to the standards she has set, and she makes me want to try. During the year that I was writing this dissertation, life was not easy. Celeste has been every bit the friend to me during that time as she has been my advisor. I have no words to express my gratitude.

I owe special thanks to John Murphy for never failing to bring new bits of information to me that helped me to shape this project, and for just being a good sounding board. I also want to mention Amy Ross for her enthusiastic support of my project, and giving me opportunities to speak across disciplinary boundaries to other like-minded scholars. I also thank the other members of my committee, Roger Stahl and Kelly Happe, for their interest and advice. Other professors at the University of Georgia and elsewhere have also been very helpful over the years. I'm indebted to Bonnie Dow for helping me to see how gender was implicated in the Abu Ghraib scandal, especially gender invisibility regarding the male soldiers. Without her pushing me to look for what was lacking in the media discourses, this project would've never gotten off the ground. And thanks to Vanessa Beasley for helping me to theorize in the early stages of my project.

The list of friends and family I owe my gratitude to are too vast to name them all here, so I'll just mention a few. Jamie Landau has become the kind of friend who will be with me for the rest of my life. I'm so grateful for the hours of conversation, weekly dinners, study dates, and general hanging out. Jamie, you are the other half of my brain, and there's no one in the world quite like you. My old friend Matthew von der Ahe has been a lifeline at those times I was tempted to quit grad school and just pour coffee for a living. I appreciate his willingness to talk about my project for hours even though, as a geologist, he was engaging another language. My sweet friend, Becky Kuehl, one of the "women who wine," what would I have done without you?

My family has been a constant source of support through a very difficult year for us all. With their never-ending encouragement, I was able to stay in Georgia and do my work with a minimum of guilt and anxiety. My family has always rallied around me, and because of them this

dissertation has become something of a family effort. My dad, Kurt, has been the cheerleader I never knew he could be. My big sister, “Rung,” and my little sister, Karina, have shown as much enthusiasm for my work as, at times, I have. I appreciate their eagerness to read work that must’ve seemed dry to them, but which they engaged with their formidable brains. My brothers, Sverre and Steven, have been steadfast in their love and support. The love and care given to my parents by my oldest friend and sister-in-law, Laura, has made it possible for me to sleep at night. And, finally, my mom, whose amazing mind has left a body that continues to weaken, I wish your generation would’ve let you achieve what I know you could have, but that takes nothing away from all you’ve done. I miss you every day.

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INTERROGATING TORTURE

Whoever was tortured, stays tortured.

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There's no such thing as a little bit of torture.

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Introduction

On April 28, 2004, the CBS news program *60 Minutes II* broke the story of prisoner torture at the American controlled Iraqi prison of Abu Ghraib. Photographic images broadcast by the program showed naked Iraqi male prisoners being subjected to a variety of physical abuses and humiliations, many of them clearly in violation of numerous anti-torture treaties and conventions and Muslim sexual taboos. Posed in a number of the photographs were American service men and women smiling into the camera, and in some cases giving cheerful thumbs-up. The photographic evidence from Abu Ghraib suggested that representatives of the liberating force in Iraq were torturing imprisoned Iraqis with seeming impunity. Condemnation by government and press representatives for the actions of those labeled as "the few" was swift. President Bush spoke publicly from the White House on April 30th saying, "I share deep disgust

[1] Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realties*, trans. Sidney Rosenfield and Stella P. Rosenfield (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1980), 34.
[2] Quoted in Rory Kennedy, "Ghosts of Abu Ghraib," (USA: Moxie Firecracker Films, 2007).

that those prisoners were treated the way they were treated. Their treatment does not reflect the nature of the American people. That's not the way we do things in America."[3]

Less than a year later, stories began to be circulated in news media that prisoners were being abused by interrogators of both sexes at the military prison at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. Although no photographs accompanied the reports, vivid verbal descriptions portrayed scenes of interrogations that walked right up to the line of torture and, in the view of many, crossed it. Media and political discourse about Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay did not focus solely on the violations of American ethos and military honor perpetrated by the offending soldiers. Headlines that flooded major newspapers across the country suggested that the gender of some of the perpetrators was of particular relevance to the crime. Lynndie England, a woman soldier who appeared in several of the most notorious Abu Ghraib photographs, was quickly singled out for media attention. "Leasher Gal Lashed with Abuse Rap,"[4] read one headline. "Military Charges Female Reservist,"[5] "Leash Gals's Sex Pix,"[6] "A Woman Apart,"[7] – these headlines are representative of notice drawn to England's identity as a woman. An article that singled out the offending women soldiers was entitled simply "Shameless."[8]

Arguably, Abu Ghraib began a torrent of media discourse about torture that has not subsided. Interestingly, although much media focus was narrowed to the women soldiers at Abu Ghraib, military justice found several of the men to have higher accountability. With a three year sentence handed down at her court-martial, Lynndie England's sentence was eclipsed by

[3] Farah Stockman, "Bush Voices Disgust over Abuse Photos; Threat Is Seen to Iraq Mission," *The Boston Globe*, 1 May 2004.
[4] Matthew Sweeney, Bridget Harrison, and Marsha Kranes, "Leasher Gal Lashed with Abuse Rap as Kin Dig in for Court," *New York Post*, 8 May 2004.
[5] "Military Charges Female Reservist in Abuse of Iraqis," *Deseret Morning News*, May 8 2004.
[6] Vincent Morris and Deborah Orin, "Leash Gal's Sex Pix," *New York Post*, 13 May 2004.
[7] Lynne Duke, "A Woman Apart: For Fellow Soldiers, Lynndie England's Role at Abu Ghraib Is Best Viewed from a Distance," *Washington Post*, 19 September 2004.
[8] Ann Marlowe, "Shameless," *National Review*, May 21, 2004.

sentences of eleven years and seven years given to Charles Graner and Ivan "Chip" Frederick, respectively, who appeared in many of the photographs. Nonetheless, England is the one who one newspaper referred to as "The Face Behind a Nation's Shame."[9] England is the one denounced as "a sadistic she-devil"[10] and referred to as "the poster girl for sexual humiliation and degradation at Abu Ghraib."[11]

The curious gender focal point of news media did not end with Abu Ghraib. In 2005, as stories of torture reached the press regarding the American detention center at Guantánamo Bay, the narrative again centered on the gender of the alleged perpetrators. "Detainees Accuse Female Interrogators,"[12] reported one prominent newspaper, suggesting that the gender of the accused interrogators was a salient part of the report. "Beyond Decency,"[13] declared another headline in an article that took severe exception to the use of women interrogators. A well-known columnist entitled her piece to draw direct attention to the gender of some of the interrogators: "Torture Chicks Gone Wild."[14] Despite months, if not years, of well-supported rumors suggesting prisoners had been tortured at Guantánamo Bay, as well as other American controlled facilities, when women were accused, news headlines screamed with indignation. Reading the news coverage of both Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay raises the question of what was worse, the fact that human beings were treated so abominably by representatives of a super power that is a signatory on numerous international anti-torture conventions, or that the soldiers who perpetrated some of these acts were women.

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[9] Maki Becker, Corky Siemaszko, and Paul HB Shin, "The Face Behind a Nation's Shame," *Daily News*, 7 May 2004.
[10] Becker, Siemaszko, and Shin.
[11] Evan Thomas et al., "Explaining Lynndie England," *Newsweek*, May 15, 2004.
[12] Carol D. Leonnig and Dana Priest, "Detainees Accuse Female Interrogators," *Washington Post*, 10 February 2005.
[13] James Allen et al., *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe, NM: Twin Palms Publishers, 2005).
[14] Maureen Dowd, "Torture Chicks Gone Wild," *New York Times*, 30 January 2005.

In this project, my concern is not solely with the morality of torture, although its blatant immorality is always in my periphery. I take it for granted that most reasonable people would not argue that torture is a good thing in and of itself, however much they may disagree about it as perhaps a necessary evil. My concern, rather, is with the rhetorical force of torture especially as it has become a mechanism by which gender is shaped and understood in United States culture. Simultaneously, gender has become an interpretive tool by which the acceptability of torture is shaped and understood. When torture as an interrogation method, either real or fictionalized, is taken up by mass media its trajectory cannot be contained and the discourses that cluster around it cannot be controlled. Media reports of torture can enhance discourses that tend to reshape notions of acceptable masculinity and femininity. Likewise, the social disciplinary function of mass media can contribute to discourses that use gender norms to absolve some torturers while condemning others. My major focus in this dissertation is the circular relationship between gender and torture. In other words, I am interested in the ways that gender norms have influenced perceptions of torture and torture has influenced what are believed to be acceptable gender behaviors.

Through an analysis of both news media and popular entertainment television programs, this dissertation will explore the implications for linking gender and torture when these concepts are taken up and disseminated through mass media. This analysis will be organized around a key research question, namely, how has mass media discourse about torture as an interrogation method been shaped by, and contributed to the reshaping of, gender? I will consider several dimensions of this issue: How have news stories of torture condemned policies that allow for torture as an interrogation method while simultaneously serving as a social disciplinary tool for women who violate gender norms by participating as torturers? In the area of entertainment

media, how has torture come to be used as common story lines in popular television programs that serve to redefine masculinity and femininity? How has masculinity been reshaped so as to include torture as an acceptable action of those who wear the mantle of hero and savior?

This introductory chapter is organized as follows: First, I will justify my study of torture. Why, in the 21st century, when the barbaric ways of the past have been reportedly abandoned, is there a problem of torture? And how have gender norms come to be knitted into this topic? What is unique about the current world conflict that arguably began with the portentous date of September 11, 2001? Second, I will justify my use of gender as a theoretical construct for this dissertation. Feminists and gender theorists argue compellingly that gender roles are deeply embedded and inescapable. Rules of gender control nearly every aspect of life, whether or not we are conscious of it, and that now includes the acceptability of torture as an interrogation method. Third, I will justify my attention to mass media texts. While it is not my position that mass media serves a top-down hegemonic function in Western society, there is no denying the power and place of mass media in U.S. life. Much like gender roles, mass media is deeply embedded in all facets of Western culture and inescapable. Therefore, trends in media are a commentary about society generally. Fourth, I will address the question of defining torture. Since the U.S. became embroiled in the "new paradigm" of this "war on terrorism," questions that never used to be public questions are being raised and debated by politicians, scholars, and activists. Questions such as: What is torture? Is it something that a civilized people should engage in? Regarding both of these questions, I would add a further question: What is at stake in asking either of these questions in the first place? Finally, I will briefly discuss my method of analysis, and then preview the upcoming chapters of this dissertation.

I turn now to the question of the historic moment we now face that makes possible the question of torture, the construction of a masculine savior, and the suppression of women who would be, but, according to prevailing cultural mythologies, can never be, saviors.

A "War of Ideas"

The Bush administration has made the point on several occasions that September 11, 2001 introduced a "new paradigm" of modern warfare.[15] This paradigm, the administration claims, is marked by terrorists who blend into civilian populations, do not wear uniforms, claim no national allegiance, and have as their solitary goal the murder of innocents. Prevailing against these "enemy combatants" requires, according to the president, winning the "war of ideas."[16] Indeed, the Bush administration's phrase gained much traction in the weeks and months following September 11th with numerous newspaper editorialists expounding the importance of winning the "war of ideas."[17] The two sides delineated in this war were the American ideals of love, tolerance, and preservation of human life against the terrorists' perceived commitment to hatred, intolerance, and a culture of death. Similar to any conflict between nations, portraying the enemy as brutal, unreasoning, and animalistic is necessary as a justification for killing "him."[18] Consequently, it is not new that many of the issues that contributed to the attacks on September 11th were so simplified. But several things about this conflict are new. For one thing, women represented a significant portion of those enlisted in the military branches of service, and this is consequential when engaging an enemy of a culture where women are expected to maintain

[15] Alberto R. Gonzales, "Decision Re Application of the Geneva Convention on Prisoners of War to the Conflict with Al Qaeda and the Taliban," ed. White House Counsel (2002). Reprinted in Mark Danner, *Torture and Truth: America, Abu Ghraib, and the War on Terror* (New York: New York Review Books, 2004), 83.
[16] George W. Bush, "National Strategy for Combating Terrorism," ed. White House (U.S. Government, 2003), 2.
[17] See, for example, "Our Stories Can Win War of Ideas," *Grand Rapid Press*, 20 October 2001; "More in the War of Ideas," *Washington Post*, 28 December 2001; and "The War of Ideas," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 1 January 2002.
[18] See Sam Keen, *Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986).

severely limited roles. But a second and even more important difference in the conflict for which September 11th was a continuation is that a clash of ideologies became evident. I would argue that September 11th marked a date where the war between Judeo-Christian and Muslim ideologies took center stage.

Those who spoke for al Qaeda made no attempt to obfuscate regarding their motivations. Following the deaths of several al Qaeda members in Pakistan, the movement's leader, Osama bin Laden, issued an explicit exhortation:

> We hope that these brothers are among the first martyrs in Islam's battle in this era against the new Christian-Jewish crusade led by the big crusader Bush under the flag of the Cross; this battle is considered one of Islam's battles. We incite our Muslim brothers in Pakistan to give everything they own and are capable of to push the American crusade forces from Invading Pakistan and Afghanistan.[19]

Meanwhile, President Bush assured his worldwide audiences early and often that the United States had no quarrel with Islam. In a pivotal speech delivered just nine days after the attacks on New York and Washington, Bush spoke directly to his Muslim audience:

> We respect your faith. It's practiced freely by many millions of Americans, and by millions more in countries that America counts as friends. Its teachings are good and peaceful, and those who commit evil in the name of Allah blaspheme the name of Allah. The terrorists are traitors to their own faith, trying, in effect, to hijack Islam itself. The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends; it is not our many Arab friends. Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them.[20]

This expression of respect for Islam became a common refrain for the president, and over the years he has stayed on point. But other voices were not so circumspect. A number of prominent media and religious figures stepped into the fray following September 11th and argued for an interpretation of the conflict as Judeo-Christianity against Islam. In an op-ed piece in the *Boston Globe*, the writer acknowledged that,

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[19] Stephan Salisbury, "Word 'Crusade' Raises Specter of Superpower Holy War against Islamic World," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 30 September 2001.
[20] George W. Bush, "Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People," *White House* (2001), www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/print/20010920-8.html

> Of course Islam should not be gratuitously insulted. But neither should it be sugar-coated or kowtowed to. Yet too many Western elites are unwilling to speak plainly about the problems within Islam itself, or to hold Muslim culture to what should be universal standards of decency and justice.[21]

This writer's implicit suggestion is that Judeo-Christian culture contains no prevailing problems, and that it is in a position to dictate "universal standards of decency and justice." He further notes, "We do Muslims no favors by excusing attitudes or practices that ought always to be deemed inexcusable."[22] The writer does not specify who "we" is in this sentence. It may be Americans, but it is certainly *not* Muslim Americans who appear to be part of the problem of Islam generally. Another editorial disputes the notion that democracy mitigates "Islamofascism" (a term that came into vogue in 2002 and has not retreated). This editorial asks the question, "If Muslims in democratic societies are inherently less radicalized than the fundamentalist or dictatorial regimes in the Muslim world, then why is Europe seething with radical Muslims?"[23] The article implies throughout that there is a shortcoming inherent in Islam, which is apparently absent in its Judeo-Christian counterpart, which makes it immune to the palliative of democracy.

Several conservative media pundits with large audience followings added to the prominent strain of media criticism of Islam that had begun to emerge. Conservative radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh, who commands a daily audience of millions,[24] proclaimed his viewpoint in 2007 that American Muslims represent a danger to the country. His interpretation of a Pew Research Center study is that,

> Muslims in America are not so different from their co-religionists around the world. In fact, their viewpoints are pretty much the same as that of their religious counterparts around the world, and getting more extreme with age and American upbringing.[25]

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[21] Jeff Jacoby, "A War of Values, Not Religion," *Boston Globe*, 6 November 2005.
[22] Jacoby.
[23] "Muslims and Democracy," *Washington Times*, 22 July 2005.
[24] "Latest Top Host Figures," *Talkers Magazine Online* (2005), http://www.talkers.com/talkhosts.htm
[25] Rush Limbaugh, "American Muslims Not Moderating," (2007), http://www.rushlimbaugh.com/home/daily/site_052307/content/01125110.guest.html

Limbaugh goes on to claim that the "Drive-By-Media in concert with the Democrat Party" has produced news headlines and stories that falsely claim that American Muslims are moderate and mainstream. Why? In order to keep people from understanding "that Bush is right about the threat that we face from Islamofascists." Michael Savage, host of the popular nationally syndicated rightwing radio show *Savage Nation,* which ranks just below Limbaugh and Sean Hannity in audience size,[26] claimed that only when he sees Muslim extremists "hanging from lampposts in the entire Middle East…with their guts hanging out, then I'll believe that there's a difference between radical Islam and the rest of Islam over there."[27] Meanwhile, conservative commentator and author Ann Coulter, whose books frequently appear on bestsellers lists, decried the notion of Islam as a religion of peace "for at least 3,000 reasons right off the top of my head."[28] In Coulter's estimation, Islam is a "car-burning cult" and not a "real religion," as personified by Catholicism and Protestantism.

If conservative media commentators hinted at the failings of Islam in comparison to Christianity, some evangelical religious leaders in the U.S. were not so subtle. In responding to reports from Guantánamo Bay that interrogators there had desecrated the Quran, one pastor in North Carolina posted a sign in front of his church reading: "The Koran needs to be flushed."[29] The pastor defended his actions by saying, "I don't hate Muslims, I just hate their false doctrines."[30] This pastor was not the first to negatively compare Islam to Christianity. Not long after the 9/11 attacks, televangelist Pat Robertson used his television show the *700 Club* to proclaim that Islam "is not a peaceful religion that wants to coexist. They want to coexist until

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[26] "Latest Top Host Figures."
[27] Michael Savage, "Savage: No Difference between 'Radical Islam and the Rest of Islam over There'," *Media Matters for America* (2004), http://mediamatters.org/items/200406250006
[28] Ann Coulter, "Calvin and Hobbes - and Muhammad," *anncoulter.com* (2006), www.anncoulter.com/cgi-local/printer_friendly.cgi?article=99
[29] Paul Nowell, "N.C. Church Stands by Sign Saying Quran 'Should Be Flushed'," *Associated Press*, 24 May 2005.
[30] Nowell.

they can control, dominate and then, if need be, destroy."[31] A spokesperson for the *700 Club* defended Robertson's comments saying, "To deny that the Koran promotes violence to many followers would be to deny the truth."[32]

Robertson was not the only evangelical to express a view that demonized Islam, while simultaneously expressing an amnesiac version of the rise of Christianity. Reverend Jerry Falwell joined the chorus of voices when he referred to Mohammed as a "terrorist" and the "Reverend Franklin Graham, who spoke at Bush's inauguration, has called Islam 'evil.'"[33] Televangelist Rod Parsley, who has endorsed John McCain's candidacy,[34] condemned Islam as being responsible for "more pain, more bloodshed and more devastation than nearly any other force on Earth."[35] Parsley has written extensively on the "war between Islam and Christian civilization," and claims that "America was founded, in part, with the intention of seeing this false religion destroyed, and I believe September 11, 2001, was a generational call to arms that we can no longer ignore."[36]

Conservative activists, who staunchly backed President Bush in nearly everything else, took issue with his characterization of Islam as a religion of peace. Kenneth Adelman, a former Reagan official argued, "The more you examine the religion, the more militaristic it seems. After all, its founder, Mohammed, was a warrior, not a peace advocate like Jesus."[37] Eliot Cohen of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies suggested that, "Nobody would like

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[31] Sonja Barisic, "Pat Robertson Describes Islam as Violent Religion That Wants to Dominate, Destroy," *Associated Press*, 22 February 2002.
[32] Barisic.
[33] Dana Milbank, "Conservatives Dispute Bush Portrayal of Islam as Peaceful," *Washington Post*, 30 November 2002.
[34] James Nash, "Can McCain Be Mr. Right?" *Columbus Dispatch*, 9 March 2008.
[35] Dennis A. Mahoney, "Higher Aspirations," *Columbus Dispatch*, 21 August 2005.
[36] David Corn, "McCain's Spiritual Guide: Destroy Islam," *Mother Jones* (2008), http://www.motherjones.com/washington_dispatch/2008/03/john-mccain-rod-parsley-spiritual-guide.html
[37] Milbank.

to think that a major world religion has a deeply aggressive and dangerous strain in it."[38] Activist Paul Weyrich, one of the co-founders of the conservative Heritage Foundation, insisted that,

> Islam is at war against us…[O]ne thing that concerned me before September 11th and concerns me even more now is [the Bush] administration's constant promotion of Islam as a religion of peace and tolerance just like Judaism or Christianity. It is neither.[39]

Like the editorialist quoted above, Weyrich's use of "us" is clearly not all inclusive, and his characterization of the conflict seems to be that of Christianity, or Judeo-Christianity, against Islam, with Islam acting as the aggressor. Chief Justice Roy Moore of the Alabama Supreme Court, who gained a great deal of press attention, and public support, for his refusal to remove a granite sculpture of the Ten Commandments from his courthouse, insisted that "This is not a nation established on the principles of Buddha or Hinduism. Our faith is not Islam. What we follow is not the Koran, but the Bible. This is a Christian nation."[40] Graham's words suggest that he speaks for a segment of the American population that he believes to be the only legitimate voice of America. His use of "we" is explicitly contrasted to those who do not adhere to biblical tenets, especially Muslims. All of these public figures, many of them leaders in their religious communities, drew sharp lines of the sides in the battle being waged. All suggested that this is not a secular "war of ideas," but rather a war between religious ideologies and those who adhere to them.

In vocal opposition to his supporters, President Bush has, for the most part, showed remarkable restraint in his secular language with regard to Islam. As noted above, he repeatedly reminded his audience that the war was against Islamic extremists not Islam as a religion. Despite these reassurances of tolerance and attempts to distance the conflict from motivations based upon incompatible religious views, Bush's words have at times suggested the opposite. On

[38] Milbank.
[39] Milbank.
[40] Nat Hentoff, "Making America a Christian Nation," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, 18 February 2002.

a number of occasions, for example, Bush has characterized the enemy using the language of the pulpit such as "evil-doers" whose "only motivation is evil."[41] He has also made it clear that, in his view, this is a war in which "God is not neutral," suggesting the U.S. has divine backing.[42]

In the days following September 11th, in which the president was forced often to speak without a script, he referred to the war as a "crusade." "This is a new kind of evil," he noted. "And the American people are beginning to understand. This crusade, this war on terrorism, is going to take awhile."[43] A White House spokesperson was quick with assurances that the president was not equating the current conflict to the centuries-long war between Christians and Muslims for the Holy Land in which many thousands of Muslims were massacred by Christian armies. But whether by accident or by design, the president's use of this word suggested to Muslims internationally that this war bore the earmarks of a religious one.[44] As the years went by, Bush drew criticism from those who objected to his constant referencing of terrorism as "Islamic." As one editorialist noted, "the United States, in condemning IRA terrorism in Northern Ireland or Basque terrorism in Spain, does not describe it as 'Catholic terrorism,' a phrase that Catholics around the world would likely find offensive."[45]

Notwithstanding the president's public verbal restraint, despite his occasional inadvertent remark, enough public voices were raised that suggested a prominent cultural strain that identified the conflict as a battle of religious ideologies. With as many as a billion people worldwide claiming membership in Islam, a formidable "enemy" takes shape. This enemy is portrayed as so fearsome, brutal, and animalistic that it would take a prodigious set of weapons

[41] Martin Walker, "Bush: Anti-Terror Campaign 'Good Versus Evil'," *United Press International*, 25 September 2001.
[42] Bush, "Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People."
[43] Salisbury.
[44] Salisbury.
[45] Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Do These Two Things Have Anything in Common?" *Washington Post*, 4 December 2005.

to protect "us" from "them." A new kind of enemy required a new kind of hero. In a fight that symbolically pits one "God" against another, an ordinary mortal will not do. Vice President Cheney said as much when interviewed on the NBC program *Meet the Press* shortly after 9/11.

> We also have to work, though, sort of the dark side, if you will. We've got to spend time in the shadows in the intelligence world. If you're going to deal only with the sort of officially approved, certified good guys, you're not going to find out what the bad guys are doing. You need to be able to penetrate these organizations.[46]

Cheney's description of this new hero is that of men (note "good *guys*") who are able to traverse moral boundaries in the name of the greater good but who remain immune to the vortex of the "dark side." It is men like this for whom the passage of the 2005 anti-torture Detainee Treatment Act was seen as something that "may tie [their] hands."[47] As I will argue in this dissertation, this new hero is distinctly masculine, remorseful when *forced* to perform actions that cross the line into torture, but, at the same time, unrepentant. He is sure of himself and his judgment and willing to do the unthinkable for the greater good. As one who fights for the side of good (Judeo-Christianity) against evil (Islam), this new hero is an archetypal messiah.

The creation of this new hero in the shape of a messiah effectively guarantees that that shape will not be female. The culturally perceived defectiveness of women "physically, morally, and mentally" means that they could never rise to the level of messianic saviors. A messianic hero would necessarily recall the image of Christ, thus requiring this hero to be male. As feminist scholar and theologian Rosemary Rather Ruether notes, Christ's maleness was not coincidental "but an ontological necessity. Just as Christ has to be incarnated in a male, so only can the male represent Christ."[48] In this paradigm, women cannot fill the role of the new hero. But as

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[46] Ken Herman, "Bush Urges Americans to Return to Work as Nation Awaits Market Reaction," *Cox News Service*, 16 September 2001.
[47] Morton M. Kondracke, "McCain Amendment Goes Too Far Barring Coercive Interrogations," *Roll Call*, 15 December 2005.
[48] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 106.

American women make up a large portion of the armed forces, they must be accommodated, and their presence must be endorsed. If "we" are to be different from "them," women must be allowed to achieve at least the appearance of equality. But even with this patina of equanimity, as I will argue, they must be kept under strict control. Because when women are not controlled, as media reporting of Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay suggests, their "dangerous" sexuality is uncontained, and is often displayed in their misuse of torture. A masculine, messianic hero is portrayed as being in a position to use torture effectively to save the world, but discourses circulating in mass media suggest that this is something women, no matter how professional and well trained, are incapable of.

This claim of gendered uses of torture provides a segue into my next section where I will explore more fully the place of gender in society and, now, its place in establishing who may righteously perform torture.

Tortured Gender

That torture operates under rules of gender will come as little surprise to gender scholars. As R. W. Connell notes in his work on masculinity, gender "is configuring of practice however we slice the social world, whatever unit of analysis we choose."[49] In other words, gender is ubiquitous, including in practices of torture. In mass media, gender determines who makes an appropriate victim of torture and who may perpetrate it without being subject to social disciplinary action. Torture has even been articulated, in some discourses, as an undesirable but necessary weapon in battling terrorism, but when it is carried out by a woman the gender of the perpetrator tends to exacerbate the societal judgment she will receive, and remove from consideration any argument of the ends justifying the means. A man, on the other hand, may not

[49] R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, Second ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 72.

be willing to have his actions as a torturer made public, but if they are, he is relatively certain to escape condemnation *as a man*. In short, what was once an unthinkable taboo in U.S. culture is now thinkable provided there is no disruption of gender codes.

At this point, it would be helpful for me to briefly discuss what I mean by "rules of gender," and gender itself particularly, as research in this area will provide the theoretical underpinnings for this project.

Judith Butler describes gender as performativity. In her work, she argues persuasively that gender is not a *being* it is a *doing*. The performance of gender constitutes an identity that it claims to be. In other words, what one does – wearing a dress, putting on make-up, being sexually attracted to men – determines what one is – a woman. But there is no essential connection between the doing and the being. As Butler notes, "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results."[50] Butler explains that through constant repetition, performances of gender become naturalized and unquestioned, and deviance from the performance can subject one to social discipline. As John Sloop points out, in publicized cases where individuals have attempted to trouble gender by shunning its essentialized markers (e.g., Brandon Teena, David Reimer, Calpurnia Adams, etc.), there has been an inevitable effort to position these cases "within the larger body of public argument as aberrations in nature's plan and hence [that effort] worked to reify dominant assumptions about human bodies and sexual desire."[51] Although gender is a performance, it does not follow that the performance is always conscious or that everyone is always free to pick up and drop gender markers. As Judith Halberstam notes, "…we are embedded in gender relations, and gender relations are embedded

[50] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 33.
[51] John M. Sloop, *Disciplining Gender: Rhetorics of Sex Identity in Contemporary US Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 2.

within us, to the point where gender feels inescapable."[52] Within a bi-gender system, which the U. S. shares with most of the world, there is little allowance for behavior that troubles gender norms.

While it is the case that both women and men "do gender," it seems that discussion of gender tends to focus exclusively on women as if the words "woman" and "gender" are synonymous and men are free of gender performance. Connell discusses the opposition of masculinity and femininity where "masculinity is the unmarked term, the place of symbolic authority. The phallus is the master-signifier, and femininity is symbolically defined by lack."[53] As Simone de Beauvoir observed over 50 years ago in the introduction of her groundbreaking feminist text, *The Second Sex*, "A man would never get the notion of writing a book on the peculiar situation of the human male. But if I wish to define myself, I must first of all say: 'I am a woman'; on this truth must be based all further discussion."[54] Women are always uniquely gendered, Beauvoir argues, whereas men can think of themselves apart from their gender. I take this argument a step further and suggest that it seems to be exceptionally difficult to discuss men and their actions in terms of gender.

Michael S. Kimmel, whose work on masculine studies is widely referenced by gender scholars, echoes both Beauvoir and Connell when he writes of manhood being invisible and "endowed with a transcendental, almost mythic set of properties that …keep it invisible."[55] Sandra Bem discusses the positioning of men as "the universal person" as "androcentrism." This term locates "males at the center of the universe looking out at reality from behind their own

[52] Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 119.
[53] Connell, 70.
[54] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), xxi.
[55] Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, Second ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3.

eyes and describing what they see from an egocentric – or androcentric – point of view."[56] The androcentric point of view is what Donna Haraway describes as the "god trick," or the claim to see "everything from nowhere."[57] Masculinity, then, is understood as essential to biological males but is unsituated, transcendent, and invisible.

Despite the common view that masculinity is an authentic and inseparable part of what it is to be male, masculinity, like femininity, is constantly policed and subject to discipline. As Kimmel points out: "Manhood is neither static nor timeless. Manhood is not the manifestation of an inner essence; it's socially constructed. Manhood does not bubble up to consciousness from our biological constitution; it is created in our culture."[58] This being the case, masculinity must follow rules of gender if it is to maintain its primacy and invisibility. For example, the male soldiers implicated in torture at Abu Ghraib broke many laws and rules, but they did not break gender rules. As I will argue in later chapters, they did not pose in sexually suggestive positions with naked Iraqi prisoners, nor did they allow themselves to be captured on film being dominated by women. As a result, their gender went completely unremarked upon in subsequent media discourses. The American women, on the other hand, did break rules of gender. They were caught on film sexually dominating men – albeit racialized "others." And Lynndie England especially was seen as flaunting male signifiers – in both her appearance and in her aggressive sexuality. Consequently, much of the public discourse served the function of disciplining the women of Abu Ghraib, not for breaking military and international laws, but for violating gender norms.

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[56] Sandra Lipsitz Bem, *The Lenses of Gender: Transforming the Debate on Sexual Inequality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 42.
[57] Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies*, 14, (1988), 581.
[58] Kimmel.

In sum, people use gender, consciously or unconsciously, to organize numerous things in the world – from the right clothes to wear to the right cars to buy to the right sort of bodies to sacrifice in times of war. Gender is also used to determine who can torture and who can be tortured. When torture discourses are picked up and disseminated by mass media they open many avenues for discussion and debate. For example, mass media and public discourses of Abu Ghraib could have focused exclusively on the breakdown of discipline and lack of training of the soldiers implicated. It could have probed into whether or not military intelligence command ordered the torture. It could have focused on the overall moral question of whether or not torture is something the United States should ever allow as part of its policy. But by and large the focus was on the gender performance of the perpetrators of the torture, especially Lynndie England.

This peculiar attention to gender did not end with Abu Ghraib. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, in 2005 much attention was devoted to the gender performance of women interrogators at Guantánamo Bay. Interrogations had been going on in Guantánamo long before 2005, and have continued since. There is a great deal of evidence that prisoners at this American military detention center have been tortured.[59] Nonetheless, when women were implicated in the torture of prisoners, it warranted sustained media coverage. Popular entertainment media, too, has picked up torture as a topic du jour. Torture is depicted in many popular television programs not just as something the villains do, but as something heroes engage in. The morality of torture is simplified by depicting the heroes (Americans) as never making a mistake when a victim of torture is selected. They always get the mastermind and they always get results in the form of accurate and lifesaving information. This despite Aristotle's time honored pronouncement that information obtained under torture is unreliable and ought not

[59] See Michael Ratner and Ellen Ray, *Guantánamo: What the World Should Know* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 2004).

to be used as a source of invention.[60] In popular media's depictions, torture is effective. It is rarely dismissed as an unqualified evil that should never be entertained or entertaining. Rather, it has become one of the markers that our culture uses to define a heroic man and a disturbed woman.

In the following section I will justify my examination of mass media as I explore discourses of torture. It is fair to claim that none of the torture cases that rose to public attention after 9/11 would have done so without the assistance of mass media. But my focus is to suggest that, rather than objectively reporting the harsh facts, mass media played a vital role in using narratives of torture to reify and redefine gender.

Torture and Mass Media

In her pioneering work, *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry argues that torture robs the victim of language and agency. The pain inflicted upon the body is so great that it has the effect of "utterly nullify[ing] the claims of the world."[61] Torture "unmakes" the prisoner's world as it simultaneously makes the interrogator's world. Scarry argues that the prisoner's pain becomes the interrogator's power. She writes that "the larger the prisoner's pain…the larger the interrogator's world."[62] Put differently, the interrogator's power over the prisoner is total and the prisoner is at the complete mercy of the interrogator. Scarry writes about the immorality of torture in universal terms, and it is difficult to disagree with her assessment of torture as an unequivocal moral evil. Indeed, it is not my project to disagree with Elaine Scarry's evaluation of torture. There are perhaps few things in contemporary foreign policy that are more despicable

[60] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, trans. George A. Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 115.
[61] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 33.
[62] Scarry, 37.

than the attempts made by sovereign powers to find ways to "legally" torture those who are viewed as the enemy. Nonetheless, taking a position of universal condemnation of torture does not help us to understand why it is debated by philosophers and legal scholars alike as a viable method of interrogation.[63] It does not help us to understand why cases like Abu Ghraib, while receiving much denunciation from editorialists and politicians, do not rise to the level of national scandal. And even the denunciation about Abu Ghraib – which was widespread – was often more about *who* was doing the torturing than it was about the act of torture itself as a collective taboo. Focusing on and dismissing torture as unacceptable also does not help us to understand why it has become an accepted practice of some fictional characters in entertainment media – such as several extremely popular television shows – characters who are then lauded as heroes.

To understand the issues that escape understanding when torture is viewed through the lens of universal moral evil, it is helpful to consider two areas that are outside the scope of Elaine Scarry's project, namely, mass media and gender. Mass media involves not only talking about torture but, in many cases, actually seeing it. Scarry acknowledges that witnessing torture would have a profound effect on anyone. She notes that,

> Almost anyone looking at the physical act of torture would be immediately appalled and repulsed by the torturers. It is difficult to think of a human situation in which the lines of moral responsibility are more starkly or simply drawn, in which there is a more compelling reason to ally one's sympathies with the one person and to repel the claims of the other.[64]

Scarry's hypothetical reference to witnessing the act of torture is not one that she expounds upon. Instead, she writes about torture as an abstraction. Her descriptions of interrogations, often brutal, take place as if in a vacuum. These interrogations are closed state secrets; only the

[63] See, for example, Sanford Levinson, ed., *Torture: A Collection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Here, the pros and cons and torture as an interrogation method are debated primarily by legal scholars, such as Alan Dershowitz.
[64] Scarry, 35.

interrogator, the prisoner, and the authorial voice are present in the torture sessions that Scarry describes and discusses. There is no observer to these acts of torture and, with the exception of her case studies, the prisoners and interrogators are gender neutral. Mass media coverage of torture, such as the widely circulated photographs from Abu Ghraib, and the inundation of torture story lines in popular entertainment media, give us the opportunity to be observers, to look "at the physical act of torture."

Mass media makes possible what Foucault argued disappeared with prison reform, namely, torture as a public spectacle.[65] Evidence suggests that the magnitude with which the spectacle of torture appalls or repulses can increase or decrease depending upon who is perpetrating the spectacle and who is victimized by it. Mass media takes a material reality, the pain and inhumanity of torture experienced by the victim, and offers that experience up for reinterpretation to the world at large. Mass media provides organizing frames by which to categorize experience.[66] J. R. Macnamara notes that media offers an abundance of representations "about the way things are, can be or should be."[67] Despite the excess of narratives available for consumption, research by media scholars suggests that audiences are not passive recipients. Rather, as Fred J. Fejes suggests, audience members are active and "selectively [attend] to different aspects of media programming."[68] In other words, audiences may be influenced by media messages, but do not necessarily unreflexively adopt narratives that are counter to their existing worldviews.

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[65] See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).
[66] Sherrie A. Inness, *Tough Girls: Women Warriors and Wonder Women in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 53.
[67] J. R. Macnamara, *Media and Male Identity: The Making and Remaking of Men* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 13.
[68] Fred J. Fejes, "Masculinity as Fact," in *Men, Masculinity, and the Media*, ed. Steve Craig (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992), 20.

It is not my assumption, as I make my arguments, that mass media is a kind of all-powerful Hydra that is solely responsible for setting ideological and cultural agendas that the rest of us follow blindly. Rather, my underlying assumption is that mass media both reflects and reifies the dominant culture of which it is a part. In taking this position, I agree with media scholar Pippa Norris who writes: "The frame for the mainstream U.S. media can be expected to reflect and reinforce the dominant frame in U.S. culture."[69] With the help of mass media, audiences can take previously inconceivable cruelties and taboos, as torture once was, and reinterpret them. Often, that involves simplifying complex situations, and ignoring some "truths" in favor of new "truths." It also involves overlaying old, established rules – such as entrenched gender codes – on new situations in order to decipher them.

It is safe to claim that much torture perpetrated by governments around the world probably takes place just as Scarry describes it – away from the prying lens of mass media. The U.S. program of extraordinary rendition, for example, depends upon the secrecy of third party regimes in order to shield its own complicity in participating in torture. But as the United States grows and spreads as a super power, and as technology outpaces imperialism, it is increasingly difficult to ensure that acts of torture will remain shielded from civilian eyes.[70] The photographs that captured the torture of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib were not the work of seasoned photojournalists. Rather, they were the product of digital cameras operated by the very perpetrators of the torture. All it took was slipping a computer disk to the right person, and the Abu Ghraib images were reproduced to the nth degree for every news media outlet and blogger

[69] Pippa Norris, "News of the World," in *Politics and the Press: The News Media and Their Influences*, ed. Pippa Norris (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997), 277.

[70] The recent execution of Saddam Hussein for crimes against humanity is an excellent illustration of this point. One witness is alleged to have smuggled a camera phone to the gallows, and the video was available on the Internet almost immediately. The ensuing outcry even served to turn the convicted mass murderer into a martyr in some Middle Eastern countries. See Hassan N. Fattah, "Images of Hanging Make Hussein a Martyr to Many," *New York Times*, 6 January 2007.

that wanted them. One thing mass media gives us is the ability to be eyewitnesses to torture no matter where it occurs in the world, and even when it does not actually occur, such as in the case of fictionalized depictions of torture. And the visual image has a great deal of power to influence.

In their work on iconic images, Robert Hariman and John Lucaites argue that publics are created by images that interpellate them into being. They note that the "widely disseminated visual image provides the public audience with a sense of shared experience that anchors the necessarily impersonal character of public discourse in the motivational ground of social life."[71] Hearing about or reading about the Abu Ghraib investigation did not prompt public or press indignation. But seeing the photographs made Abu Ghraib *the* story of 2004, perhaps even the story of the Iraq war. Seeing the images of brutalized prisoners offers an experience once removed from witnessing the actual event. Likewise, seeing torture depicted on fictionalized television programs can give a sense of witnessing a spectacle, especially as producers go to great lengths to make television drama as real as possible. Viewers may only be witnessing the "desert of the real," as Baudrillard terms it,[72] but for many regular viewers of popular television programming this simulacrum is more real than reality could ever be. For example, early in the 2008 presidential campaign, GOP candidates frequently referenced Jack Bauer, the fictional hero on the popular television program *24*, prompting one news paper headline to ask facetiously, "Do GOP candidates realize *24* is just a TV show?"[73]

If it is true that media "reflects and reinforces" dominant frames, then it is the case that gender norms are upheld by mass media depictions. This is likely a rather uncontroversial argument. It is a rare occurrence that mass media "stirs the waters" by interrogating typically

[71] Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, "Performing Civic Identity: The Iconic Photograph of the Flag Raising on Iwo Jima," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 88, (2002), 365.
[72] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1.
[73] "Do GOP Candidates Realize *24* Is Just a TV Show?" *Grand Rapid Press*, 24 May 2007.

unquestioned gender performances. It is another thing altogether for me to claim that media aids and abets in the construction of torture as a normative behavior connected to masculinity, and supported by a war of ideologies albeit, at times, unacknowledged. But this is my claim as I go forward into this dissertation.

In the next section, I deal with an issue that has received a great deal of attention by members of the press, politicians, legal theorists, and academics, namely, the question of defining torture. From that question, inevitably arises a second: Are there occasions justifying "our" practice of torture? While I resist answering either of these questions, I must acknowledge the debate, especially as it pertains to a question of my own: What is at stake in asking either of these questions in the first place?

Dangerous Questions

In his book, *Discipline and Punish,* Michel Foucault writes of a time in Western culture (as typified by France) when public torture and execution were common spectacles. Public torture was a right of the people that both they and their rulers jealously guarded. The people participated in public torture and executions by gathering in support of the ruling power. Their display of zeal to see punishment carried out made them, in a sense, an arm of the state. People expected to witness the carrying out of the condemned prisoner's sentence, no matter how cruel or brutal it was. Foucault notes that, "The right to be witnesses was one that they possessed and claimed…The people claimed the right to observe the execution and to see who was being executed…The people also had a right to take part."[74]

[74] Foucault, 58.

Foucault writes that the public nature of early disciplinary systems was considered to be necessary. Public torture and executions gave the sovereign the opportunity to demonstrate power and authority over those "he" dominated. Foucault writes:

> [I]n a penality employing public torture and execution, example was the answer to the crime; it had, by a sort of twin manifestation, to show the crime and at the same time to show the sovereign power that mastered it; in a penality calculated according to its own effects, example must refer back to the crime, but in the most discreet way possible and with the greatest possible economy indicate the intervention of power.[75]

The brutal punishment, then, served a dual purpose. It was a reminder to those who witnessed it not only of the consequence of crime, but also of the power to punish – and to punish without mercy – that was the property of the sovereign.

Over time, however, the people's attitude changed. It became more and more evident that the lower the economic class the harsher the punishment. Public punishment took a turn and became an opportunity for the people to resist the ruling power by showing solidarity with the accused. The prisoner's body became the battleground upon which the resistance was fought. The prisoner was at times viewed as a hero or martyr, regardless of the crime, and the executioner was many times in fear of his own life from an increasingly angry public. As the tide began to turn, and the people were no longer willing to assist the ruling class in meting out punishment, the call for penal reform began to sound. Foucault argues that the reform movement was driven largely by the need to break down the solidarity that formed between prisoners and the people when punishment was public.

> It was evident that the great spectacle of punishment ran the risk of being rejected by the very people to whom it was addressed…the people never felt closer to those who paid the penalty than in those rituals intended to show the horror of the crime and the invincibility of power…The solidarity of a whole section of the population with those we would call petty offenders…was constantly expressed [through resistance]…And it was the breaking up of this solidarity that was becoming the aim of penal and police repression.[76]

[75] Foucault, 93.
[76] Foucault, 63.

Foucault suggests that punishment changed its focus from the prisoner's body to the mind and soul. As the penal system became more "humane" and sanitized, the idea of causing pain to the body became scandalous. Foucault notes that even "punishing the enemy of the social body" requires humane tactics, as "the principle of moderation… is revolted at the sight or at the imagination of too much cruelty."[77] Elsewhere in *Discipline & Punish*, Foucault refers to the refocus of punishment as bringing it "under the veil of administrative decency."[78] So in addition to violating the secrecy of the act of punishment that the state has been given as a right, publicized torture violates the tacit understanding that punishment will not be visited upon bodies.

Foucault's genealogy explains much about how Western penal systems evolved to where they are now, but his discussion of the utility of public torture has few parallels to the United States. The U.S. has a long history of its populace engaging in public torture. The 17th century saw the Salem witch hunts, resulting in the public torture and deaths of many at the hands of enthusiastic zealots.[79] And the shameful and, perhaps, uniquely American practice of lynching survived well into the 20th century. Foucault describes the people of France's passionate involvement in public punishment as a support position. Representatives of the sovereign actually carried out the sentence on the accused prisoner's body, while the crowd rallied in support. In the United States, however, especially with the practice of lynching, the people delivered the punishment while representatives of the state looked the other way. Those who participated in lynching were rarely brought to justice. In fact, a lynching was often an excuse for

[77] Foucault, 91.
[78] Foucault, 263.
[79] Mary Beth Norten, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002).

a community celebration complete with commemorative photographs to capture the moment.[80] It was as if the people, in their fervor, performed what the state, with its codified statutes and purported blind justice, could not. In essence, the people performed and the state supported, which is the very opposite of what Foucault describes was taking place in France in the 17th century.

The United States may have had a different philosophy regarding the hands-on responsibilities of public torture, but like the people of France, the people involved in public spectacles of punishment in the U.S. expected to participate. As Franklin Zimring comments regarding vigilantism, those who participated considered "punishment as a community activity rather than the conduct of a governmental entity separate from community processes."[81] The U.S. also followed the same evolution in penal reform that Foucault describes. Eventually, especially as mediated images of lynching victims were disseminated, the state intervened to take punishment away from the people and restrict it to the confines of state-controlled prisons. Ultimately, the focus of punishment upon the body was deemed no longer acceptable.

Perhaps the disappearance of torture "as a public spectacle" partially explains why the revelation of the events at Abu Ghraib was greeted with such outrage by many members of the press and public. The news of the investigation of prisoner torture at Abu Ghraib was available months before the photographs were broadcast, but this news created very little media attention. It was not the rumor of torture, but the spectacle made possible by the photographic evidence that made the world sit up and take notice. The photographs made the people witness to American "liberators" – fighters against "evil" – torturing helpless, shackled, often naked,

[80] James Allen, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe, NM: Twin Palms, 2000).
[81] Franklin Zimring, *The Contradictions of American Capital Punishment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 99. See also Peter Ehrenhaus and A. Susan Owen, "Race Lynching and Christian Evangelicalism: Performances of Faith," *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 24, (2004).

sometimes injured, Iraqi men. Abu Ghraib created a spectacle once again of torture. The disseminated photographs allowed publics of many different cultures to see what the Western design of penal reforms typically keep hidden if it does occur. But it was not only punishment that was unveiled, it was punishment of bodies – something that is an anathema to "civilized" penal systems.

The incident at Abu Ghraib with its nauseating visual aids helped to propel the issue of torture into public consciousness, but it is only part of the story. Even as it condemned the actions of soldiers at Abu Ghraib, reams of leaked and officially released presidential memos suggested that the Bush administration was working to circumvent the Geneva Conventions and other international anti-torture treaties of which the United States is a signatory. The documents released were mostly memos passed between Justice Department officials and members of the White House Counsel's office, and they seemed concerned with specifically defining torture in very narrow terms. One memo in particular, written in 2002 by Assistant Attorney General Jay Bybee to White House Counsel Alberto Gonzales, attracted a large amount of press attention for its extremely narrow definition of torture.

> The victim must experience intense pain or suffering of the kind that is equivalent to the pain that would be associated with serious physical injury so severe that death, organ failure, or permanent damage resulting in a loss of significant body function will likely result. If that pain or suffering is psychological, that suffering must result from one of the acts set forth in the [U.S.] statute. In addition, these acts must cause long-term mental harm.[82]

Press and public attention focused on this memo as it seemed to pave the way for a variety of abuses that would fall short of torture under this definition, the Bush administration's denials notwithstanding. As one editorialist noted, "If the underlings who put in a great deal of time and thought on these memos had not believed that their masters wanted to lower the bar on torture

[82] As reprinted in Danner, 126.

they would not have wasted their time on legal opinions."[83] Lowering the bar regarding what constitutes torture appears to be just one of the motives of these legal opinions. Another important motive seems to be avoiding prosecution for any interrogator found to be using suspect methods, and even providing legal backing to keep the president himself from one day being brought to the Hague as a war criminal. The Bybee memo claims that any "Executive Branch individual" accused of torture could use as a defense against prosecution "that he was fulfilling the Executive Branch's authority to protect the federal government, and the nation, from attack."[84]

Bush administration officials were not the only ones who grappled with the question of how to define torture. "Torture: A Necessary Evil?" read one headline regarding the rumored torture of al Qaeda leader Khalid Shaikh Mohammed.[85] "When Does Coercion Become Torture?"[86] asked another headline. Regarding the training of Special Forces members by waterboarding them, an editorial headline asked, "We Waterboard Our Own, So How Can It Be Torture?"[87] Regarding the torture death of an Iraqi Major General, one article asked, "If These Things Aren't Torture, What Is?"[88] Another article commented on the lack of clarity about what constitutes "cruel, inhuman, and degrading" treatment as specified by the U.N. Convention Against Torture. "What about sensory deprivation? Shaking? Slapping? Nakedness? Dousing with cold water? Prolonged standing or kneeling? Sleep deprivation? Sexual humiliation? Loud music? Questioning of Muslim men by female interrogators?"[89]

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[83] H.D.S. Greenway, "Who's to Blame for Torture?" *Boston Globe*, 25 June 2004.
[84] As reprinted in Danner, 154.
[85] Jonah Goldberg, "Torture: A Necessary Evil?" *Record*, 29 September 2006.
[86] Richard Saccone, "When Does Coercion Become Torture?" *Baltimore Sun*, 5 November 2007.
[87] Michael Lewis, "We Waterboard Our Own, So How Can It Be Torture?" *Buffalo News*, 3 November 2007.
[88] Matt Zencey, "If These Things Aren't Torture, What Is?" *Anchorage Daily News*, 2 October 2006.
[89] Kondracke.

It is perhaps to be expected that this question of definition would be raised either by those who were motivated to construct a legal bulwark around the administration, or those who on a more philosophical level wanted to know if torture is something "we" must now contemplate as part of "our" identity. Kenneth Burke notes that, as symbol using animals, humans define everything. Our terms create what Burke refers to as "terministic screens" – we cannot have one without the other, and we cannot say anything without terms.[90] Our need to define creates a catch-22 that Burke describes as reflection, selection, and deflection. He argues that, "Even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality"[91] (emphasis in original). Put differently, when we define what something *is*, we are simultaneously defining what it *is not*. We cannot get away from this particular fact – it is an inescapable part of being symbol using animals. By choosing to define torture as, say, that which intentionally causes extreme pain equivalent to organ failure, then that also means that torture is *not* sexual humiliation. It means torture is *not* prolonged stress positions. It means torture is *not* waterboarding. It means that torture is *not* threatening one's wife or mother with rape.

As a scholar interested in social justice, I find myself resisting the pressure to specifically operationalize the term "torture." Of course, by including chapters in this dissertation that cover sexual humiliations, I am implicitly saying that, yes, these things are torture. But I do not wish to specifically delimit so potent a term. Other scholars who are braver than I am have attempted to do so with questionable success. Ethics scholar Jean Bethke Elshtain has gone on record against those who claim that "torture lite" methods (which include waterboarding), which she refers to as "Torture 2," should be considered torture as prohibited by international treaty. She argues:

[90] Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 50.
[91] Burke, 45.

> In a world of such probabilities, [where an informant might have information that would probably spare the lives of innocents], we should demur from Torture 1 – the extreme forms of physical torment. But Torture 2, for which we surely need a different name, like coercive interrogation, may, with regret, be used.[92]

History professor Alfred W. McCoy, however, disagrees with any ambiguous categorizing attempts. As he noted when interviewed in the documentary film *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*: "There's no such thing as a little bit of torture."[93] Scholars and intellectuals join the media fray usually by asking not what torture *is*, but rather *ought* we to engage in it? The questions are not unrelated. I would argue that posing the first lays the groundwork for the second. Once torture has been defined, either narrowly (as in the Bush administration memos), or broadly (as in the Third Geneva Convention and the U.N. Convention Against Torture), the logical next question is, then, "should we do it?" Is there a conceivable circumstance or set of circumstances in which torture moves from prohibited taboo to permissible act?

Some, such as Alan Dershowitz, argue that because torture is happening, and is likely to continue to happen, the best that can be done is to drag it out into the open and force interrogators to document their actions with something like a torture warrant.[94] Others, such as cultural critic Slavoj Žižek, passionately refute any who believe torture is a topic for debate. He argues:

> [A] clear sign of progress in Western society is that one does not need to argue against rape: it is "dogmatically" clear to everyone that rape is wrong. If someone were to advocate the legitimacy of rape, he would appear so ridiculous as to disqualify himself from any further consideration. And the same should hold for torture.[95]

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[92] Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Reflection on the Problem of 'Dirty Hands'," in *Torture: A Collection*, ed. Sanford Levinson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 87.
[93] Kennedy.
[94] Alan Dershowitz, "Tortured Reasoning," in *Torture: A Collection*, ed. Sanford Levinson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
[95] Slavoj Žižek, "Knight of the Living Dead," *New York Times*, 24 March 2007.

Arizona Senator and Republican presidential candidate John McCain has long opposed any relaxing of anti-torture standards. McCain's years spent as a tortured POW in a Vietcong prison camp bolsters his ethos on this topic. He believes that,

> both the prohibition on torture and the cruel, inhumane and degrading standard must remain intact. When we relax that standard, it is nearly unavoidable that some objectionable practices will be allowed as something less than torture because they do not risk life and limb or do not cause very serious physical pain.[96]

Passionate, knowledgeable stakeholders argue on both sides of this debate. The debate is only made possible because the questions *is* and *ought* have been asked. Torture used to not be a topic for public debate – either what it is or whether the United States should be engaging in it. The Third Geneva Convention and the U.N. Convention Against Torture seemingly defined it to everyone's satisfaction, and the very fact of the U.S. being signatories of those documents meant that, without exception, torture would not be utilized. But with 9/11 came a highly visible ideological war, an enemy that was willing, even eager, to be martyred in suicide attacks, Abu Ghraib, presidential memos parsing words, Guantánamo Bay, and fears of ticking time bombs. Asking the questions means conceding the possibility of torture. Debating it means that it is no longer an unquestioned taboo, it is a topic for reasoned argument with negative and positive resolutions. As Žižek argues,

> Such legitimization of torture as a topic of debate changes the background of ideological presuppositions and options much more radically than its outright advocacy: it changes the entire field while, without this change, outright advocacy remains an idiosyncratic view.[97]

Asking the questions, then, assists in providing the conditions for possibility. In consideration of the inherent dangers posed by these questions, I choose not to ask them. I will leave it to other

[96] John McCain, "Torture's Terrible Toll," *Newsweek*, November 21, 2005, 36.
[97] Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (New York: Verso, 2002), 104.

more courageous or head-strong scholars to debate these issues. I am more concerned about the conditions of possibility that are created by the very fact of these questions having been asked.

Several years have passed since the story of Abu Ghraib made daily headlines. Twelve soldiers have been court-martialed and have either served or are currently serving their time in military prison. Despite the events of Abu Ghraib being seemingly resolved, the story brought torture to public consciousness, and it has not retreated. In 2005, President Bush drew fire from critics for vowing to veto a defense spending bill if it arrived on his desk with an attached anti-torture amendment sponsored by Senator John McCain.[98] Later, Bush appeared to concede to the overwhelming congressional support for the amendment,[99] but it then became known that he had attached a signing statement to the amendment. The signing statement asserted the claim that the president would have a great deal of discretion in choosing to ignore the law if he deemed it necessary to national security.[100] In the fall of 2006, the Bush Administration worked to pass legislation allowing for "detainees" to be held without charges, and to be tried before military tribunals with no recourse to counsel or appeal. The same legislation allows for "aggressive interrogations of top terror suspects."[101] The president has also publicly admitted to the existence of secret CIA prisons where "high-value" al Qaeda operatives have been held.[102] Media investigations have found credible evidence that these operatives have been subjected to torture while in U.S. custody.[103] There is also evidence that programs of extraordinary rendition are active. Extraordinary rendition, a program begun by the CIA during President Clinton's terms in

[98] Jane Mayer, "Outsourcing Torture: The Secret History of America's 'Extraordinary Rendition' Program," *New Yorker*, February 14 & 21, 2005.
[99] Ann McFeatters, "Bush Agrees to Ban Torture," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 16 December 2005.
[100] Elisabeth Bumiller, "For President, Final Say on a Bill Sometimes Comes after the Signing," *New York Times*, 16 January 2006.
[101] Rick Klein, "Senate's Passage of Detainee Bill Gives Bush a Win," *Boston Globe*, 29 September 2006.
[102] "The Outing of Secret Prisons," *Hartford Courant*, 8 September 2006.
[103] Evan Thomas and Michael Hirsh, "The Debate over Torture," *Newsweek*, November 21, 2005.

office,[104] allows for the kidnapping and extralegal extradition of terrorism suspects to third party countries. Evidence suggests that people whose only crimes have been poor judgment in associates, and people who have been victims of mistaken identity, have been spirited off to countries with policies allowing for torture.[105] Very recently, in March, 2008, the president vetoed a bill that would have forced the CIA to follow the rules of interrogation set forth in the Army Field Manual.[106] This manual strictly prohibits the use of torture.

All of these developments, along with the legal maneuvers of the White House, suggest that the penal regimes Foucault identifies and discusses in *Discipline & Punish* may be passing into yet another chapter. When President Bush and other administration officials have insisted that "we do not torture,"[107] perhaps the most generous response is that these statements are disingenuous. At least insofar as foreign policy and the "war on terrorism" are concerned, the United States appears to be moving into a phase of legal torture, with a focus once again on bodies, but one that remains a closed secret of the state. At the very least, I believe we can predict with confidence that torture as an interrogation method, whether "public" or covert, is an issue that will be with us for some time. Because of the enormous human rights implications, and the extraordinary rhetorical force of torture when the issue is taken up by mass media, it is a topic that deserves the attention of scholars.

In the final section of this chapter, I will briefly give attention to my critical orientation and preview the upcoming chapters. My orientation is one that can be best described as "critical rhetoric."

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[104] Mayer.
[105] Mayer.
[106] Steven Lee Myers, "Bush Vetoes Bill on CIA Tactics, Affirming Legacy," *New York Times*, 9 March 2008.
[107] Ken Herman, "U.S. Torture Ties Remain Murky," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 18 March 2005.

Critical Orientation

This project is a rhetorical analysis of mass media discourse concerning torture as an interrogation method. As such, I will draw upon rhetorical theory and criticism. This critical study will require the deployment of several different "methodological" tools as needed. I do not describe myself as a media critic; rather, I am a rhetorical critic who analyzes media texts. My goal in this project is not necessarily to extend theory, although that may be a serendipitous result. Instead, my goal is to use theory to understand my texts, which will necessarily lead to extending theory as a byproduct of my critical efforts. To this end, I prefer to draw upon John Sloop's discussion of "critical rhetoric."

Drawing on scholarship of Raymie McKerrow,[108] Sloop articulates the focus of critical rhetoric as "doxastic rather than epistemic knowledge."[109] In other words, critical rhetoric is interested in public discourse and understanding about particular artifacts, rather than abstract philosophical attempts to make meaning. As McKerrow argues,

> Rather than focus in on questions of "truth" or "falsity," a view of rhetoric as doxastic allows the focus to shift to how the symbols come to possess power – what they "do" in society as contrasted to what they "are."[110]

For example, instead of focusing on the morality of torture in the abstract, I am interested in exploring how mass media artifacts are used along with established gender norms to interpret the growing use of torture as an interrogation method. To that end, this exploration may contribute to gender theory, especially work on gender silence.

A second implication of critical rhetoric that Sloop discusses is that of political practice. As a method, "critical rhetoric views its own writing as a political practice, an attempt to alter or

[108] Raymie E. McKerrow, "Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis," *Communication Monographs,* 45, (1989).
[109] Sloop, 18.
[110] McKerrow, 104.

shift public knowledge by illustrating how that knowledge has been constructed."[111] My view of this dissertation is that it is a scholarly *and* a political performance. I view the responsibility of the rhetorician much as Derrida views the responsibility of the modern philosopher. According to Derrida, a philosopher is one who reflects upon shifting international policies and demands "accountability from those in charge of public discourse, those responsible for the language and institutions of international law."[112] As with the philosopher, the rhetorician's training puts her in a unique position to critically examine public discourse with a view to accountability.

My intention is to meet the high standards and expectations of academic research and writing, and also to make a political contribution. I agree with many legal and humanitarian scholars who have published work decrying torture policies as what they see as one of the greatest existing threats to human rights.[113] I would add that when discourses use gender to mitigate or aggravate its acceptability, the reprehensibility of torture is deflected.

The artifacts for this dissertation are media texts. Specifically, I will use print news media (newspapers and news magazines), and popular television serial programming. I use print news media for sustained discussion about reports of torture. Newspapers and news magazines provide a more thorough discussion of events than televised news media, and most also provide a forum for editorial and public opinion. All are crucial for an understanding of how the reports are being received and circulated. In an attempt to achieve the broadest possible geographical coverage, I searched the Lexis-Nexis database by region (e.g., northeast, northwest, southeast, southwest), and used various keywords (e.g., torture and women, torture and gender, Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo Bay, etc.). My goal is to look first broadly at emerging news reports of prisoner

[111] Sloop, 18.
[112] Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues in Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 106.
[113] See, for example, Danner; see also Alfred W. McCoy, *A Question of Torture: CIA Interrogation, from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006).

abuse at Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay, and then re-read for more nuanced articulations of gender in those reports.

The television texts are recent popular TV series that feature terrorism as a major plotline. My primary focus will be the programs *Alias*, *La Femme Nikita*, *24*, *Sleeper Cell*, and *The Unit*. All of these programs feature contemporary government agents fighting terrorism with a great deal of license. These long-running series all feature torture as a recurrent theme in many episodes. *Alias* and *La Femme Nikita* feature women protagonists as the central characters. *24*, *Sleeper Cell*, and *The Unit* feature men in the leading roles as covert federal agents fighting international terrorists. The gender contrast between the two sets of programs is useful as I am interested in comparing and contrasting the behavior of the women protagonists from the men as they confront and engage in torture. All five programs have a great deal of accessibility. *24*, *The Unit*, and *Alias* are network programs, airing on the FOX, CBS, and ABC networks respectively; *La Femme Nikita* aired on the USA network and was the first series on basic cable to be considered a genuine hit. *Sleeper Cell* aired on the premium cable network Showtime. These five popular programs most visibly represent the current genre of television programs that deal with government agents fighting terrorism.

Popular entertainment television series are more desirable as artifacts than feature films for this project for a number of reasons. First, with relatively short run times, feature films cannot give as much sustained attention to topics or character development as can long-running television series. Second, as television artifacts, available through network programming and cable, these shows are widely available and broadcast directly into homes. Finally, as Bonnie Dow argues, "commercial television's relentless profit motive is one of the elements that makes

it such a useful cultural barometer."[114] Commercial television programs do not remain on the air for any length of time unless they are able to attract an audience. Thus, their narratives must tap into what audiences find appealing and entertaining. The television programs I am examining have all achieved popular and critical acclaim, suggesting that audiences can relate to them on some level. They are extremely popular with audiences, garnering major share points each week, and impressive DVD sales as well, attesting to the degree of circulation and influence in culture these programs have achieved. Feature films are relevant to a study of popular culture texts that have torture as a theme, but I have narrowed the scope of my project to television.

Chapter Preview

In order to investigate my claims and research questions, this study will develop as follows: Chapter two will be an analysis of gender visibility and invisibility in the media discourses surrounding the reports of torture at Abu Ghraib. I investigate news coverage and editorial commentary about the accused soldiers giving particular attention to rhetoric that serves a disciplinary function concerning gender. This chapter also includes an analysis of the widely broadcast photographs that made Abu Ghraib the "scandal" it was. This chapter lays the groundwork for chapters that follow regarding the visibility of women torturers and the ways in which mass media serves as part of a social disciplinary function for women whose violent behavior is portrayed as a failure to properly perform femininity. On the other hand, men who visibly torture, as demonstrated by the widely broadcast Abu Ghraib photographs, tend to be vilified for their lack of honor as soldiers and not as men. Where the American male soldiers are made invisible regarding their gender, the same cannot be said for the Arab prisoners who are

[114] Bonnie J. Dow, *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women's Movement since 1970* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), xxii.

humiliated in the photographs. In this case, their gender is highly visible as attempts are made to feminize and homosexualize them through sexual humiliation tactics. This chapter will also include an analysis of photographs that were not widely disseminated, namely, those of an Iraqi woman prisoner forced to expose herself. Here, I will explore the possible reasons for the relative disappearance of these photographs, and what their absence in public discourse suggests about perceptions of American identity.

Chapter three is an analysis of news media coverage of the 2005 revelation of women interrogators who used sexualized interrogations on Arab male prisoners at Guantánamo Bay. This story has several similarities to Abu Ghraib, although it was not accompanied by photographs, but it also has some important differences. Once again, women are made highly visible and embodied in media discourses that paint vivid verbal descriptions of lurid, sexual interrogations. Like the women of Abu Ghraib, the women of Guantánamo are doubly disciplined in becoming subjects for military justice as well as being socially reproved for their actions. Unlike the women of Abu Ghraib, the women of Guantánamo were praised by conservative media commentators who described their actions as appropriate and effective when used against Muslim men who are described as sexually repressed and unmasculine. The Guantánamo Bay case study is also unique in that the women interrogators were reported to have used menstrual blood, real or fake, as a tool of humiliation in their interrogations. I explore the media outrage over this tactic, which matches in many ways the outrage of the prisoners whose religious worldviews were violated. The appearance of menstrual blood in the interrogation rooms at Guantánamo as a tool in the war on terrorism invites its comparison to the blood of male warriors which is given far more honor for its sacrificial value.

Chapters two and three describe the ways in which male soldiers and interrogators tend to be invisible *as men* in mass media discourses. What becomes clear through an analysis of the case studies is that the job of interrogations involving torture is not one for incompetent male soldiers (such as those at Abu Ghraib) or for women in any capacity. In chapter four, I turn my attention to popular entertainment television where the form of the appropriate masculine hero begins to take shape. His shape is made particularly vivid when juxtaposed to women would-be heroes who can only go so far toward the role of savior. It is in popular entertainment television especially that masculinity is redefined as that which may torture and not only remain heroic, but achieve messianic status. In contrast to the polluted blood shed by the women of Guantánamo, the blood shed by the masculine heroes of these programs is accorded sacred status. Chapter five will summarize and conclude this dissertation by discussing the implications of torture gaining even limited approval in public consciousness.

CHAPTER 2

GENDER (IN)VISIBILITY AT ABU GHRAIB

The image of that female guard, smoking away as she joins gleefully in the disgraceful melee like one of the guys, is a cultural outgrowth of a feminist culture which encourages female barbarians.

George Neumayr[115]

The images shock and shame those of us who have always believed that women in the military would rise to the challenge, not sink into depravity excused by a few as 'soldiering' because war is hell.

Myriam Marquez[116]

Introduction

When the story of the prisoner torture[117] at Abu Ghraib broke in late April, 2004, for a few days media reports focused on the undifferentiated acts of deviant soldiers that had perhaps forever knocked the United States from the moral high ground it claimed as justification for the invasion of Iraq. It did not take long for attention to be turned to particular acts performed by specific soldiers caught on film. Very quickly, Private First Class Lynndie England and her then boyfriend, Corporal Charles Graner, took center stage as the main players in the scandal. England soon took solo charge of the spotlight and became a synecdoche of the outrageous abuses to which the world was now witness. The photographs, released first on April 28th on the CBS program *Sixty Minutes II*, shocked and repulsed commentators reporting in Western and

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A version of this chapter originally appeared in *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, Vol. 10, No. 3, published by Michigan State University Press.

[115] George Neumayr, "Thelma and Louise in Iraq," *American Spectator Online* (2004), www.spectator.org

[116] Myriam Marquez, "Abuse Photos Smear Soldiers, Especially Women," *Tulsa World*, 12 May 2004.

[117] I refer to the actions of the soldiers at Abu Ghraib as "torture" where most press accounts referred to it as "abuse." See chapter 1 for a discussion of the problems inherent in defining torture.

Eastern media outlets. The images of naked Iraqi men being abused and sexually humiliated by smiling American soldiers, some of whom were women, was considered a major setback in American military operations in Iraq and prompted public apologies from both President Bush and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. Bush reported feeling "deep disgust"[118] over the treatment the prisoners received, while Rumsfeld "took responsibility for the mistreatment, apologized and warned that more pictures of sadistic abuse could still come to light."[119] Reportedly, both Bush and Rumsfeld were informed of the abuse allegations several months before the photographs became public, but neither spoke out until the media airing of the images.[120]

Although the Taguba Report, which reported the findings of the military investigation into abuse allegations, only mentions the women of Abu Ghraib briefly and focuses its attention on the failings higher up the chain of command, media reports focus give much scrutiny to those whose images were caught in the photographs. Chief among these is Lynndie England. A distant second in terms of media coverage, even though he received the longest prison sentence, is Charles Graner. These two are followed by other disgraced soldiers, especially Specialist Sabrina Harman and Staff Sergeant Ivan "Chip" Frederick. To date, twelve soldiers have been court-martialed for their part in the torture of detainees, and of these three are women. With three years, England received the longest prison sentence of the women, followed by Harman who received six months. The third woman, Specialist Megan Ambuhl, took a number of the photographs but did not appear in any. Ambuhl received no prison time.

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[118] Farah Stockman, "Bush Voices Disgust over Abuse Photos; Threat Is Seen to Iraq Mission," *Boston Globe*, 1 May 2004.
[119] Richard W. Stevenson, "Abuse Scandal: The Aftershocks," *New York Times*, 9 May 2004.
[120] Seymour M. Hersh, *Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib*, 1st ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 26.

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which gender and sex are discussed and *not discussed* in the media reports regarding the women and men implicated in the Abu Ghraib scandal. While I am very interested in how the women soldiers appearing in the photographs, particularly England, come to embody gender and sexuality in media discourses, and come to represent all women in the military, I am particularly interested in exploring the gender silence surrounding the discourse about the abusive male soldiers. This silence, I argue, is a consequence of cultural codes that impose social discipline upon violent women who violate gender norms as part of their violent acts while ignoring gendered behaviors in violent men. In other words, both violent women and men may ultimately face legal justice for their actions, but women are doubly disciplined by being socially vilified for their gender infractions. This is especially apparent in the current conflict where women make up a large part of the U.S. military. Here, their violence is codified to a degree provided they remain under the control of an appropriate (male) hierarchy. On the other hand, violent men in the military seem to raise little alarm and are not subject to social discipline. As I will argue, the outcry regarding the infractions of the male soldiers at Abu Ghraib focused more on their lack of professionalism than their violence. Ultimately, this lack of professionalism showed that these men were not the heroes needed to fight on the side of "right" in the battle against "evil."

This chapter will discuss four areas of contradiction in media reports of gender and sexuality in the case of Abu Ghraib. First, I will explore the high visibility of gender in media reports of England and Harman, and contrast that visibility to the invisibility of gender markers in the male soldiers also charged with abuse. Second, I will extend the discussion of gender markers into the discourses surrounding the sexual behavior of England and Graner. Much disapproval is expressed regarding England's behavior, but very little regarding her partner's.

Third, I will contrast the construction of the women of Abu Ghraib as representatives of all women soldiers with the media silence on the possibility of Graner and Frederick as representatives of men or of any other identity category that they shared. Finally, through an analysis of the released photographs, I will contrast the complete lack of gender markers regarding the male soldiers at Abu Ghraib with the excess of gender markers assigned to the Iraqi prisoners in the photographs. I will also discuss the curious lack of widespread dissemination of, or media discourses about, Iraqi women prisoners who were also subjects of sexual humiliation captured on film. Before I begin this discussion, however, it is necessary to briefly discuss the problems of gender that are specific to the U.S. military.

The lack of male gender visibility is widespread in Western culture, and is glaringly apparent upon examination of military culture. There, membership of women is tolerated, often even encouraged, as it is simultaneously viewed as highly suspect and a source of pollution. In her exploration of military culture, Carol Burke notes that women in the military are viewed as "a dangerous distraction. Critics argue that men fight better without women around and that when the fighting stops, the sexualization of women so dominates male thinking that men can never develop professional relationships with them."[121] Arguments from critics notwithstanding, women have become so established in the military that it could not function without them. As Hilary Neroni notes, women in the military present a conundrum. She states:

> On the one hand, [the military] needs women to fill positions that would otherwise be empty, but, on the other, women often prove an obstacle to the military's smooth functioning, insofar as that functioning depends upon an investment in patriarchal ideology.[122]

[121] Carol Burke, *Camp All-American, Hanoi Jane, and the High-and-Tight: Gender, Folklore, and Changing Military Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 56.
[122] Hilary Neroni, *The Violent Woman: Femininity, Narrative, and Violence in Contemporary American Cinema* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), 134.

Neroni argues that the military provides a place of acceptable female violence, even though women are not technically allowed in combat. In the current conflict, the lines of the battlefield have become extremely vague and even in support positions women are frequently in dangerous situations alongside men. More women have been killed in the Iraq war than in any war since World War II.[123] Despite almost all military units having been integrated, and women enjoying more opportunities for advancement than ever before, as well as sharing in wartime danger, military tradition seems to depend upon the continued view of women as a polluted Other. The only way for a woman soldier to succeed, Barbara Finlay argues, is by learning "to go along with a culture that glorifies dominance, masculinity, and aggression, and motivates hostility against 'the enemy' in part by depicting 'him' as weak and unmanly."[124] From basic training on, soldiers in training are taught that to be warriors is to reject all that is feminine. In fact, Burke argues, the word "warrior" is "a term of identity that excludes women. There are few words left that so desperately retain their gender-rigid fix."[125] And if the goal of military tradition is to create masculine warriors, women must remain an anathema. But it is not only military culture that views women as a suspicious source of pollution; this view is shared by the mass media as part of its reflection of dominant cultural norms. If it was not, I argue, there would not have been so much media attention given to the women abusers at Abu Ghraib who, while certainly culpable for their actions, made up a minority of those charged with abuse.

Having established that the military reflects a gender hierarchy that is part of Western society as a whole, I will now scrutinize mass media discourses surrounding Abu Ghraib for the ways in which gender is rendered visible and invisible regarding the abusive soldiers.

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[123] John Diedrich, "A Woman Warrior's Role," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 18 April 2004.
[124] Barbara Finlay, "Pawn, Scapegoat, or Collaborator?" in *One of the Guys: Women as Aggressors and Torturers*, ed. Tara McKelvey (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2007), 200.
[125] Burke, 142.

Gender Markers – Visible and Invisible

In the introduction to *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir poses the deceptively perplexing question, "What is a woman?" She goes on to demonstrate that this is not a question that is easily answered, but she muses about why it is even necessary to ask the question at all. As noted in chapter one, Beauvoir suggests that a man would not find it necessary to preface his remarks with a discussion of his gender. Women are defined in gendered terms, in the ways that they are not men, but men are simply defined as universal humans. "He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other."[126] Or as Judith Butler added in her discussion of Beauvoir's position and the positions of those who followed her, "only the feminine gender is marked…the universal person and the masculine gender are conflated, thereby defining women in terms of their sex and extolling men as the bearers of a body-transcendent universal personhood."[127]

An analysis of the news coverage surrounding the release of the Abu Ghraib photographs suggests that things have not changed much since Beauvoir penned her feminist text. Although only two women soldiers appear in the photographs, much attention is given to them as women, whereas press coverage is meted out to the male soldiers as soldiers and not as men. Lynndie England, in particular, went on to become the poster-child for bad behavior and a cautionary tale for thousands of women soldiers on active duty. Sabrina Harman achieved neither the notoriety nor the longer prison sentence of England, but she did not escape scrutiny as a woman.

In the photos of England and Harman from Abu Ghraib they are wearing standard, military-issue clothing. Both wear loose camouflage pants, khaki t-shirts, and lace-up boots. There is no overt suggestion of bodily secondary sex characteristics. Neither breasts nor hips are visible in these photographs. In the now infamous leash photograph of England (Figure 1), her

[126] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), xxii.
[127] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 10th Anniversary ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999), 13.

appearance is androgynous. The photograph shows England standing with her body squared to the camera. In her left hand she loosely holds what appears to be a dog leash. Her impassive gaze is directed toward the naked, prone prisoner at the end of the leash. The man appears to be battered and in pain, but England's expression contains no visible trace of compassion for this unfortunate man. England's appearance is so unisex in this photograph that if we did not already know that this was Lynndie England, a female soldier, there is little about the photograph that would mark her as female.

Figure 1: England with prisoner on leash

The images in this chapter are considered to be in the public domain as a result of *ACLU v. US Department of Defense*. See: http://www.rcfp.org/news/mag/30-2/foi-abughrai.html and http://www.aclu.org/images/torture/asset_upload_file447-24786.pdf

Despite the lack of explicit feminine gender markers in the leash photographs, or in the others, news reports of the women remark on their appearance – especially England's appearance. She is

repeatedly referred to as small, "tomboyish,"[128] and "perky" with a "pixie haircut."[129] A columnist for a Spokane, Washington, newspaper commented on England's tomboyishness, and added: "She has short-cropped hair, a tight, muscular body and that don't-mess-with-me-expression."[130] This description of England's expression seems to contain some editorial license. In the several widely circulated photographs of England, she is smiling at the camera in most, and has what might be described as a bored expression in the leash photograph. The description of her expression as "don't-mess-with-me" serves the purpose of categorizing England as tough and unfeminine.

In her book, *Female Masculinity*,[131] Judith Halberstam argues that masculine women particularly trouble masculinity as they detach it from biological men and demonstrate it to be a construct maintained with effort. Sherrie A. Inness makes a similar point in her book *Tough Girls* when she argues that masculine women also trouble femininity. Many people find tough, masculine women so disturbing because they reveal "the artificiality of femininity as the 'normal' state of women."[132] The media interpretation of England as "tough" served to portray her in masculine terms and to emphasize her abnormality as a woman.

In contrast to Harman, who is described as having an "angel's face," England is referred to as unattractive. As one writer put it, "you can see it – can't you? – what no one will testify to: She's homely – and that matters for a woman in America."[133] Another journalist, in an offhanded reference to the Lederer and Burdick 1958 bestseller, referred to England as "an ugly American

[128] Matthew Sweeney, Bridget Harrison, and Marsha Kranes, "Leasher Gal Lashed with Abuse Rap as Kin Dig in for Court," *New York Post*, 8 May 2004.
[129] Maki Becker, Corky Siemaszko, and Paul HB Shin, "The Face Behind a Nation's Shame," *Daily News*, 7 May 2004.
[130] Rebecca Nappi, "Photos Shatter Assumptions About Women," *Spokesman Review*, 8 May 2004.
[131] Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).
[132] Sherrie A. Inness, *Tough Girls: Women Warriors and Wonder Women in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 21.
[133] Richard Cohen, "Victimizer and Victim," *Washington Post*, 6 May 2005.

abusing hapless Iraqi men."[134] Attention is called to those things that mark England and Harman as women or as contrary to feminine gender expectations. The newspaper and newsmagazine articles that covered the Abu Ghraib story contain no physical description of the male soldiers indicted in the scandal. In contrast to England and Harman, who are consistently referred to "female" reservists and "women" soldiers, the men implicated in the abuse are simply referred to as ungendered soldiers. For example, in a sample of four articles that told Charles Graner's story, none of the headlines refer to his biological sex. He is referred to as a "guard,"[135] a "suspect,"[136] and by his rank of "Spc."[137] (Specialist). The articles referenced suggest that England and Harman's status as women is newsworthy, whereas the men implicated in the scandal are invisible as men. According to cultural scholar Suzanne E. Hatty, this separation of men from their embodiedness *as men* is a common social phenomenon. She notes,

> Men are frequently depicted in the public arena as "talking heads" divorced from their physicality. In these representations, corporeality is de-emphasized in the pursuit of political or social credibility. It is almost as if the public acknowledgment of embodiment is, for men, a liability.[138]

This sustained silence about the sex or gender roles of the male soldiers at Abu Ghraib is conspicuous when compared to the multitude of articles that focus on Harman, and especially on England, as women.

In his discussion of media coverage of the murder of Brandon Teena, John Sloop examines the inclination of media representatives to explain those who violate gender norms. "If gender operates according to iterated norms," Sloop explains, "all cases of transgression must be

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[134] Neva Chonin, "The Lynndie Hop," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 29 August 2004.
[135] David Finkel and Christian Davenport, "Records Paint Dark Portrait of Guard," *Washington Post*, 5 June 2004.
[136] Michael A. Fuoco, Ed Blazina, and Cindi Lash, "Suspect in Prisoner Abuse Has a History of Troubles," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 8 May 2004.
[137] Judy Lin, "Trouble at Home, Abroad for Spc. Charles Graner Jr.," *Associated Press State & Local Wire*, 11 May 2004.
[138] Suzanne E. Hatty, *Masculinities, Violence, and Culture* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2000), 119.

explained."[139] When he discusses media disciplining of Janet Reno's gender transgressions, Sloop draws upon Kate Bornstein's work in *Gender Outlaw* to point out the societal expectation of behavior within a bigendered system. As Sloop explains, "this binary gender system leads us to expect as normal particular behaviors from men and particular behaviors from women."[140] Not surprisingly then, the media coverage of England's behavior at Abu Ghraib focuses on her failure to behave as a woman should, whereas the media coverage of Graner's behavior focuses on his failure to behave as an honorable soldier should.

An article in the *Boston Globe* explores the gender issues raised by the Abu Ghraib abuse scandal. Here, a retired Army general, Evelyn "Pat" Foote, is quoted as being "horrified" that three women were involved in the abuse of prisoners. The article notes that "she is disappointed that [the women soldiers] did not heed her advice, that to be successful in the military, a woman should act more like a woman than a man."[141] According to General Foote, success in acting "more like a woman than a man" includes avoiding "romping, stomping, spitting, cussing, and swearing." The theme of the *Boston Globe* article, as well as General Foote's comments, seems to be that women in the military have a special responsibility to maintain their gendered essence in an environment that will make assaults against it.

Discourse regarding Graner's behavior, however, contains no such decrying of his or the other male solders' failure to uphold some elevated standard of masculinity. Indeed, Graner's description as a "rogue"[142] soldier in one article is very much in keeping with the overall media narrative about him. "The men have become symbols," acknowledges the *Ventura County Star*. They have become symbols of "rogue soldiers on the one hand and lackadaisical leadership on

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[139] John M. Sloop, *Disciplining Gender: Rhetorics of Sex Identity in Contemporary US Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 78.
[140] Sloop, 121.
[141] Mary Leonard, "Abuse Raises Gender Issues," *Boston Globe*, 16 May 2004.
[142] Stephen J. Hedges, "Two Take Brunt of Blame in Prison Scandal," *Ventura County Star*, 16 May 2004.

the other."[143] Graner and his male colleagues did not fail to meet some unspecified standard as men; they are not symbols of failed masculinity. They failed as soldiers.

In their 2006 article, John W. Howard, III and Laura C. Prividera examine the soldier archetype and the lay public's perception of military persona. They explain that the soldier archetypes promote an expectation of a "warrior hero:" "The warrior hero is described as independent, disciplined, strong willed, physically imposing, and above all masculine."[144] The authors go on to explain that the feminine is the antithesis of the warrior hero as being feminine is seen automatically as faltering. Given these views of women as essentially gendered and men as universal human, it might be expected that the explanation of England's behavior would focus on her as a failed woman, and the explanation of Graner's behavior would focus on him as a failed soldier.

As two of the most visible soldiers in the photographs, and most talked about for their off-camera behavior, both England and Graner are subjected to scrutiny by media coverage in order to determine the cause of their criminal acts. But there is a distinct difference in the way they are explained. Where Graner is investigated for his failure to follow procedure, England is investigated for her pathology as a woman. Media reports offer at least two antagonistic portrayals of England: In one she is an amoral nymphomaniac who was willing to bare her body on camera engaging in sex with several different men including Graner. This same woman gleefully participated in the sexual humiliation of Iraqi prisoners, and did not hesitate to break other rules along the way. A second portrayal is that of a not very bright (borderline retarded, by some accounts) young woman who was seduced (as woman traditionally are) by an older, wilier, and superior paramour. The first account explains England as an anomaly that must be rare for

[143] Hedges.
[144] John W. III Howard and Laura Prividera, "Gendered Nationalism: A Critical Analysis of Militarism, Patriarchy, and the Ideal Soldier," *Texas Speech Communication Journal,* 30, (2006).

women in general – but perhaps not for women who choose to join the military. The second explains her as typical of her gender and class background.

Her portrayal in the photographs and in press accounts as an S & M dominatrix so troubles traditional views of feminine gender that some kind of explanation is necessary. Bolstering the first portrayal, England is described as a wanton woman who repeatedly disobeyed orders to stay out of Graner's bed and in her own. As a "paper-pusher" not assigned to the "hard-site" where Graner worked as an MP, press accounts reiterate that she had no business being around the prisoners at all. The only explanation for her behavior is that she was over-sexed, rebellious, and not at all inclined to behave as a woman should. As the *Toronto Star* commented:

> Getting naked, it now appears, was not a shy pursuit for the 21-year old England. Included in the not-yet-released Abu Ghraib archive…were videos and still photos of England. Said one senator: "She was having sex with numerous partners. It appeared to be consensual."[145]

A report in a North Carolina newspaper opens by informing the reader that England "ignored three orders to stop sleeping in a fellow soldier's bed."[146] The article does not mention until later that the "fellow soldier" was Graner, at the time her fiancé. We are also told that England appeared "in sexually explicit pictures with other soldiers" and was known to have engaged in "raunchy behavior before and after [her] company journeyed to Iraq."[147] England's refusal to stay out of Graner's bed impacted her ability to do the job she had been assigned in the Iraqi prison. The *New York Post* reports that "she showed up late, left early and did a sloppy job because of her late-night assignations."[148] She is also reported to have "provided lewd

[145] Jennifer Wells, "Sex, Vileness and Videotape: It's Made for TV," *Toronto Star*, 16 May 2004.
[146] Jay Price, "Abuse Suspect Flouted Orders," *News and Observer*, 5 August 2004.
[147] Price.
[148] Andy Geller, "'Get Lucky' Lynndie - Caught in Sex Acts at Abu Ghraib," *New York Post*, 5 August 2004.

commentary as guards forced two Iraqi prisoners to engage in a sex act."[149] Apparently, England's commentary is more newsworthy than the actions of the anonymous guards forcing the prisoners to engage in sex.

England's sexual behavior is used as evidence of her deviance. The fact that all of her alleged sexual partners except for Graner go unnamed and uncondemned suggests that *her* sexual behavior is at issue. Her willingness to "get naked" and her eagerness to engage in a forbidden sexual relationship with her boyfriend is reported as if it is confirmation of her portrayal as a sexual outlaw, and as if it further explains her foray into torture. Her sexual activity, combined with her propensity to break other rules, serve to represent England as so deviant that she can only be a rare anomaly – rare for universal male soldiers if not necessarily for women soldiers.

Bolstering the second portrayal, which draws upon England's gender and class background to interpret her behavior, media reports explain England as the product of a low-educational background, from a tiny town with no opportunities, married and divorced as a teen, and only too willing to do anything to be with her boyfriend, Graner. Referring to her class background a writer for the *Washington Post* noted: "She is that rare genuine article, the cliché, the stereotype that turns out upon investigation to be true."[150] Her defense team explains her to the press as someone who suffered from childhood challenges such as a learning disability, and who possessed certain physical features that resulted in her being teased as a child. It was not only that she was eager to please Graner because she loved him; she is pathologized as having an overly-compliant personality in general, and unusually docile to authority figures – such as that represented by her older and higher ranked boyfriend. Or as a *Rolling Stone* writer put it using much harsher language,

[149] Geller.
[150] Cohen.

> Lynndie's whole trial strategy had centered around mock-retard method acting of the *Sling Blade* or *My Left Foot* school – with the defendant staring off into space like a coma patient while her overmatched young military counsel tried to sell the five-member military jury on the idea that Lynndie was an "overly compliant personality" with "extraordinary deficits" who was not completely responsible for her actions in Iraq.[151]

This portrayal of the inappropriate fit of femininity within the military context is reinforced by portrayals of Harman as also inappropriately feminine. She is explained in a way that makes her seem pathological from childhood. We learn in the *New York Post*, for example, that Harman has "always had a fascination with stomach-churning photography. Growing up, her homicide detective dad and forensic science buff mom constantly shared with their daughter grisly crime-scene photos."[152] Indeed, her father explained Harman's fascination with forensic photography as something that she'd had since she was a child. The overall tone of the article is that Harman's fascination is deviant, perhaps especially for a woman who had always been "a kind and gentle girl."[153] In this same article Harman, like England, is also explained as being overly-compliant, and ultimately a victim of peer-pressure.

The explanations offered for Graner's behavior differ dramatically from those of England and Harman. He was a good student and citizen growing up. But then the idealistic young man fell in love, married, and was soon shipped off to serve in the first Gulf War. According to the *Washington Post's* interviews with Graner's close friends, Graner returned from the Gulf a changed man. Certain his new wife had been cheating on him while he was away – a concern not without some basis, readers are informed – Graner grew to be jealous and distrustful of her. His friends paint the portrait of a devoted family man who was changed "not only by the experience of being in a war but also by the unanswered phone calls home."[154] Graner's wife is implicitly

[151] Matt Taibbi, "Ms. America," *Rolling Stone*, October 20, 2005.
[152] Aly Sujo, "The Ghoul Next Door Was Jail Abuse Fotog," *New York Post*, 9 May 2004.
[153] Joe Eaton, "Sabrina Harman," *Roanoke Times*, 26 May 2005.
[154] Finkel and Davenport.

held responsible for some of the negative changes he displayed. At the very least, she was not supportive enough of her soldier husband, and at worst she may have been guilty of infidelity while he was off doing his duty.

Adding to his domestic concerns, Graner was posted to a notoriously dangerous prison in Saudi Arabia and was serving as a prison guard when a violent riot broke out. It was an event, the reader is informed, that scarred all who served. The *Washington Post* reports:

> Months of such experiences changed every one of the reservists by the time they left Saudi Arabia, [a friend of Graner's] and others say – some in positive ways, some not. There have been a high number of divorces and two suicides, including the suicide of one of Graner's closest friends.[155]

The explanation of Graner suggests that he is a damaged Gulf War veteran, indelibly changed by the horrors of war not because he is a man, but because he is a soldier and war is a hell that not all soldiers can survive intact. His experience in the Gulf and his disillusionment with his possibly unfaithful wife tacitly explain his return to civilian life as a documented spousal abuser, and as a civilian prison guard who was repeatedly reprimanded for failure to follow orders and who was also investigated for prisoner abuse.

One consequence of attempts to explain England, Harman, and Graner is that the cause for the women's behavior is positioned within them, as something essential to them as women, or as the result of their failure to perform properly as women. The cause of Graner's behavior, on the other hand, is exterior to him and not connected to his unmarked gender. He is a victim of circumstances and, perhaps, a treacherous woman. The media portraits of the behavior of the women soldiers of Abu Ghraib as being deviant for women, or perhaps being deviant because they are *women soldiers* – terms that are nearly mutually exclusive – both emphasize women

[155] Finkel and Davenport.

embodying sex in a way that men do not. Whether they are sexual renegades or simply seducible, the women soldiers represent temptation and a stumbling block for masculine warriors.

The Sexual Body of Lynndie England

Perhaps because women have been historically tied inextricably to their gendered bodies, they have also been understood in many cultures that are otherwise vastly different to embody their sexuality in a way that men do not. In fact, one of the most common arguments given for keeping women out of the military is that their sexual presence will break down unit cohesion. As the logic goes, men desire women and are in competition with each other for their attention. This breaks down unit cohesion, and explains why Elaine Donnelly of the conservative *Center for Military Readiness* refers to women soldiers as a "distraction."[156]

Sexual assault has been a pervasive problem in military academies and units since they were integrated, but it is not difficult to find those who excuse male soldiers who sexually assault their female counterparts. Carol Burke notes that these

> reactionaries blame neither the system nor the perpetrators but the women themselves. Calling for separate but equal training programs, these people maintain that it is "natural" or "inevitable" for such situations to occur when men and women are placed in close quarters…[157]

The assumption being that it is "natural" or "inevitable" for men to sexually assault women, and the solution is to remove women from the military environment.

In anthropologist Gayle Rubin's work on the politics of sexuality, she notes that "because sexuality is a nexus of the relationships between genders, much of the oppression of women is

[156] Elaine Donnelly, "Army Betraying Its Women...And Men," *Center for Military Readiness* (2005), http://www.cmrlink.org/WomenInCombat.asp?docID=243
[157] Burke, 21.

borne by, mediated through, and constituted within, sexuality."[158] Later in her essay, she posits one reason for this gendered oppression: "Part of the modern ideology of sex is that lust is the province of men, purity that of women."[159] Unsurprisingly, given these prevalent views, media discourse surrounding the soldiers who abused prisoners at Abu Ghraib focuses on England's sexual indiscretions, both in front of and away from the camera, while offering very little commentary regarding her consensual sexual partners who were all men. Although one of the charges brought against Graner in his court-martial was adultery,[160] no media attention is focused on him for his sexual dalliances with England. Rather, England is portrayed as the one who would not stay in her own bed and who is seen in unreleased videos engaging in sexual behavior with a number of soldiers including Graner. Graner's sexual behavior goes uncondemned in media reports and remains largely invisible seemingly because, as a man, he was just doing what men do. As a woman, England's behavior is wanton and inappropriate. She is described as "brazen"[161] and "undisciplined and promiscuous."[162]

A story in the *New York Post* breathlessly announces that "shocking shots of sexcapades involving Pfc. Lynndie England were among the hundreds of X-rated photos and videos from the Abu Ghraib prison scandal" that lawmakers viewed in a "top-secret Capitol Hill conference room."[163] Although other soldiers appeared in sexually explicit photos and videos from Abu Ghraib, the *New York Post* reports that it was England who was engaged in a "porno

[158] Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 28.
[159] Rubin, 33.
[160] Graner was separated from his wife when he and England began their relationship. They later divorced. After the birth of his child by England, Graner married another convicted Abu Ghraib abuser Megan Ambuhl.
[161] Geller.
[162] Estes Thompson, "Iraqi Detainees Identified Pfc. Lynndie England as Abuser," *Associated Press State & Local Wire*, 5 August 2004.
[163] Vincent Morris and Deborah Orin, "Leash Gal's Sex Pix," *New York Post*, 13 May 2004.

performance."[164] And even though some of the unreleased photographs showed soldiers engaging in sex acts, simulated and otherwise, with dead animals and posing with dead Iraqi prisoners, the "most jarring," according to the *Washington Post*, were "the raw sex shots of England and Graner doing things to each other, and of England doing things to herself."[165] The peculiar reduction of England to her sexual body is not only the consequence of her abusive actions at Abu Ghraib. Many of the sources cited for this chapter report on England's pregnancy by Graner as if it is news, and as if it somehow explains her behavior. "Who can ignore the pregnancy?" rhetorically asks one article. "Getting pregnant in combat theater is forbidden."[166] England's pregnant body is tacitly touted as one more sign of her out-of-control sexuality. It is also England's body that gets press attention in more than one report of nude photographs for which she posed while on vacation in Virginia Beach with her boyfriend, Graner.[167]

As if England's rumored off-camera and on-camera behavior were not enough to bring condemnation, certain media accounts embellish the evidence that is available in order to reinforce her sexual excesses. As one Los Angeles columnist describes the photographs: "She points a seductive finger at their exposed genitals, holds a grown man at the end of a leash and grins the most gleeful grin all the while."[168] Leaving aside the problematic description of England's finger as "seductive," only the most imaginative viewer could describe her expression in the leash photograph as a "gleeful grin." One thing that makes this photograph so difficult to look at is that England's expression suggests boredom – as if this was an everyday duty for her and had lost its thrill. There are undoubtedly disturbing sexual connotations to the photograph,

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[164] Morris and Orin.
[165] Lynne Duke, "A Woman Apart: For Fellow Soldiers, Lynndie England's Role at Abu Ghraib Is Best Viewed from a Distance," *Washington Post*, 19 September 2004.
[166] Duke.
[167] Price.
[168] The World According to Peaches, "We All Share the Guilt with Lynndie England," *Daily News of Los Angeles*, 30 September 2004.

but England's facial expression neither adds to nor subtracts from those connotations, and they would be there regardless of who held the leash – woman *or man*. The fact that it is a woman with a reputation for not using much discernment in choosing her sexual partners only adds fuel to the notion that women do not just *have* sex, they *are* sex.

The women in the Abu Ghraib photographs were indicted by military justice for their crimes against helpless detainees at the prison, and further indicted by the press and public for their failure to behave as proper women. Unlike their male counterparts, the women of Abu Ghraib bore the burden of representation of all women soldiers, and all women soldiers were implicitly indicted along with England, Harman, and Ambuhl.

"*Thelma and Louise* in Iraq"

As Beauvoir notes, men are the One, accepted as subjects, and women are the Other, defined in opposition to men who require no definition. Men are rarely described in popular media as part of a gendered category while women rarely escape the assignment. Michael Kimmel notes, "[w]e continue to treat our male military, political, scientific, or literary figures as if their gender, their masculinity, had nothing to do with their military exploits, policy decisions, scientific experiments, or writing styles and subjects."[169] This inability of society to see men *as men* while being simultaneously unable to see women as anything but women may explain how Lynndie England, Sabrina Harman and, to a far lesser extent, photographer Megan Ambuhl, although three of the soldiers investigated for the Abu Ghraib abuses, are seen by some aspects of the media as standing in for all women soldiers. Indeed their behavior, although anomalous by most accounts, reignited the debate over women in the military.

[169] Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, Second ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2.

The conservative journal the *American Spectator* commented in a we-told-you-so tone, "Conservatives were shouted down when they warned that placing women in combat would not only expose them to abuse but could turn them into abusers."[170] The article suggests that feminists are ultimately to blame, noting: "Had Thelma and Louise gone off to Iraq – and sexually humiliated some of Saddam Hussein's soldiers as payback for abuse to Jessica Lynch a few cities back – the radical feminists could make a sequel."[171] The *National Review* added, "This collapse of traditional roles has something to do with the involvement of women soldiers in disgraceful behavior."[172] According to Linda Chavez, president of the Center for Equal Opportunity – an organization that opposes affirmative action and women in the military – "the presence of women in the military police unit may have even encouraged the obscene misbehavior that the photos reveal."[173] Chavez goes on to ask if it is "good for civilization and society to try to turn women into men and put them in the traditional role of the male warrior. You have to train people to kill. I think we have to have the debate about whether this is a desirable thing for women."[174] Apparently for Chavez and those who support the military's combat exclusion for women, there is no debate about whether it is desirable to train men to kill.

It is not only conservative journals that moved to place the Abu Ghraib women in a position of representation for all women soldiers. A writer for the *Chicago Sun-Times* comments regarding England: "One can't imagine a worse poster child for women in the military."[175] The comment is made seemingly without awareness that the men implicated are not considered to be representatives of men in the military. *The Tulsa World* noted that the abuse photographs were a

[170] Neumayr.
[171] Neumayr.
[172] Ann Marlowe, "Shameless," *National Review*, May 21, 2004.
[173] Leonard.
[174] Leonard.
[175] Richard Roeper, "The News Is Different When Women Are Involved," *Chicago Sun-Times*, 12 May 2004.

taint on all soldiers but especially women. The reporter noted, "Those pictures…unfairly smear all of the women and men who are doing the job right. Already there are some talking heads dredging up the old canard that women soldiers can only harm morale and order."[176] Although this writer does not appear to support the idea that the Abu Ghraib women are representative of all women soldiers, she references the women in the military debate without pointing out that there is not a debate about men in the military. This lack of comment seems to naturalize the debate even though the writer refers to it as a "canard." Another columnist, writing in almost mournful, personal tones of her regret over these women's actions, wrote, "Men have been implicated in this scandal, too, but it's the women I feel so disappointed in. I expected more of them." Why? "I believe *we* are peacemakers rather than warriors. *We* nurture rather than harm. And *we* use *our* refined instincts to expose and stop brutality"[177] (emphasis added). According to this columnist, the women of Abu Ghraib represent not only all women soldiers but all womankind, and for that reason their behavior is a particular affront to women everywhere.

It is noteworthy that none of these articles suggest that the men of Abu Ghraib represent all men, nor take those men *as men* to task for their violent behavior. The peculiar societal tendency to conflate a few military women's behavior with that of all military women is discussed in detail by Shannon Holland in her research on media reporting about American POW Jessica Lynch. Holland notes that media reporting on Lynch tended to

> obfuscate the political debates over women in combat by metonymically framing Lynch as a representative of all military women, thus deflecting attention away from the thousands of women who perform effectively in the military (and the thousands of men who do not).[178]

[176] Marquez.
[177] Nappi.
[178] Shannon L. Holland, "The Dangers of Playing Dress-Up: Popular Representations of Jessica Lynch and the Controversy Regarding Women in Combat," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 92, (2006), 28.

Like Jessica Lynch, who Holland argues was framed as being incongruous in the hyper-masculine military environment, the women soldiers of Abu Ghraib were similarly castigated. As Howard and Prividera note, the tacit cultural expectation of the warrior soldier is that he is male to the point where the words "warrior" and "woman" are seen as antithetical. Carol Burke finds that in spite of integrated training and facilities in the military and growing opportunities for women, basic training naturalizes aggressive and violent behavior as masculine and is set in opposition to what is feminine. Burke notes:

> Training that sets its sights not only on instilling discipline, teamwork, and the knowledge of military skills but also on sculpting ineffable "manhood" must set itself in opposition to all that is not "manly." What boys are trained to cast away as despised is called female. The feminine names traits to be loathed, ridiculed, and exorcised.[179]

Perpetrating violence is justified in military training through instilled hatred of the enemy. Burke writes: "Moral justification, palliative comparison, euphemistic labeling, displacement of responsibility, and diffusion of responsibility offer ways in which repugnant conduct is transformed into sanctioned behavior. The soldier executes violence not as the aggressor but simply as the justified moral agent."[180] This is all part of the transformation of the recruit from civilian to warrior – one that requires "him" to suppress as feminine any squeamishness "he" may feel in the face of violence. This "warrior code" in fact, as one scholar put it, naturalizes violence as part of the tradition of American men.[181]

The persistent cultural fantasy that soldiers must be men and men are naturally violent may explain why the backgrounds of prominent male soldiers at Abu Ghraib are not interrogated by the media for violent histories that might give insight into their violent actions. Charles Graner, as previously mentioned, has a well-documented record of domestic abuse. His ex-wife

[179] Burke, 50.
[180] Burke, 48.
[181] T. Walter Herbert, *Sexual Violence and American Manhood* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 60.

filed three protection-from-abuse orders against him because of his violent behavior toward her and their two children.[182] Early media accounts of the story make no suggestion that a man with Graner's background had no business being in a position of oversight of essentially helpless prisoners. Nor are there any media pundits pointing an accusatory finger at the men at Abu Ghraib as examples of testosterone-driven male violence. But if military training has as its goal the making of violent warriors, perhaps Graner's history and unspoken gender were assets to his duties in Iraq.

Another oddity is that the two men who were ultimately held to be the most culpable for the abuses at Abu Ghraib, Graner and Frederick, were both prison guards in civilian life. There is no doubt that the behavior of England and Harman in the photographs is abhorrent, but neither woman is shown physically hurting the prisoners. The same cannot be said for Graner and Frederick. In one photo, Graner is shown aiming a fist at the head of a prisoner he has subdued on the floor. Eyewitness reports confirm that after the photo was taken, Graner hit the prisoner so hard that he was rendered unconscious and necessitating a call for a medic.[183] In another photo, Frederick is shown sitting on a prisoner who is laying face down pinned between two stretchers. The prisoner is clearly in discomfort, but Frederick sits casually on the man like a big game hunter on a trophy. In another photo that also calls the image of a big game hunter to mind, Graner is seen with the same prisoner, kneeling beside him with a hand on the hapless man's back.

Despite these egregious cases of physical abuse from experienced civilian prison guards, no journalists, editorialists, or military experts are recorded as suggesting that civilian prison guards should be more carefully vetted before they are allowed to have oversight in military

[182] Finkel and Davenport.
[183] These same eyewitnesses report that when the medic, a woman, arrived and treated the unconscious prisoner, Graner asked her if she wanted to stay and join in on the "fun." The medic declined. See Duke.

prisons – even though Graner is reported as having a violent history as a civilian corrections officer. The silence on this issue seems to suggest that it is not the men's violence that is culpable, but their failure to meet the expectations of honor of the warrior code as it is understood in popular culture. While it is certainly to be expected that a soldier would have occasion to resort to violence, tormenting helpless prisoners would be seen as the base behavior of a bully, not the noble action of a warrior hero. At any rate, Graner and Frederick's behavior is not used as an excuse to instigate a debate about violent men in the military. Neither man comes represent all male soldiers in any universalizing sense.

(White) Men Have No Gender

I began this chapter with the claim that "the story of the prisoner torture at Abu Ghraib broke in late April 2004." That claim is not entirely true. The international press was informed as early as January 2004 that a military investigation was in progress regarding abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib.[184] Although the investigation was made public in January, and soldiers began to be charged in March,[185] Abu Ghraib did not become a "story" in the United States until the photographs were made public. The sequence of events supports visual scholars' assertions of the power of photographs to define public consciousness, especially in times of war. Photographs capture a "truth" and immediacy not available with words alone. As Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites note, photographs of war atrocity create "a searing eventfulness that breaks away from any official narrative justifying the war."[186] Indeed, the dissemination of the Abu Ghraib photographs demanded specific official response and apology, and not rationalizations. Even

[184] Eric Schmitt, "Inquiry Ordered into Reports of Prisoner Abuse," *New York Times*, 17 January 2004.
[185] Ann Scott Tyson, "U.S. Soldiers Face Charges of Prisoner Abuse," *Christian Science Monitor*, 26 March 2004.
[186] Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, "Public Identity and Collective Memory in U.S. Iconic Photography: The Image of 'Accidental Napalm'," *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 20, (2003), 41.

though the Bush administration proclaimed its disgust and assured the world press that the contents of the photographs were the work of a "few bad apples"[187] and not representative of the American military, the response was not enough for members of the press and public. There were repeated calls for Bush to make an explicit apology. And when he did finally apologize, he was condemned in some media accounts for not apologizing specifically to Iraqis.[188] Interestingly, none of these calls for an apology were issued before the release of the photographs. In the spirit of "seeing is believing," until the sight of prisoner abuse became public knowledge, it did not exist as an exigence demanding a response.[189]

The photographs from Abu Ghraib tell a story of the abuse of power that has visible gender, racial, and cultural implications. The hundreds of photographs were part of Charles Graner's private collection on a CD that documented his tour in the Middle East.[190] It is likely that he never intended for them to achieve mass dissemination, but the very fact of the photographs being taken in the first place calls into question whether the cameras at Abu Ghraib were part of the prisoners' torture. Mark Danner documents that as part of the cultural training of soldiers in Iraq, they are instructed to avoid shaming Iraqi men above all else. Soldiers are instructed that if they "must do something likely to cause shame, remove the person from the view of others."[191] Soldiers are also informed that "[p]lacing a detainee on the ground or putting a foot on him implies you are God. This is one of the worst things we can do."[192] Danner argues

[187] "Mr. Rumsfeld's Defense," *New York Times*, 8 May 2004.
[188] See Richard Ronconi, "Bush's Apology Needed to Be Made to Iraqis," *Times Union*, 14 May 2004. See also, Jonathan Curiel, "Bush Defends U.S. On Arab TV," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 6 May 2004.
[189] For more on the power of photography in wartime, see Barbie Zelizer, "When War Is Reduced to a Photograph," in *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime*, ed. Stuart Allan and Barbie Zelizer (New York: Taylor & Francis Inc., 2004).
[190] For the sequence of events that resulted in the broadcast of the photographs, see Rory Kennedy, "Ghosts of Abu Ghraib," (USA: Moxie Firecracker Films, 2007).
[191] Mark Danner, *Torture and Truth: America, Abu Ghraib, and the War on Terror* (New York: New York Review Books, 2004), 18.
[192] Danner, 18.

that shaming the prisoners in front of others, men and women, and then the presence of the camera "let the detainee know that the humiliation would not stop when the act itself did but would be preserved into the future in a way that the detainee would not be able to control."[193] It seems very probable that the camera did more than provide keepsakes for Graner and other soldiers. It was likely an inseparable part of the prisoners' torment.[194]

Thinking in terms of who had power at Abu Ghraib and who did not, the male and female soldiers are equal opportunity abusers. Both have complete control over their naked and helpless prisoners. Although all of those who were court-martialed argued that they were simply following orders, and essentially helpless themselves, the photographs tell the story of soldiers abusing the authority they had been granted and, often smiling, seeming to enjoy it. The Iraqi prisoners, on the other hand, are usually shown stripped of clothing and of any suggestion of real or symbolic phallic power – and this is undoubtedly an important part of their humiliation. They are usually hooded and bound, often hand and foot, and thoroughly subdued. Contrary to their male captors, the maleness of these prisoners is profoundly marked both in the photographs and in the press accounts of the abuse.

In all but a few photographs, the prisoners are naked. Many of the news outlets that published the photographs redacted the genitals and the faces of those who were unhooded reportedly out of respect for the serious breach of Muslim cultural mandates that had been forced upon these men, and, no doubt, in keeping with editorial policies against explicit nudity. Regardless of the motive, I argue that the very act of blurring the genitals draws the viewers' attention to them and succeeds in reducing the prisoners to their penises.[195] As viewers, we are

[193] Danner, 19.
[194] My thanks to Amy Ross for pointing this out to me.
[195] In early 2006, Salon.com released previously unavailable photographs from Abu Ghraib. These photographs are not redacted, and I would argue do not draw the viewer's eye to the penis the way the redacted photographs do.

intensely aware of these prisoners' gender, not only because media reports call our attention to the violation of Muslim codes of conduct, but also because the photographs draw our attention to the unmistakably male part of their anatomy. Their nudity makes them appear vulnerable in a way that their captors are not. This latter point is also made by Hariman and Lucaites in their discussion of the iconic "Accidental Napalm" photograph from the Vietnam era. In referring to nine-year-old Kim Phuc's nudity in the photograph, Hariman and Lucaites note: "The uniformed soldier [in the photograph] has an identity; the naked body has been stripped of conventional patterns of recognition, deference, and dismissal."[196] Like the naked and injured girl in "Accidental Napalm," the prisoners in the Abu Ghraib photographs have been stripped of all identifying features except for their gender. Their bodies become the *tabula rasa* upon which the story of prisoner torture at Abu Ghraib is written. For, as Christine Harold and Kevin Michael DeLuca point out, the dissemination and reception of images "of the human body in peril…illustrates the rhetorical and political force of images in general and of the body specifically."[197]

The lack of vulnerability on the part of the American soldiers in the photographs, particularly the male soldiers, is worthy of comment. Of all of the photographs that have been released to the public, only a handful were posed or staged. Others were candid shots of life at Abu Ghraib. Interestingly, in the posed photographs those involved seemed to make an effort to protect the male soldiers from any hint of homoeroticism. When the male soldiers are seen with naked prisoners, either they are at a safe distance, or they pose with women. For example, Graner appears in two of the infamous pyramid photographs, but he is seen with England in one and

[196] Hariman and Lucaites, 42.
[197] Christine Harold and Kevin Michael DeLuca, "Behold the Corpse: Violent Images and the Case of Emmett Till," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 8, (2005), 266.

Harman in the other. In the photograph with England (Figure 2), the two are standing at the heads of the Iraqis, Graner has his arm around England, and both are giving thumbs up.

Figure 2: England and Graner with prisoner pyramid

Graner is looking into the camera and not at the pile of naked men in front of him. In the photograph with Harman (Figure 3), the two stand behind the pyramid. Graner is further back, with his arms crossed, staring into the camera. In contrast, Harman is crouched down behind the prisoners, between Graner and the pyramid, and seems close enough to touch them.

Figure 3: Graner and Harman with prisoner pyramid

The presence of a woman in both of these shots, I argue, serves to hold Graner's heterosexuality in place. Had he willingly posed alone and in close contact with naked men, he would not have been able to avoid the homoerotic implications that are antithetical to the American warrior.

In the only widely broadcast photograph where Graner is seen physically handling the prisoners, the raised fist picture, all of the prisoners are clothed. In fact, they are so covered up, and all are wearing hoods, that all we see is a jumble of limbs and only naked hands and feet are visible. Graner is not seen touching or cavorting with naked men and he thus escapes the "taint" of homosexuality that is imposed upon the prisoners in the staged photographs.

The sexual humiliation visited upon these prisoners shocked the world particularly the Muslim world where such crimes know no forgiveness – certainly not for perpetrators and often not for victims either. Yet according to Burke's exploration of gendering in the US military, the mode of humiliation chosen is an essential part of military culture. From the moment basic training begins, new soldiers learn that the ultimate humiliation is to be feminine. Burke notes,

"Conventionally, male initiation in warrior cultures begins with infantilization and feminization and proceeds to practices designed to rid the adolescent of all traces of the female."[198] Burke gives examples of many of the methods used to defeminize recruits including sexually humiliating initiation rites with strong homoerotic currents and referring to soldiers as "ladies" or "girls" when they do not perform as expected, thus building up an aversion to all things feminine.

The abuse the prisoners at Abu Ghraib experienced shows a marked attempt on the part of their captors to humiliate the men by feminizing them. In several photographs, we see prisoners forced to simulate sex with each other – a severe violation of Muslim culture and a clear attempt to feminize the prisoners through simulated homosexual sex. Several prisoners are seen with women's underwear on their faces and, according to England's deposition prior to her court-martial, sometimes the guards used maxi pads instead of underwear to maximize the prisoners' humiliation.[199] Of course, the photographs that received the most attention are those where women soldiers are in the presence of naked prisoners. Thus when a woman, England, points at and seems to mock the genitals of an Iraqi man who is being forced to masturbate, the ultimate infraction has been committed. England has all the power and the Iraqi prisoner is weak, helpless, and worst of all feminine.

Without doubt, the modesty between the sexes that is required in Muslim culture contributed greatly to the abusive choices the soldiers made. But the military tradition of humiliating men by disparagingly forcing feminine gender markers upon them worked hand-in-hand with Muslim cultural taboos. England and Harman, who received the same basic training as their male counterparts, were complicit in reinforcing the view that the worst thing that can be

[198] Burke, 20.
[199] Michael A. Fuoco, "England Gives Her Side," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 23 May 2004.

done to a man is to make him a woman. Press accounts of the sexual abuse at Abu Ghraib often cite Arab culture as the reason Harman and especially England's actions were so repugnant.[200] Not as much discourse is available concerning those photographs where neither woman is present and where the prisoners are clearly being forced to perform sex acts, simulated or otherwise, by their male captors.

The photographs of performed and simulated sex have received much attention for their pornographic potential, and rightly so. Three in particular have received wide circulation in popular press and have stirred outrage in Eastern and Western cultures. In one, a naked, hooded man stands at an angle to the camera (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Prisoners in forced sexual simulation pose

[200] See Hedges. See also, Dana Milbank, "U.S. Tries to Calm Furor Caused by Photos," *Washington Post*, 1 May 2004.

Kneeling between his spread legs is another naked and hooded man. The standing man has his hands on the kneeling man's head as they simulate the position of fellatio. The shot is framed perfectly. In the background, another naked and hooded man is visibly masturbating, while another holds his own head in what can only be described as a gesture of despair. While mainstream press pixilated all visible genitalia in this shot, there is no reducing the impact of this photograph. Were it not for the man holding his head in despair, the shot could be read as a standard pornography scene where two people have sex, while a voyeur looks on and masturbates. Whether the man holding his head is simply adjusting his hood or is on the verge of emotional breakdown, his posture of hopelessness and helplessness takes this photograph from pornography to something that is heartbreaking in its frankness. It is a reminder to the viewer, in case we have forgotten, that what we are seeing is not fun and games at Abu Ghraib, but torture.

A second sexually explicit photo shows two naked and hooded men, their hands linked behind their heads, facing the camera (Figure 5). They are half-sitting on the upper backs of two other naked men seated on the floor behind them.

Figure 5: Nude hooded prisoners

Although the men facing the camera are not interacting with each other, their genitalia are perfectly centered in the shot. This is an example of what I noted earlier, namely, that the act of blurring the genitalia, even if the motive was to show some respect for men who were experiencing egregious sexual assault, only serves to reduce these men to their penises. A third shot isolates one of the two men in the second shot, again situating his penis in the photograph to give it "center stage." In another photograph, Lynndie England poses with the prisoner, pointing at his genitalia and smiling at the camera. The photographer manages to capture both this anonymous man's humiliation and England's glee. The photographs of the Iraqi men, seen with or without soldiers, are unmistakable evidence of their captors' attempts to humiliate and feminize them. Although the male soldiers carefully preserve their own heterosexuality and unmarked gender in the posed photos, much effort seems to have been made to impose gender excess on the prisoners. Graner and Frederick were reported to have routinely called the prisoners names, such as "gays," and asking them "do they like to make love to guys,"[201] verbal taunts obviously designed to force homosexualizing markers upon prisoners whose culture took severe exception to being so marked.

An analysis of the Abu Ghraib photographs is incomplete without giving attention to the fact that there were also women prisoners at the prison who were alleged to have been sexually abused and photographed. Because only one set of photographs of a woman prisoner has achieved any level of dissemination, and women prisoners rate only brief mention in official investigations such as the Taguba Report, very little is known about these women. The Taguba Report acknowledges that "naked male and female detainees" were captured on film and videotape,[202] but only reproductions of male detainees have achieved wide dissemination. The

[201] Fuoco, "Her Side."
[202] As reprinted in Danner, 292.

one authenticated set of photographs of an Iraqi woman prisoner shows a before and after shot as she is forced to lift her shirt (Figures 6 and 7).

Figure 6: Iraqi woman prisoner

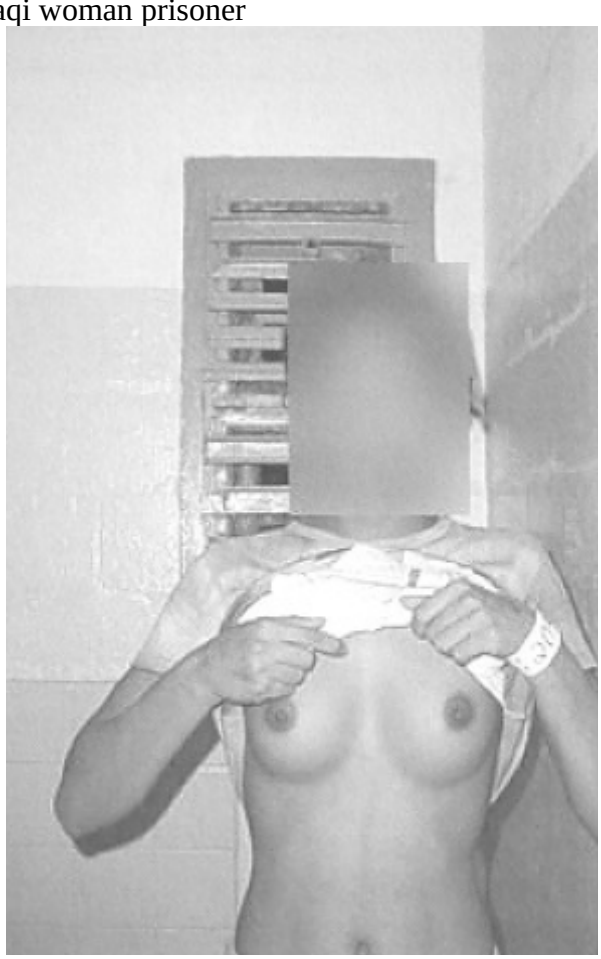

Figure 7: Iraqi woman prisoner

She poses alone with no soldiers, male or female, appearing in the frame to further mock and humiliate her. It is a mystery why this set of photographs did not achieve the mass distribution of some of the photographs showing male prisoners' humiliation. There is nothing novel about women being the sexual spoils of war,[203] so is this photograph simply too banal to make news? The sexual humiliation of men in wartime is portrayed as something new and that likely contributed to the constant reproduction of the photographs featuring men. But perhaps the cynical truth of women's sexual abuse as concomitant with war prevented these photographs from gaining traction. Or perhaps the banality of these photographs comes from the Western obsession with breasts being displayed for titillation. Perhaps it is too reminiscent of the *Girls Gone Wild* video series that shows college women in various spring break locations baring their bodies for voyeuristic cameras. Perhaps it is too reminiscent of that ethos to suggest abuse and humiliation. Or, completely contrary to these speculations, perhaps the contents of these photographs are too shocking for public sensibilities suggesting, as they do, that "liberating" American forces were involved in demeaning Arab women. As Kristen McCauliff has argued, Arab Muslim women are typically portrayed in Western media discourses as passive and religiously pious.[204] With mass media being perhaps the only link to Arab cultures for most Americans, an interpretation is invited of Muslim women as incapable of being enemy combatants. This being the case, surely the quest of the American masculine warrior is to protect these women, not exploit them.

To sexually abuse civilian women would run counter to the heroic and honorable soldier archetype. This notion seems so thoroughly embedded into military tradition that the Taguba

[203] See Susan Brownmiller's historical treatment of rape and war in the section "War" in Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (New York: Ballantine Publishing Group, 1975).
[204] Kristen McCauliff, unpublished manuscript, "The [Female] Citizen: Selling the Story of Suffrage in the West," (Athens, GA: University of Georgia, 2008).

Report, which was the first official investigation into the Abu Ghraib abuse scandal, reports on the abuse of women in ambiguous terms. The report is unequivocal in listing the crimes perpetrated against male detainees. It charges soldiers with "forcing groups of male detainees to masturbate," "threatening male detainees with rape," and "forcing naked male detainees to wear women's underwear," among other things.[205] Among the list of outrageous abuses committed against male detainees, there is this curious insertion: "A male MP guard having sex with a female detainee."[206] The language choice here is startling. First, it implies that the sexual encounter was consensual. The woman was not reported to have been raped; rather, she is "having sex." To suggest this encounter could have been consensual ignores the relative power position of an armed American guard at a military prison in an active war zone compared to that of an unarmed woman prisoner. Interestingly, in keeping with the tone of the Taguba report, none of the court-martialed soldiers were charged with rape. A second point of interest in Taguba's language choice is that it makes clear that this consummated sexual act was heterosexual, thus preserving the appearance of a staunchly heterosexual fighting force even in the face of so many homoerotically charged scenes captured on film.

Whatever the reasons for the near invisibility of the women prisoners at Abu Ghraib, one thing seems to be certain: Their presence does not trouble gender as the women soldiers' behavior does, and as the forced behavior of the male detainees does. Rather, the women prisoners' reduction to their sexual bodies is in keeping with the view of women as something to be looked at and enjoyed as objects of male gratification. A woman baring her breasts before a camera, or having a pseudo-consensual sexual encounter with a warrior-victor, seems hardly worthy of media attention, much less widespread public disapproval. Further, their position as

[205] Reprinted in Danner, 292.
[206] Reprinted in Danner, 292.

captives under firm masculine control relieves any possibility of news-making gender outlaw behavior.

All of the convicted abusers at Abu Ghraib defended their actions by claiming that they were just following orders, and that part of their job was to "soften" prisoners for military intelligence personnel.[207] The argument has failed to gain any sympathy for the accused, but considering the military tradition of using feminization techniques to humiliate and ultimately harden new recruits, the convicted soldiers' claims may have some merit. Regardless, no media commentary urges a review of military training that extols the masculine by demonizing the feminine. Rather, the photographs are used to discipline the American women for their lack of femininity, and the American men for their lack of honorable soldiering. While much anguished sympathy is expressed regarding the male detainees, there is virtually no sustained discourse regarding the female detainees. Nonetheless, the overall relegation of events at Abu Ghraib as an anomaly serves only to pathologize the abusers, rather than using those events as an opportunity to overhaul a clearly flawed military organization.

Conclusion

The story of Abu Ghraib represents a dark era for the US military. It suggests that despite political posturing that would portray the military engagement in Iraq as a liberating effort, imperialism may well have reared its ugly head. Abu Ghraib has become a household word in America, but has not quite risen to the level of a scandal, although the word is constantly used to describe it. The issue was a nonissue during the 2004 presidential campaign, and George W. Bush won re-election in November 2004 despite there still being many unsettled questions about his promoting policies that implicitly endorse torture as an interrogation method. While there is

[207] Julie Scelfo, "She Was Following Orders," *Newsweek*, 11 May, 2004.

no one-to-one connection between Bush's re-election and the lack of sustained public outrage about Abu Ghraib, the fact that the case was not an issue during the campaign at least suggests it was not perceived as something that greatly concerned the electorate. As disturbing as the story is as a statement of American foreign policy, and as disgusting as the photographs are to look at as a demonstration of military tactics or structure, the media reports about the story focus largely on the gender violations committed by the American women involved. In this, perhaps media is only guilty of giving the public what it wants, namely, an explanation for how women could do such a thing. As Hatty points out regarding the ambivalence many feel when confronted with a woman warrior:

> Access by women to the hallowed role of warrior arguably increases women's status; at the same time, it disturbs and unsettles men's confidence in their superior status. The disappearance of difference, implied by gender integration strategies, may provoke a defensive and hostile attack.[208]

Public and media outcry over the actions of the women of Abu Ghraib can accurately be described as hostile. Were it only that the outcry was an expression of moral outrage over what human beings will do to each other, it would be understandable. But holding England, Harman, and Ambuhl to a standard to which their male counterparts are not held is a demonstration of Inness' argument: "The more a woman adopts signifiers of masculinity, the more she disturbs mainstream society. Our culture likes its girls to be girls and its boys to be boys."[209]

The story of Abu Ghraib represents a moment when cultural choices were made as to which debates the case would bring to public consciousness. It was a moment ripe for critiquing military culture and procedures, and for asking questions about the legitimacy of U.S. involvement in Iraq. And although these issues were raised, they were mere whispers compared to the overwhelming press and public outcry regarding the gender violations committed by the

[208] Hatty, 130.
[209] Inness, 21.

women soldiers. Instead of sustained questions about the lack of discipline, training, and experience of all the soldiers implicated in the abuses at Abu Ghraib, there is commentary on Lynndie England's tomboyishness, sexually free lifestyle, and overall gender outlaw behavior. Instead of a debate that focused on the flawed procedures that allowed a man with a history of violence to be entrusted with the welfare of helpless prisoners, there is a *non sequitur* about the wisdom of women in the military. Instead of reinvigorating the debate regarding the class of soldiers doing most of the bleeding and dying in Iraq, we are given England, pathologized as part of that class. Finally, instead of using the photographs to initiate a debate about faulty and antiquated military training that elevates all that is stereotypically masculine by debasing feminine markers in all their forms, the photographs are offered as evidence of the deviance of a few rogue soldiers.

Evidence suggests that, as abhorrent as the actions of the soldiers were, the women involved were held to a standard to which their male counterparts were not held. While the women soldiers are disciplined for their lack of femininity, the male soldiers remain invisible as representatives of men. Mass media discourses seem to accept and further the cultural notion of women's presence in the military as problematic: Rather than England and Harman being held up as examples of bad soldiers, they are classified as bad girls. Rather than mass media using England's apparently low IQ to draw attention to the questionable standards of military recruitment, her low sexual morality is highlighted. Gender, coded both in the language describing the story and in the photographs capturing the abuse, is disciplined and reinscribed every step of the way.

Even though the male soldiers of Abu Ghraib were not socially disciplined for poor performance of masculinity, their social and legal indictment as bad soldiers emphasizes a point

important for this project. In a post 9/11 world where a war of ideologies rages – a war where a larger-than-life hero savior is longed for – the male soldiers of Abu Ghraib fail to meet the mark. Their complete failure to uphold the honorable warrior code, and their foolishly allowing their failures to be captured for the civilian public to see, disqualifies them as heroic warrior saviors. It seems inconceivable in the mass media discourses that the undisciplined women soldiers could ever qualify, but as the next chapter demonstrates, when it comes to women, maintaining discipline has little to do with their ability to be perceived as honorable warriors. For shortly after the revelation of events at Abu Ghraib, women were once again topics of news coverage as it came to light that women interrogators were known to have abused captive Arab male prisoners at Guantánamo Bay. Here again, media discourses make women highly visible and embodied, while male interrogators fade into invisibility.

CHAPTER 3

SEX, BLOOD, AND DEGRADATION: THE WOMEN OF GITMO

While there are plenty of good reasons to keep Gitmo open – we need some place to hold suspected terrorists, after all – cleaning house seems an excellent idea. Let's begin by getting rid of the women.[210]

Introduction

Almost as soon as the United States began its military campaign in Afghanistan, a dilemma arose about what to do with the prisoners that had been captured on the battlefield or turned over to U.S. forces as part of a bounty policy.[211] Security was an issue, as Afghanistan was an active war zone. In the end, the decision was made that the U.S. base near the southeastern tip of Cuba would serve as an interim holding facility until it could be determined what would be done with the prisoners. Guantánamo Bay, U.S. Naval Station GTMO (commonly referred to as "Gitmo"), was not ideal; it had neither housing infrastructure nor the personnel to support the influx of hundreds of prisoners. It also bears the distinction of being the only U.S. base occupying space in a hostile country with which the U.S. has no diplomatic relations.[212] But Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld declared it to be the "least worst place" for the detainees.[213] The first of the "detainees"[214] arrived on January 11, 2002 at Camp X-Ray

[210] "Iraqis Demonstrate What Torture Is," *Sentinel & Enterprise*, 24 June 2005.
[211] John Mintz, "Lawyer: Most Cuba Detainees Not Terrorists," *Washington Post*, 2 June 2002.
[212] Gitmo was leased from Cuba in 1903, and a 1934 treaty affirmed the lease. The lease cannot be terminated without the agreement of both the U.S. and Cuba. The U.S. pays the Castro regime $4,085 a year for the land, and Castro refuses to cash the checks. See Theodore K. Mason, *Across the Cactus Curtain: The Story of Guantánamo Bay* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1984).
[213] George Edmonson, "Preparing Guantánamo: Base Bracing for 'Worst' Terror Cases," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 8 January 2002.

where they were "housed in open-air cages with concrete floors" until more permanent facilities could be constructed.[215] By April, 2002, construction was completed on a 410-bed facility called Camp Delta, and the numbers of detainees rapidly increased, peaking at 680 in 2003.

Rumors of prisoner mistreatment began almost immediately after their arrival, and were soon bolstered by statements from the International Red Cross noting "deterioration in the psychological health of a large number of detainees."[216] The swirling rumors received massive press attention after the early 2005 release of an FBI report, a Pentagon investigation, and a preview of a tell-all book by a military linguist who had been posted at Gitmo in 2002-2003. In his book, *Inside the Wire*, Erik Saar gives details about the interrogations he witnessed and participated in as a translator. Although Saar reports witnessing abusive women *and men*, as well as women interrogators who behaved professionally and showed respect for the detainees, it is the chapter of his book detailing women engaging in sexualized interrogations that received the most press attention. The FBI and Pentagon reports also discuss interrogators of both sexes engaging in abusive tactics, but the actions of the women interrogators – especially when these were sexualized tactics – overshadow the amount of media coverage given to the often extremely violent actions of male interrogators.

The reports of prisoner abuse came only months after the photographs from the Iraqi prison of Abu Ghraib had achieved worldwide release. Unlike the Abu Ghraib case, there were no accompanying photographs of abuse to feed the story, but like Abu Ghraib, there was a seamy sexual element to the abuse charges. As news media sources reported, women were implicated in the abuse scandal, and were alleged to have performed sexualized interrogations at Gitmo. The

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[214] The Bush administration steadfastly refused to call them "prisoners," and determined that they were not prisoners of war, thus not deserving of Geneva Convention protections. See Ron Hutcheson, "Bush Affirms Stance on Detainees," *San Jose Mercury News*, 29 January 2002.
[215] "Guantanamo Bay Timeline," *Washington Post* (2007), http://projects.washingtonpost.com/guantanamo/timeline/
[216] "Guantanamo Bay Timeline."

interrogations included such things as women wearing tight and/or revealing clothing while questioning Arab male prisoners. There were also reports of women inappropriately touching the men and rubbing their bodies suggestively against the restrained prisoners. In perhaps the most excessive violation of Muslim precepts, there were several confirmed reports of women interrogators smearing fake (and, reported in some cases, real) menstrual blood on the prisoners. The prisoners were then not given access to water with which to wash off what they thought was blood, thereby rendering them too unclean for prayer. This was, of course, the point of this particular tactic – to hinder the prisoners' ability to regain emotional and psychological strength through prayer.[217]

Predictably, with the involvement of women in the reports of abuse at Gitmo, the fact that women had also been involved in the Abu Ghraib scandal was recycled in several media narratives. In this chapter, I will explore some of the similarities, and several of the striking differences, in media coverage of the women of Gitmo and Abu Ghraib. As the women of Abu Ghraib were made highly visible and embodied in media discourses, so too were the women interrogators at Gitmo. However, in continuation of the pattern established at Abu Ghraib, male interrogators and soldiers, also reported to have abused prisoners at Gitmo, remained disembodied. The sexual presence of the women was highlighted by vivid descriptions of the tools of their "trade", namely, their bodies – breasts, genitalia, and menstrual blood. Like the women of Abu Ghraib, the women of Gitmo were portrayed as wielding dangerous, disruptive female sexuality, suggestive of loose personal morals, to the point that some commentators analogized the women interrogators to sex workers.

[217] Erik Saar and Viveca Novak, *Inside the Wire: A Military Intelligence Soldier's Eyewitness Account of Life at Guantánamo* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 225.

Media reporting on Abu Ghraib and Gitmo also differed in several significant ways. One such media narrative concerns the ways in which conservative media analysts reacted to Gitmo. Where several vocal conservative pundits upbraided the women of Abu Ghraib for their behavior, the women of Gitmo were not similarly castigated. Rather, much conservative commentary focused on the perceived erotic aspects of the interrogations and minimized their potential as abuse. The women are portrayed as behaving properly, even on those occasions where their actions are simultaneously compared to that of sex workers.

A second key way in which media coverage of Abu Ghraib differed from Gitmo concerns the ways in which the women of Abu Ghraib were pathologized. There, effort was expended to discover the deviant backgrounds of the women that might subsequently explain their despicable behavior. Not so with the women of Gitmo. Here, mainstream and liberal media argued that the sexual interrogations the women engaged in, whether or not they were voluntary, placed the women at risk of emotional damage. I explore a case study of a U.S. run prison facility in Afghanistan to illuminate my thesis that media discourses show little concern for the emotional well-being of men who engage in violent torture while showing excessive concern for women who engage in sexual torture. This disparity suggests that engaging in violent torture is less traumatic to male perpetrators than sexual abuse is to female perpetrators, and as such presents less of a problem for those perpetrators who eventually re-enter civilian society.

Finally, I will explore the women of Gitmo's use of menstrual blood in interrogations – something that was not reported to have occurred at Abu Ghraib. By examining Judeo-Christian and Islamic cultural perceptions of menstrual blood, I suggest that the reaction of Western media was in keeping with the concurrence across cultures of the view of this blood as particularly polluted. As such, its use is uniquely "productive" against Muslim male prisoners whose

worldview assigns it a place of shame and uncleanness. Its use as part of military strategy is also an affront to "pure," typically male, blood offered in sacrifice on battlefields. The media and public reaction to the use of this blood also serves to emphasize the culturally consecrated value given to male blood generally, and the low regard to which female blood is held. From the male infant blood-letting ritual of circumcision, common across cultures, to the symbolic value afforded to male warrior blood, to the unique Christian understanding of the unparalleled value of Christ's blood, male blood has reserved a sacred space in the ideologies now squaring off in the war on terrorism. And this blood, I will argue, is a necessary component in the construction of the masculine warrior hero capable of prevailing against the new "evil" enemy.

In the next section, I begin the discussion of the ways in which the reporting of the women of Gitmo in many ways repeated and reinforced the reporting of the women of Abu Ghraib. Through discourses that portrayed these women as visible and embodied, despite the lack of photographs, they are assigned a vivid presence at Gitmo that by comparison makes the male interrogators and soldiers fade into invisibility. In addition, like the women of Abu Ghraib, discourses portray the women interrogators of Gitmo as recklessly using a weapon that causes a great deal of societal angst, namely, their sexuality.

Visible, Embodied Women: The "Sex-up" Approach

Perhaps it was inevitable that when rumors were confirmed that women military personnel had been involved in sexual torture at Gitmo, the fact that women were also involved in Abu Ghraib would infiltrate media narratives and serve as a link between the two stories. The circumstances behind the stories were not completely similar. Abu Ghraib prison was in the middle of a war zone, Gitmo was completely under U.S. military control. The soldiers implicated

at Abu Ghraib were military police and low-level soldiers who played no active part in interrogations, whereas the military personnel implicated at Gitmo were professional interrogators whose business was the questioning of detainees. Still, there were similarities. Chiefly, prisoners were being abused in ways that seemed designed specifically for the humiliation of strict Muslims. Further, reports in both cases claimed that the abuses were suggestive of a U.S. policy of torture – something the Bush administration had been heatedly denying. But the similarity that captured much of the media attention was that women were actively involved as abusers in both cases.

AP reporter, Paisley Dodds, who wrote extensively on the emerging story of women interrogators at Gitmo made a point of reminding readers that in the Abu Ghraib scandal, "Several female troops have been charged."[218] Implicit in the comment is that, with the implication of women involved in torture at Gitmo, a pattern – begun at Abu Ghraib – had emerged. Despite the fact that many more male troops were ultimately charged in the Abu Ghraib scandal than were female troops, Dodds focus on the women soldiers suggests that Abu Ghraib was uniquely a problem of females. A similar tone is present in an article in the *Washington Post* that reports on detainees' accusations of abuse by female interrogators. On the one hand, the article portrays the sexual interrogations as "part of the fabric of Guantánamo interrogations,"[219] suggesting that these tactics are part of a systemic problem rather than the invention of individual interrogators. But then the writers remind readers that photos from Abu Ghraib "showed a servicewoman there holding naked prisoners on a leash and posing next to a pile of naked prisoners." Like the Dodds' piece, this statement omits key information, namely,

[218] Paisley Dodds, "Report Details Sexual Tactics Used by Female Interrogators," *Ventura County Star*, 30 January 2005.
[219] Carol D. Leonnig and Dana Priest, "Detainees Accuse Female Interrogators," *Washington Post*, 10 February 2005.

that the naked pyramid photographs that were made public show servicewomen as well as *servicemen*. Framing the story of abuse at Gitmo in such a way as to draw attention to the sex of some of the perpetrators, and linking the story to Abu Ghraib, makes the sex of the women integral to both stories. Indeed, the revelation of torture at Gitmo and at Abu Ghraib, as well as other prisons in Iraq[220] and Afghanistan[221], is not chiefly structured so as to suggest a pattern of U.S. military torture of prisoners. Rather, the revelation of torture at Gitmo is portrayed as the continuation of a pattern of *women* torturers begun at Abu Ghraib.

As was true in media coverage of Abu Ghraib was also true in the coverage of Gitmo: Media accounts that discuss torture when women are perpetrators rarely fail to draw attention to their identification as women. This is true not just when the offense under discussion is sexualized torture. It seems that no matter what the allegation, the sex of the interrogator, *when the interrogator is a woman*, is worthy of mention in the story. For example, in a report about duplicitous interrogators who lied to detainees about their lawyers, a case is related about a "female interrogator" who had taken a book from a detainee. This same "female interrogator" had told the detainee not to trust his lawyers because his "lawyers are Jews."[222] How this interrogator's sex is relevant to the story is left for readers to determine.

Another example of highlighting the sex of women interrogators even in cases that do not involve sexual conduct can be found in a story that reports on alleged improvement in conditions at Gitmo. Here it is reported that, in an innovative approach to breaking a detainee, a "female interrogator" read "a *Harry Potter* book aloud for hours."[223] Again, readers are left to fill in the

[220] Neil A. Lewis, "A.C.L.U. Presents Accusations of Serious Abuse of Iraqi Civilians," *New York Times*, 25 January 2005.
[221] Tim Golden, "In US Report, Brutal Details of 2 Afghan Inmates' Deaths," *New York Times*, 20 May 2005.
[222] Frank Davies, "US Interrogators Accused of Trying to Divide Detainees, Attorneys," *Knight Ridder Washington Bureau*, 13 May 2005.
[223] Liz Sidoti, "Lawmakers: Guantanamo Conditions Improve," *Associated Press*, 26 June 2005.

enthymematic blank left by the revelation of the interrogator's sex. Certainly her technique differs dramatically from those ungendered interrogators who wrapped a detainee's head in duct tape "because he would not stop chanting passages from the Koran."[224] They also differ from those ungendered "interrogators" who tormented the so-called 20th hijacker at Guantánamo Bay with dripping water (also known as water-boarding), sleep deprivation, ceaseless pop music, shaving his head and face, forcing him to urinate in his pants, and strip-searching him.[225] Somehow, the gender of the interrogator who lied to detainees, and who read *Harry Potter* to the detainee, is salient to the stories, whereas the gender of those who violently assault detainees is irrelevant.

If the sex of women interrogators in the above, fairly innocuous, cases became key to their respective stories, this was even more the case with stories reporting sexual torture employed in interrogations. These were not simply abusive interrogators; these were abusive *female* interrogators, with breasts, hips, and genitalia which they used against their male prisoners. There was even an intelligence moniker assigned to their methods – it was called the "sex-up" approach.[226] Perhaps the argument can be made that when reporting on sexual abuses it is necessary to note physical features of the women who are the alleged abusers as it is those very physical features that are used as vehicles for abuse. However, violent torture, like sexual torture, is an extremely physical act involving bodies impacting other bodies. Nonetheless, reports of the male military personnel who engage in it omit descriptive language of the physicality of the acts. Put differently, reports do not dwell on *masculine* fists hitting faces and bodies, or chokeholds applied by *muscled* arms, or powerful *male* feet or knees kicking or kneeing subdued prisoners, or *male* bodies wrestling other *male* bodies to the floor. It is as if the

[224] Neil A. Lewis, "FBI Memos Criticized Practices at Guantanamo," *New York Times*, 7 December 2004.
[225] James Gordon Meek and Tracy Connor, "Hard-Line Grilling or Torture?" *Daily News*, 13 June 2005.
[226] "Iraqis Demonstrate Torture."

perpetrators in these cases are disembodied phantoms, whereas the sexual interrogations are perpetrated by flesh and blood, fully embodied, women. This contrast serves to demonstrate a point made by Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price: "[W]omen just are their bodies in a way that men are not."[227]

Photographs from Abu Ghraib provided pictorial evidence of women involved in sexual torture, and the stories accompanying the photographs supplemented them by focusing attention on the women soldiers captured on film. Words in the articles draw the viewer's attention to Lynndie England's "tight, muscular body and that don't-mess-with-me expression,"[228] and Sabrina Harman's "angel's face."[229] But the story of women at Gitmo arrived without visual aids. Without photographs, the story fails to achieve the level of public spectacle that was the case for the Abu Ghraib story. Rather, the workings of Gitmo remained shrouded in secrecy, and the story had some level of official containment. Absent photographs, news narratives did the work to provide colorful verbal pictures of the women interrogators at work.

Many of the reports of the women at Gitmo focused on the tight T-shirts, lacy bras and panties, and thong underwear that were reported to be part of the seductive uniform of some of the abusive interrogators. There were also reports of the women touching their breasts and rubbing them against the prisoners,[230] and reports of women straddling restrained detainees[231] and in some cases giving them improvised lap dances.[232] The discourse of the female interrogators sketches a portrait of immensely potent female sexuality. An article in the *Kansas City Star* serves as an example in its portrayal of a female interrogator at Gitmo ready to unleash

[227] Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price, "Openings on the Body," in *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, ed. Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price (New York: Routledge, 1999), 3.
[228] Rebecca Nappi, "Photos Shatter Assumptions About Women," *Spokesman Review*, 8 May 2004.
[229] Joe Eaton, "Sabrina Harman," *Roanoke Times*, 26 May 2005.
[230] Marie Cocco, "The Right Questions About Abu Ghraib," *Times Union*, 25 May 2005.
[231] Bob Dart, "Report: 'Degrading and Abusive Treatment' but No Torture at Gitmo," *Cox News Service*, 13 July 2005.
[232] "The Women of Gitmo," *New York Times*, 15 July 2005.

her "dangerous" sexuality. A lawyer for a detainee reports on a trip to Gitmo to see his client. While at the base, he and his military escort went to a sandwich shop, and there his escort "noted that an interrogator was at a nearby table. 'There was a man in uniform and a very voluptuous, platinum blond woman in tight clothing,' Sullivan said. 'I asked my escort, "The man's an interrogator?" And my escort said, "No, the woman."'"[233] The account ends here, apparently with no explanation needed. The woman, "voluptuous" and "platinum blond" is understood to personify sexuality. She may be a professional interrogator, but the implication is that she has a powerful and destructive weapon in her arsenal: her predatory sexual allure. Her very presence, juxtaposed to a properly uniformed man, suggests something incongruent. Her voluptuousness, coupled with her stereotypical porn-star hair color and tight clothes, make her automatically suspect without further commentary necessary. The military female body, perhaps normally safely contained under an androgynous BDU (battle dress uniform), had escaped its confinement and was ready to wreak havoc at Gitmo. Other reports of women interrogators describe the havoc: The uncontained female bodies had goaded a reaction from some of the male prisoners, in essence, forcing their own desires to betray them. Several news reports tell of women who "taunted [the prisoners] for getting erections,"[234] or who were "commenting" on erections.[235]

The media accounts of the sexualized interrogations of male detainees by female interrogators provide evidence for what feminist theorists have noted for decades, namely, women are *always female* first.[236] After they have been properly labeled as female, they can then be read as interrogators, soldiers, or civilian contractors. But they must first be understood through the modifying frame of their sexual and gendered positionality before their acts can be

[233] Rick Montgomery, "Lawyers Cast Light inside Gitmo," *Kansas City Star*, 29 March 2005.
[234] Jamie Tobias Neely, "Guantanamo Bay's Latest Tactics Damage Us All," *Spokesman Review*, 6 February 2005.
[235] Dodds.
[236] See Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1989). See also Shildrick and Price.

comprehended and judged. For the women at Gitmo, once they were identified and embodied, they could then be interpreted through a gendered lens as sexually suspect women. As Lynndie England's actions at Abu Ghraib were partially explained by her propensity to stray from her own bed,[237] light is shed upon the actions of Gitmo's women interrogators by their portrayal as sexual outlaws who use their bodies as weapons against their strict Muslim captives.

As women, the abusive Gitmo interrogators are highly visible in media reports. The word "interrogator" is modified by "female" or "woman" in every sentence that reports on sexual abuse of Arab detainees. In some instances, it is not just that the perpetrator is female, but that the abuse tactic itself is female or feminine, as is suggested in a report from the *Ventura County Star* that referred to "abusive female interrogation tactics."[238] In an ironic twist, the implication seems to be that sexual abuse in an interrogation room is a distinctly *female* tactic. This is an especially interesting categorization in light of reports that male interrogators also engaged in sexualized interrogations. The difference is that their behavior is not the focus of any of the articles where it is mentioned. In fact, usually the sexual behavior of the male interrogators warrants no more than a sentence in an entire article, and generates little editorial follow-up. The *Washington Post*, for example, notes that one prisoner claims to have been "touched sexually" by male guards.[239] An editorial in another newspaper did not even give the male interrogators a full sentence. Rather, in a dependent clause, the paper reports that Mohamed al-Kahtani, the alleged 20th hijacker, "was forced to dance with a man," in addition to other humiliations.[240] The *Post* reports in a few short sentences about a prisoner being "threatened with rape by male

[237] Jay Price, "Abuse Suspect Flouted Orders," *News and Observer*, 5 August 2004.
[238] Dodds.
[239] Dan Eggen and Josh White, "Inmates Alleged Koran Abuse," *Washington Post*, 26 May 2005.
[240] "See No Evil," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 15 July 2005.

interrogators."[241] It is unclear from this sentence who would be raping the prisoner, male or female. There are no accompanying details and the story quickly returns to "a female soldier" in a tight T-shirt sexually taunting a prisoner. A search of news databases will not reveal an article entitled "The *Men* of Gitmo," or "Detainees Accuse *Male* Interrogators," or "Report Details Sexual Tactics Used by *Male* Interrogators," or "Torture *Guys* Gone Wild." But replace the italicized words with "women," "female," "female," and "chicks" respectively, and stories will be found detailing the sexual interrogations performed by women interrogators at the Cuban base.

The intense focus on the sex of the women interrogators, along with detailed descriptions of their unscrupulous methods, portrays these women as in possession of a particularly dangerous weapon – one that they are perhaps not capable of handling, namely, their sexuality. Views of female sexuality as dangerous and in need of constraint pre-date both Abu Ghraib and Gitmo and have long existed in Western cultures. Why dangerous? Chiefly, because it arouses male sexual desire. As Carole S. Vance argues, our cultural "rag-bag of myths and folk knowledge" depicts "male lust as intrinsic, uncontrollable, and easily aroused by any show of female sexuality and desire."[242] If female sexuality "triggers male attack, it cannot be freely or spontaneously shown, either in public or in private."[243] Suzanne E. Hatty adds that it is not just women who are in danger from uncontrollable male sexual desire, it is men themselves. Hatty notes that,

> sexual desire, once aroused, may interfere with rational functioning; self-control may be undermined and irrational actions ensue. Women, therefore, possess the capacity to draw

[241] Leonnig and Priest.
[242] Carole S. Vance, "Pleasure and Danger: Toward a Politics of Sexuality," in *Pleasure and Danger*, ed. Carole S. Vance (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 3.
[243] Vance, 3.

> men closer to the outer boundaries of masculine subjectivity, and may even entice them over the edge into the abyss of the irreal.[244]

With so much on the line when female sexuality is not under specific (male) control, the solution historically has been to constrain it. The most common method of constraint has been to socially confine the expression of female sexuality within the bounds of traditional, monogamous relationships, preferably heterosexual marriage.[245] When women step outside of this monogamous heterosexual boundary, and especially if they should achieve some kind of notoriety in the process, they are likely to have their actions further scrutinized for their sexual transgressions. Lynndie England's behavior at Abu Ghraib is a prime example of this. As I noted in the previous chapter, she was consistently vilified in media reports for her actions caught on film *and* for her sexually permissive off-camera behavior. The latter exacerbated the former making her, deservedly or not, a representative for what went wrong at Abu Ghraib. Should a woman be perceived as using sex as a tool, as is suggested by some media accounts of the women at Gitmo, the implication is that she is cold and calculating and demonstrating aberrant behavior. As Linda LeMoncheck notes, in the Christian tradition upon which most of Western culture is based, "It is the threatening, unscrupulous, manipulative woman who would use her passive allure to 'get men where she wants them.'"[246]

Some media reports about the women interrogators at Gitmo describe them flaunting their intoxicating sexuality, using it as a tool with which to bludgeon their helpless victims. For example, the *Washington Post* reports that "female interrogators repeatedly used sexually suggestive tactics to try to humiliate and pry information from devout Muslim men" held at

[244] Suzanne E. Hatty, *Masculinities, Violence, and Culture* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2000), 19.
[245] Vance, 3.
[246] Linda LeMoncheck, *Dehumanizing Women* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1985), 89.

Gitmo.[247] This report seems to suggest that the interrogators had a two pronged goal: to humiliate *and* to pry information from the detainees. This same article reports that "female interrogators regularly violated Muslim taboos about sex and contact with women," and that one "paraded around in a tight T-shirt" to cause a detainee distress. This active female sexual agency is contrasted in this article with sentences constructed to hide the agents behind violent tactics used on detainees, agents who are presumably male soldiers and interrogators. For example, the article recounts a case in which "three women in lacy bras and panties strutted into the interrogation room" where a detainee was chained. They then "cooed" over the detainee's attractiveness and made suggestive remarks to him. When this failed to spark a reaction from the prisoner, "one woman sat on his lap, another rubbed her breasts against his back and massaged his chest and a third squatted near his crotch." The prisoner then tried to resist by head-butting the woman behind him. At this, "all three ran out and a team of soldiers stormed in and beat him."

If the account is true, the prisoner's experience is certainly a violation of Muslim codes of modesty between the sexes and blatant sexual abuse. Interestingly, while the women are portrayed as connivingly using their sexuality as a club to flog a helpless man, the "team of soldiers" who violently beat him is described in gender neutral terms. One can assume that the soldiers who carried out such overtly violent actions were men, but there is no need to assume anything with regard to the women interrogators. Readers are told that they are female, they wear lacy undergarments, and they parade around, coo, and strut. Their actions are described in lightly veiled condemnatory language, while the actions of the presumably male soldiers are reported without added commentary.

[247] Leonnig and Priest.

Unlike the male soldiers and interrogators whose characters rarely seem to raise suspicion, the misdeeds of women soldiers and interrogators are reported on with acrimony. As the article noted above demonstrates, the women are reported as actively using their sexuality as tools against devout Muslims. Another report describes them in disapproving language as "flaunting their sexuality" and using "sexual taunting" during interrogations.[248] This same article reports detainees being "stripped and shackled low to the floor" for hours at a time by no agents in particular. It also reports of copies of the Koran "which had been tossed into a pile and stepped on" by nameless, faceless, and ungendered guards. But when the abusive acts are sexual in nature, and performed by women, the agents are highlighted, such as the "female interrogators" who "forcibly" squeezed male prisoners' genitalia.[249] Another article reports that "female interrogators" used their bodies "suggestively" against detainees, but that ungendered persons unknown strapped detainees to the floor, wrapped them in Israeli flags, and threatened to transport them to countries with reputations for much worse treatment of prisoners.[250] The reports go beyond detailing what happened at Gitmo and seem to suggest something about the character of the women involved in the sexual interrogations. Again, this is similar to media reporting on Abu Ghraib.

Like the women of Abu Ghraib, the personal morality of the women at Gitmo is repeatedly called into question in media reports about their conduct suggesting that they are using their sexuality because it is an effective tool against Muslim men *and* because these women are themselves sexually suspect. This is in keeping with Western cultural mores which suggest that a woman who engages in sexual behavior outside of the bounds of a monogamous, heterosexual relationship is violating acceptable gender norms. In a common Western trope,

[248] Neil A. Lewis and Eric Schmitt, "Inquiry Finds Abuses at Guantanamo Bay," *New York Times* 1 May 2005.
[249] Lewis and Schmitt, "Inquiry Finds Abuses."
[250] Carol Rosenberg, "3 GI's Punished for Detainee Abuse Mistreated Inmates," *Miami Herald*, 12 November 2004.

women who use sex as a tool to get what they want are likened to prostitutes and porn actresses. LeMoncheck notes that when a woman engages in sex solely as a means to an end, and with someone with whom she is "less than intimate, all the negative connotations of the prostitute – mercenary, unclean, valuable solely in virtue of her sexual instrumentality for others – arise."[251]

This viewpoint is borne out in a *New York Times* article that attacks the Pentagon for being "utterly unconcerned with the fact that women in uniform had been turned into sex workers at Guantánamo."[252] In this comment, the women are not just likened to sex workers, they are in "fact" sex workers. The article also refers to the women as behaving "like trollops." "It's like a bad porn movie," commented Maureen Dowd. "All S and no M."[253] A lawyer for a detainee was quoted in the *Washington Post* as noting that the actions of the women reminded him "of a pornographic Web site – it's like the fantasy of all these S&M clubs."[254] An editorialist compared the reports from Gitmo to "the bizarre sexual aggression of an MTV music video,"[255] while another referred to the women as "our dominatrixes."[256]

The analogy of sex workers is an illuminating choice. Sex work is rarely viewed as an honorable choice of employment. A woman who engages in this kind of work may be pitied as a victim, but she is more often despised as selling not just her sexual services for money, but selling herself. The analogy works as a rhetorical strategy to belittle the women interrogators, suggesting that they being paid by the U.S. military not for their value as professional intelligence workers, but rather for the sexual services they provide. The ambivalent response on the part of the male prisoners (e.g., the reports that some of them got erections) is not noted in

[251] LeMoncheck, 49.
[252] "The Women of Gitmo."
[253] Maureen Dowd, "Torture Chicks Gone Wild," *New York Times*, 30 January 2005.
[254] Leonnig and Priest.
[255] Neely.
[256] Dimitri Vassilaros, "The Tortured Logic of Mo Dowd," *Pittsburgh Tribune News*, 6 February 2005.

order to excuse the women's actions by suggesting that the men were willing participants. On the contrary, a deeply held belief that Western culture shares with some strains of conservative Islam is that women are responsible for arousing and squelching male sexual response. Vance notes that "Through a culturally dictated chain of reasoning, women become the moral custodians of male behavior, which they are perceived as instigating and eliciting."[257] While some media reports suggest that there was a conscious intent on the part of the women interrogators to arouse the humiliating lust of the prisoners, Susan Bordo points out that when it comes to male arousal, "Conscious intention…is not a requisite for females to be seen as responsible for the bodily responses of men, aggressive as well as sexual."[258] The ideologies may seem to be diametrically opposed, but both Western women and those who are part of nations that are ruled by Islamic law (*Sharī'ah*) are placed in the role of "moral custodians of male behavior." As one Muslim cleric notes:

> Islam has taken measures to prohibit practices which would lead to stimulating of sensual passion or to deviation from chastity. Women are therefore ordered not to do what would titillate men's feelings of lust. She must therefore cover her body, and not show her adornments of beauty or of jewelry or makeup to the outside world or to strangers. She must not frequent, more than absolutely essential, public gatherings attended by men. She must spend much time at home.[259]

Muslim scholar Asma Barlas interprets conservatives' insistence on veiling women as their perception of women's bodies being particularly shameful. She notes that conservatives "justify such forms of veiling on the grounds that women's bodies are pudendal, hence sexually corrupting to those who see them; it thus is necessary to shield Muslim men from viewing

[257] Vance, 4.
[258] Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, Tenth Anniversary Edition ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 6.
[259] Quoted in Ann Elizabeth Mayer, *Islam and Human Rights: Tradition and Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2007), 120.

women's bodies by concealing them."[260] Where Muslim women are often veiled from head to toe and sequestered at home in order not to "titillate men's feelings of lust," Western women of all religious stripes learn from a young age that sexual harassment and rape is often blamed on the victim's behavior – where she goes or what she wears. So the report that some male prisoners had erections is not meant to suggest that they may have been willing participants in sexual activity at Gitmo. Rather, it is reason to judge the women even more harshly. As stewards of male desire, these women's treacherous bodies caused the men to betray themselves.

This insidious cross-cultural view of women's bodies being perpetually sexual bodies demonstrates their inability to ever be perceived as heroic saviors in the fight that Bush describes as "good against evil."[261] Being so bound to their bodies, being so very *earthly*, women are culturally perceived to be always already "tainted." As such, they cannot aspire to be saviors, and certainly not the kind of savior that would be needed to prevail against evil. To be sure, not all men qualify for such a role – and the Abu Ghraib discourses by disparaging the failed male soldiers demonstrated this point. But women, simply by virtue of possessing unruly and earthly bodies are automatically disqualified.

While the media reporting of Gitmo contains some striking similarities to that of Abu Ghraib, there are also some important differences. One difference is the way that conservative media representatives responded to the two stories. Where the women of Abu Ghraib were placed in positions of representation of all women in the military, and were used by conservative voices to raise the issue of the appropriateness of women in the military, the women of Gitmo were not similarly used. In fact, the conservative media is selectively silent regarding the women

[260] Asma Barlas, *"Believing Women" In Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'ān* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, Austin, 2002), 54.
[261] Martin Walker, "Bush: Anti-Terror Campaign 'Good Versus Evil'," *United Press International*, 25 September 2001.

of Gitmo, playing down the reports of sexual interrogations while avoiding altogether the issue of the use of menstrual blood as tool of humiliation.

Selective Silence of the Conservatives

When the story of prisoner torture at Abu Ghraib broke, conservative columnists lost little time in jumping on the media bandwagon that chiefly castigated the women soldiers. The conservative journals the *American Spectator* and the *National Review* laid most of the blame for the women's actions at the door of feminism. The *American Spectator* scolded "the radical feminists" for paving the way for women to enter combat because "[n]ow America needs a conditioning course not on the abuse of American women taken in defeat, but abuse by American female soldiers in victory. The feminists call this progress."[262] Similarly, the *National Review* faulted the "collapse of traditional roles" for the women's "disgraceful behavior."[263] In another article, a writer for the *National Review* brought up an issue of concern to many, not just conservatives, namely, the blight that Abu Ghraib placed on the American military. But this writer was specific in his placement of responsibility: "Thanks to [Lynndie] England and her little band of degenerates, the proud uniform of the U.S. army has been stained, and both the terrorists' and President Bush's political opponents have been handed an unfortunately effective propaganda tool."[264] For this writer, Lynndie England, though not ultimately as harshly punished as several of the men, was placed in a position of leadership for the "band of degenerates" that had embarrassed the American military at Abu Ghraib.

One might expect that, with the revelation of similar egregious acts of abuse at Gitmo, conservative voices would again join the media chorus of disapproval. But this was not the case.

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[262] George Neumayr, "Thelma and Louise in Iraq," *American Spectator Online* (2004), www.spectator.org
[263] Ann Marlowe, "Shameless," *National Review*, May 21, 2004.
[264] W. Thomas Jr. Smith, "No Excuses," *National Review* May 14, 2004.

Articles did appear in such conservative mainstays as the *Spectator* and the *Review*, but they were not condemnatory either of the women interrogators or of feminists. Indeed, even vocal anti-women-in-the-military activists such as Elaine Donnelly and Linda Chavez were oddly silent regarding the entire Gitmo incident. No sustained conservative discourse suggested that what happened at Gitmo was a reason to remove women from the military, or that it was evidence of military women becoming degenerates. So, why the selective silence among conservatives? In order to explore possible answers to this question of missing discourse, it is first necessary to examine the existing discourse.

While many mainstream and liberal media narratives condemned the women at Gitmo for their perceived immorality, conservative commentary generally avoided descriptors such as "trollops" or disparagingly likened their behavior to "sex workers." In at least one case the behavior of the women who sexually tormented their Arab prisoners was referred to as "a great plan."[265] In responding to a condemnatory op-ed piece by Maureen Dowd, Dimitri Vassilaros noted that the use of "feminine wiles" on Gitmo detainees was a great plan, "unless the suspects are gay. Or unless our chicks look like Abu Ghraib prison guard Lyndie [*sic*] England." Vassilaros commented that if any of "our GI Janes" looked "like Demi Moore when she starred in *GI Jane* (or better yet, in *Striptease*)," any "basic red-blooded American" would've instantly cooperated in the interrogation. Still, according to Vassilaros, sexual interrogations are "a great plan because terrorists tend to be so uptight about earthly women that they prefer the 72 virgins waiting for them in heaven."

Vassilaros was not alone in playing down the sexual interrogations. A writer for the *National Review* insisted that they were "no worse than pledging a college fraternity."[266]

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[265] Vassilaros.
[266] Henry I. Miller, "Reconsidering Gitmo," *National Review*, July 25, 2005.

Another boastingly referred to his own experiences in military boot camp and suggested that what the detainees endured was nothing by comparison. As for the sexual interrogations, "An American soldier yearns for such 'intimidation.'"[267] One writer suggested that the sexual interrogations at Gitmo were "[n]ot exactly crimes against humanity. In Las Vegas some men pay thousands to be interrogated like that."[268] What these commentators have in common is their focus on the overtly sexual aspects of the interrogations to the near exclusion of the menstrual blood tactic. The assumption is that all American soldiers are male, heterosexual, have no qualms about anonymous sex involving bondage and domination, and harbor no set of principles that disallows sex outside of a committed relationship. Indeed, Vasilaros's passionately macho commentary seems to place only over-sexed heterosexual men in the category of "red-blooded American."

The exclusive focus on the potentially erotic aspects of the interrogations suggests a number of things about this narrative. First, with the suggestion that American soldiers, indeed, American men, would not only withstand such methods but would welcome them, it is implicit that the Muslim prisoners are lacking the masculinity that American men possess (again, the narratives seem to assume that American soldiers are all male, heterosexual, and promiscuous). The Arab men's eschewing what any normal "red-blooded" American man would "yearn for" tends to feminize them by comparison. This is certainly in contrast to Saar's account of his own reaction to having seen an overtly sexual interrogation. Saar, an American soldier who self-identifies as heterosexual, reported feeling so degraded by an interrogation he participated in as a

[267] George H. Wittman, "What Could Be Worse Than Gitmo?" *American Spectator*, June 22, 2005.
[268] James Burnham, "Catching Flak for Gitmo," *Daily Texan*, 17 June 2005.

translator that "[t]here wasn't enough hot water in all of Cuba to make me feel clean."[269] Saar's account suggests that perhaps not every "American soldier yearns for such 'intimidation.'"

A second implication of this focus on the erotic aspects of the interrogations is that by giving a nod of approval to the sexual methods the women at Gitmo used, while excoriating the lowly female soldiers at Abu Ghraib for their usurping their positions and dominating men, the narratives suggest that the actions at Gitmo demonstrate appropriate feminine behavior. Yes, the women interrogators dominated the male prisoners, but as long as their actions could be interpreted as erotic sex games, and as long as they were appropriately attractive, their actions were deemed acceptable for these commentators. They were doing what women could do in service of country, namely, sacrifice their virtue. (After all, conservative commentators have been quite clear that women killing or sacrificing their lives in war is unacceptable.[270]) This narrative is demonstrated by another writer for the *Spectator* who directly addressed the sexual tactics and approved of them. He noted: "I've met a few of these gals, and I can tell you they are smart, tough, and are accomplishing things other people can't…I – and a lot of people who are, fortunately, in control of what they do – approve because they are acting within the rules, and producing results."[271] This writer also approvingly refers to the women as "dedicated professionals."

The above commentator who notes that men pay "thousands" for such sexual attention equates the actions of the Gitmo women to sex workers. But unlike mainstream and liberal media commentators, this is not a disparaging comparison. Unlike the conservative commentator that

[269] Saar and Novak, 228.
[270] See Mary Leonard, "Abuse Raises Gender Issues," *Boston Globe*, 16 May 2004. Here, conservative Linda Chavez makes the point that it is culturally undesirable for women to become combat warriors.
[271] Jed Babbin, "The Gitmo Varsity," *American Spectator Online*, July 18 (2005), www.spectator.org

referred the women of Abu Ghraib as "female barbarians,"[272] these writers do not seem to take exception with military women performing interrogations akin to sex work. A crucial difference in the way that the "gals" at Gitmo were perceived compared to Lynndie England and "her band of degenerates" is that where the Gitmo women are portrayed as professionals, the women of Abu Ghraib are portrayed as reprobates. Articles that reported on Abu Ghraib revealed that one of Lynndie England's excuses for her behavior was that it was "just for fun."[273] No reports accompanying the story of the women at Gitmo suggest that they enjoyed what they did. In fact, Saar's account suggests that the women interrogators were often emotionally shaken by what they did. As professionals, the women of Gitmo were doing what was necessary, even if it was dirty, unpleasant business. As appropriately feminine "gals," they are portrayed as doing what they had to do, but there is no suggestion that they enjoyed it.

The selective silence of conservative commentators is just one way that media narratives of Gitmo differ from Abu Ghraib. Another key difference is that the women of Abu Ghraib were often pathologized in media accounts that sought to explain their behavior, where the women of Gitmo are portrayed more as victims of a ruthless military hierarchy. In this paradigm, women are not "naturally" sexual aggressors and are far more likely to be victims of other's sexuality than they are to be in possession of sexual agency. If a woman uses sexuality, say in an interrogation room, the explanation must be that she was forced to do so, because no "normal" woman would ever choose this action. This being the case, the women at Gitmo needed to be rescued either from an unprincipled military chain of command, or they needed to be rescued from their own errant ways. In contrast, there is an absence of media narratives that suggest that men who engage in violent torture in interrogations are put at similar psychic risk.

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[272] Neumayr.
[273] Alisha Berger, "'Just for Fun' - Lynndie's Sick Abuse Excuse," *New York Post*, 4 August 2004.

A Tale of Two Prison Camps

As noted, a theme that emerges from media reports about women military abusers at Gitmo that does not appear in discourse about the male abusers, and did not appear in the discourse about the women of Abu Ghraib, is how the women's actions at Gitmo would impact them psychologically. Indeed, editorial after editorial agonized over how women participating in sexual interrogations demeaned and dehumanized their male prisoners *and themselves*. Under this theme, the women interrogators used sexual techniques under duress. But even if the women voluntarily used such methods in interrogations, the cultural understanding of sex being inherently demeaning for women suggests that these women were at psychic risk whether they were aware of it or not.

There is no socially consistent understanding of female sexuality. While it is often portrayed as something socially dangerous and in need of control, it is simultaneously perceived as something that victimizes women themselves. LeMoncheck notes that in Western culture, the traditional assumption regarding women is that "sex is dirty, sinful, or evil."[274] Where "heterosexual sex is thought by many to turn a mere boy into a respectable, fully developed man," sex makes women dirty.[275] The pornography debates, for example, sometimes suggest that women are inherently objectified and victimized by sex, and that no woman could willingly consent to participating in the production of porn.[276] A woman who argues that she is a willing participant is sometimes accused of laboring under a false consciousness.

The difference in discourses between Abu Ghraib and Gitmo could be partially explained by the lack of photographs of the abuses perpetrated at Gitmo. The Abu Ghraib photographs

[274] LeMoncheck, 48.
[275] LeMoncheck, 49.
[276] See Kathleen Barry, *The Prostitution of Sexuality: The Global Exploitation of Women* (New York: New York University Press, 1995).

make it difficult to believe that the women were anything but cheerful collaborators with the men in the sexual torture and humiliation of the prisoners. They are smiling, giving thumbs up, and at times have their arms linked companionably with their male counterparts. Media discourses interpreting these photographs are that the women had to be *a priori* degenerates who were obviously operating outside of the control of strict military hierarchy. In contrast, with the lack of photographs of Gitmo interrogations, and the lack of explicit pictorial views of the women's attitudes while carrying out their activities, some of the narratives that spin around the story place them in roles that are socially comfortable for women, namely, the roles of victims. Absent photographs proclaiming the contrary, and combining that absence with Western society's views of proper femininity, it is easy to concoct narratives of the women interrogators following procedures and being under control even if it is granted that those procedures and the chain of command are inherently flawed. At least the women were not inventing these tactics out of whole cloth; they are victims, and thus at risk of being harmed by the actions forced upon them.

The discourses that portray women as helpless sexual tools often imply that there is someone, or something, behind the scenes pulling the strings. One article, while not excusing the behavior of the women at Gitmo, remarks that "no young military reservist could possibly have concocted the strategy of interrogating Muslim men by using religious humiliation and tactics of sexual degradation."[277] Another article, while simultaneously calling for the removal of all women from Gitmo, suggests that what happened there was the result of a "policy of *using* women to sexually humiliate men"[278] (my emphasis). Most articles that use the "women as tools" rhetoric place the U.S. military and/or the Bush administration in the position of wielder of the tools. One news piece, for example, comments that a military spokesman "wouldn't

[277] Cocco.
[278] "Iraqis Demonstrate Torture."

address whether the U.S. military had a specific strategy *to use women*" (my emphasis).[279] This article notes that a recent military investigation of interrogation tactics at Gitmo warns "that anyone outside Department of Defense channels should be prepared to address allegations that *women were used* intentionally with Muslim men" (my emphasis).

The Abu Ghraib media discourses, while often insisting that responsible members of the military hierarchy should be sought out and punished, were not quick to suggest that the women soldiers were mere pawns. In fact, as I note in the previous chapter, media narratives often went to great lengths to discover a psychological basis that would reduce *women* to performing such actions. Lynndie England was reported to have been a borderline retarded sexual deviant before she ever arrived at Abu Ghraib,[280] and Sabrina Harman brought with her an unhealthy interest in "stomach-churning photography."[281] For the women at Gitmo, however, no concerted media effort was made to find a psychological flaw that might have impacted their actions. Rather, the concern was directed toward how their actions impacted them psychologically.

An op-ed piece in the *Spokesman Review* condemns the women of Gitmo for their sexual abuse of the detainees, declaring that "sexual assault, always a display of power and aggression, strikes human beings where they are most vulnerable – their sexuality."[282] The article goes on to argue that such actions degrade all of American society – a common argument in anti-torture editorials, no matter who the perpetrator is, female or male. But the writer goes a step further and states that using sexual tactics "exploits and debases the women." Similarly, Maureen Dowd in her piece for the *New York Times* berates the women interrogators for using "a toxic combination of sex and religion," and assails the Bush administration for "allowing its female interrogators"

[279] Dodds.
[280] Price.
[281] Aly Sujo, "The Ghoul Next Door Was Jail Abuse Fotog," *New York Post*, 9 May 2004.
[282] Neely.

to use sexual techniques in interrogations.[283] "Who are these women?" Dowd asks, clearly suggesting that there is some fundamental deficiency in women who would willingly perform such acts. But the point of her article is that "such behavior degrades the women who are doing it, the men they are doing it to, and the country they are doing it for." According to this self-described feminist writer, the women may have been acting in service of their country at the behest of some higher authority, but their behavior was causing harm to everyone involved, including themselves. Likewise, an op-ed piece in the *Miami Herald* states that sexual interrogations performed by women interrogators "debase interrogator and prisoner alike,"[284] and an editorial in the *New York Times* agrees that these methods lower "the humanity of the people who practice it, and the citizens who condone it."[285]

An underlying assumption in some of the opinion pieces decrying the women's behavior is that a woman's presence in an interrogation room will be a sexual presence. An article from the editorial desk of the *New York Times* complained of women behaving like "trollops" and "sex workers" at Gitmo because this was "exploitation and debasement of women serving in the United States military."[286] "These practices are as degrading to the women as they are to the prisoners," noted the editorial, so "where are the members of Congress who wring their hands over the issue of women in combat?" One editorialist, while arguing against closing Guantánamo Bay as a solution to the abuse problems there, as some have urged, claims to have a better answer: "Let's begin by getting rid of the women."[287] This writer's assumption is that the very presence of women at Gitmo suggests that the "sex-up" approach will be employed. The author draws upon Saar's account of at least one woman interrogator using sex as an interrogation tool,

[283] Dowd.
[284] "Send a Clear Signal: Torture Not Tolerated," *Miami Herald*, 16 May 2005.
[285] "Self-Inflicted Wounds," *New York Times*, 15 February 2005.
[286] "The Women of Gitmo."
[287] "Iraqis Demonstrate Torture."

but ignores Saar's other descriptions of women who used respect and professionalism in their interrogations of Arab prisoners. The above editorialist advocates the view that any presence of women is automatically and irrevocably sexual; therefore, "As an act of self-respect," women should be removed from contact with male prisoners.

These discourses suggest that when women interrogators use sex as an interrogation method, even if they do so willingly, following a directive to be "creative," they are dehumanized and degraded by their own actions. Likely, there is some truth in this often well-meaning discourse. Saar's book, for example, reports that after engaging in a particularly obscene sexual interrogation, "Brooke", the interrogator, burst into tears.[288] Clearly, perpetrating an abuse against another human being would be psychically damaging for anyone who possesses any degree of humanity. As such, it is not problematic that news analysts condemned the military for "using" women in a way that would be demeaning to them and emotionally damaging to the prisoners. What is problematic is that there is no similar commentary regarding the male military and civilian personnel who are known to have engaged in violent interrogations some of which resulted in prisoner deaths. The silence surrounding the impact of violent torture on the men who perpetrate it suggests that this is not a social problem. It suggests that men may be naturally violent, and able to readily enact the violence necessary for warriors, yet are able to extinguish violent tendencies when they are no longer in the interrogation room. It suggests that male violence, innate and necessary,[289] does not psychically touch male torturers. The abundance of discourse alerting the public to the degradation of military women, when compared to the dearth of discourse expressing concern about the impact of violence upon male torturers, further suggests that female sexuality is of more danger to society than is male violence.

[288] Saar and Novak, 228.
[289]See R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, Second Ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 45.

To illustrate this point, it is helpful to consider a case study that serves as a comparison to the story of women at Gitmo. This is a case of a prison camp in Afghanistan known as the Bagram Collection Point. In May 2005, the *New York Times* published a lengthy report, submitted by journalist Tim Golden, about prisoner torture at Bagram which in 2002 had resulted in the brutal deaths of two prisoners in custody. The source for the story was a "nearly 2,000-page confidential file of the Army's criminal investigation into the case."[290] The few articles and editorials that followed drew upon the *Times* report as a source. While the *Times* report contains the themes I have already discussed here, namely, women explicitly labeled as "female" regardless of their actions, and the suggestion that at least one woman's actions were specifically tied to her identity as female, the report is unique in that it contains disturbing revelations of displays of hyper-masculinity.

The article reports that members of the Third Platoon stationed at Bagram had been nicknamed "the Testosterone Gang." "Several were devout bodybuilders," notes the article, and a group of them had "decorated their tent with a Confederate flag." One interrogator, Specialist Damien M. Corsetti, who was only 23 at the time, bore the nickname "Monster," which he'd had tattooed in Italian across his stomach. Corsetti was well known for his violent tendencies in the interrogation room. During one interrogation, he pulled out his penis, thrust it into a prisoner's face, and threatened the man with rape. Corsetti was later transferred to Iraq and wound up at Abu Ghraib. There, he was "fined and demoted for forcing an Iraqi woman to strip during questioning." Corsetti was sometimes referred to as "the king of torture." He was one of several soldiers who were implicated in the torture murders of two Afghan prisoners in late 2002.

One prisoner, identified as Habibullah, "a brother of a former Taliban commander," had a reputation for being particularly intractable in interrogations. Habibullah arrived at Bagram on

[290] Golden.

November 28, 2002, and by December 4th he was dead. The prisoner was labeled as uncooperative, and was the recipient of many beatings, including commonly used "peroneal strikes," where prisoners would be struck above the knee in the peroneal nerve. The blow was designed to cause a great deal of pain, thereby incapacitating the prisoner. As the *Times* reports, "communication between Mr. Habibullah and his jailers appears to have been almost exclusively physical." An autopsy attributed Habibullah's death "to a blood clot, probably caused by the severe injuries to his legs, which traveled to his heart and blocked the blood flow to his lungs."

Similarly brutal was the death of a 22-year old taxi driver known as "Dilawar" who arrived at Bagram one day after Habibullah's death.[291] Dilawar was reported by his family to be a shy, uneducated man who had rarely ventured outside of the village where he lived with his wife, young daughter, and extended family. The taxi he had obtained was a way for him to support his family. He was detained at a checkpoint when he drove his passengers past an American base that had been mortared that morning. Dilawar's three passengers were eventually sent to Gitmo (and released a year later without charges), but Dilawar was sent to Bagram. He was quickly labeled as uncooperative, although some witnesses disputed this label. The military investigation concluded that there were no Arabic translators who could speak fluently Dilawar's obscure Pashto dialect, so what was perceived as a lack of cooperation was actually a complete failure to communicate.

According to the *Times* reading of the military investigation, Dilwar had received over 100 peroneal strikes. It was reported that some of the MP's found it amusing that Dilwar would cry out "Allah!" after each strike, so they would hit him just to make him scream. During his interrogation sessions, he was subjected to threats and sexual humiliation, and then further

[291] For a documentary film treatment of Dilawar's story, see Alex Gibney, "Taxi to the Dark Side," (USA: Discovery Communications, 2007).

beatings when he could not physically perform tasks he was ordered to perform, such as assuming stress positions, because he had already been so badly beaten. On December 10th, Dilawar died. The medical examiner reported that the prisoner had died of heart failure, but that his heart had failed because of the extreme injuries to his legs. According to the coroner's assessment of Dilawar's cause of death, his legs had been "pulpified" by the repeated peroneal strikes. The coroner added that she had seen similar injuries in people who had been run over by a bus. The military investigation revealed that before his final interrogations, his interrogators had concluded that he was of no intelligence value. Like Habibullah, Dilawar's death was ruled a homicide.

The media reporting on the Habibullah and Dilawar murders, while outraged, was sparse. Despite the lack of sustained interest in the case, the follow-up stories and editorials demanded accountability for the deaths of the Afghan men and for persistent accounts of abuse at Bagram and Gitmo. It would be a mistake to suggest that there was less media fury shown for the murders at Bagram than there was for the sexual abuse at Gitmo. Even though there was more continuous reporting on the women of Gitmo, the outcry was as indignant in both cases. What is lacking from follow up reporting on the Bagram case is any suggestion that the behavior of the male soldiers and interrogators was in any way expressions of aberrant masculinity. The original *Times* report, by noting the over-the-top display of masculinity of a group of men within the Third Platoon, certainly laid the groundwork for critical reflection, but none followed. There is also a deafening silence in the media discourse with regard to any concern over the psychic damage that might have been inflicted upon those who participated in the murders of Habibullah and Dilawar

The discourse that followed the *Times* report mostly excoriates the Bush administration, especially the Justice Department and the Pentagon, for setting a stage that was amenable for prisoner abuse and torture. By Bush's ignoring international law and attempting to narrowly redefine torture, much media reporting laid the blame for the murders at Bagram squarely at the feet of the president. Newspaper editorials demanded "a truly independent investigation that includes reviews of not just the Pentagon but the CIA as well."[292] An editorial in the *Bangor Daily News* agreed, noting that "responsible higher-ups must be identified and punished, including those who manipulated official policy to permit torture."[293] Another editorial decried the typical result in reported cases of prisoner abuse: "When anyone is held responsible, it is low-ranking service people."[294] The writer goes on to note that this time such a remedy would be no remedy: "The only way for the United States to salvage its reputation in the world and among its own citizens is through the appointment of an independent federal investigator on detainee abuse." A writer for the *New Yorker* agreed with all of the above editorials when he wrote that "the indulgence of this sort of depravity goes to, and comes from, the top."[295]

News media was certainly justified in demanding culpability from the chain of command. As editorialists correctly noted, low level soldiers often bear the brunt of abuse scandals, while those who likely give the order, or who fail to give proper supervision and training, remain untainted. Many of the articles that reported and commented upon the women at Gitmo expressed the same concern. What makes the discourse surrounding Bagram different from that of Gitmo is that there is a plethora of gendered discourse about the latter and almost none about the former. Where much attention is given to the embodied female abusers at Gitmo, the

[292] "Investigate the Abuse," *St. Petersburg Times*, 26 May 2005.
[293] "Poppies and Torture," *Bangor Daily News*, 24 May 2005.
[294] "Torture, American Style," *Record*, 22 May 2005.
[295] Hendrik Hertzberg, "Big News Week," *New Yorker*, May 30, 2005.

maleness of the abusers at Bagram, when it is mentioned at all, is nearly relegated to a footnote. Golden's original story opened the way for those that followed to enter into discourse about the abuse of masculinity at the collection point. But none of the follow-up commentary mentions the "Testosterone Gang," or Corsetti's offending penis tactic. Unlike the breasts and genitalia of the women at Gitmo, discourse of which was repeatedly reproduced, Corsetti's brandished and threatening penis elicited no sustained media outcry. It is as if "Monster's" threat of rape was not taken seriously by those who commented upon the abuse at Bagram – certainly it was not taken as seriously as the women who rubbed their breasts on prisoners or smeared them with fake menstrual blood.

In addition to the lack of discourse about the embodied masculinity of the perpetrators of murder at Bagram, there is no discourse that discusses the degradation of said perpetrators. Where media representatives suggest that the women at Gitmo were uniquely degraded, exploited, and dehumanized by their own behavior, there is no matching discourse regarding the men at Bagram. This silence is puzzling. It is reasonable that those who engaged in horrific violence at Bagram would experience some psychological trauma once removed from the surreal environment of war. After all, many returning veterans of the Iraq war have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of the horrors they have witnessed and perpetrated.[296] It also seems reasonable that, with PTSD contributing to alcohol and drug abuse as well as suicide, domestic abuse, and other violent crimes, these men could subsequently become a threat to themselves or to others. But no editorial concern is shown for the men who brutally murdered two helpless prisoners, or indeed about any of the men who have been implicated in prisoner torture. In contrast, there is no lack of patronizing concern shown for the women who engaged in sexual interrogations. The inference is that men are not as psychically

[296] Dan Frosch, "Fighting the Terror of Battles That Rage in Soldiers' Heads," *New York Times*, 13 May 2007.

fragile as women, and/or that perpetrating violence does not negatively impact men to the extent that perpetrating sexual abuse impacts women. These men may bring shame to their country – and there is a surplus of commentary suggesting just that – but their actions bring no harm to themselves.

The solution to the problems at Bagram as suggested by media discourses is a full investigation of the chain of command. This solution is also offered for the interrogation lapses at Gitmo, with one crucial difference: Where at least one pundit suggested that the solution to the problem of Gitmo would be to remove women, no discourse suggests that violent young men who demonstrate sociopathic tendencies may not have the wisdom or patience to use anything other than physical aggression in the interrogation room, and should therefore be removed from active duty. As was the case for Abu Ghraib, no media commentary scrutinized individual male behavior for violent histories and tendencies, nor suggested that the Bush administration and the Pentagon are supporting policies that turned young men into soulless murderers. The collective men involved in the Bagram murders were portrayed as one of many faulty cogs in the military machine, but not as men who were put in psychological danger by their own violent actions.

A final way in which the discourses surrounding the women of Gitmo differed from that surrounding the women of Abu Ghraib involved one of the very methods of interrogation reportedly used by the women at Guantánamo Bay. Saar's book and the simultaneously released FBI and Pentagon reports confirmed prisoner reports that women interrogators had smeared what was thought to be menstrual blood on the Arab prisoners. While the mixture of blood and war is expected and inevitable, this blood was not accorded the symbolism of honor as that of warrior blood spilled on the battlefield. Rather, this blood brought with it the connotations of pollution shared by Judeo-Christian and Islamic cultures.

Blood in the Interrogation Room

While the tight T-shirts and commentary about erections elicited many condemnatory media remarks, this did not compare to the avalanche of censure that accompanied reports of women smearing menstrual blood, fake and real, on the Muslim detainees. This tactic was a strategy to break the prisoners' ability to gain strength through prayer by making them feel too unclean to pray. The three major monotheisms in the world can trace their origins to the Middle East and early biblical law commonly referred to as the "Old Testament." Here, blood plays a prominent role in a variety of purification rituals. According to the law of Abraham, given a place of honor especially in the Jewish faith and in Islam, baby boys were to be circumcised when they were eight days old. The shedding of their blood from this unmistakably male appendage marked them as being part of God's covenant. Traditionally, the circumcision ritual is more than just the removal of the male foreskin. The importance of the infant male's blood is emphasized in orthodox Jewish requirements in that if a child is born without a foreskin, is circumcised in the hospital prior to the 8th day of life, or if a grown man converts, blood must be ritualistically drawn from the glans.[297] There is no corresponding codified ritual for baby girls in the Bible or in the Quran. As a sign of the different values assigned to baby boys and baby girls, the book of Leviticus instructs different lengths of purification for women after a child is born.

> If a woman conceives and bears a male child, she shall be ceremonially unclean seven days; as at the time of her menstruation, she shall be unclean. On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. Her time of blood purification shall be thirty-three days…If she bears a female child, she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her menstruation; her time of blood purification shall be sixty-six days.[298]

[297] Sami A. Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh, *Male & Female Circumcision among Jews, Christians and Muslims: Religious, Medical, Social and Legal Debate* (Warren Center, PA: Shangri-La Publications, 2001).
[298] Leviticus 12:2-5, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)*

These traditions emphasize that from birth male and female bodies and blood were viewed differently with the female child perceived as a polluting factor requiring twice the time of purification for the mother as compared to that accompanying a male child.

In addition to male blood being a sign of a special covenant relationship with God, blood was also a sign of atonement for sins. The "Old Testament" and the Quran both advocate animal sacrifice in order to atone for sins. The book of Leviticus offers a detailed treatment for animals sacrificed in praise to God or for atonement for sins, and all required blood to be sprinkled on the altar of God.[299] The Quran instructs Muslims that certain festivals required ritual sacrifice for atonement.[300] Later, Christian teachings hold that Christ's blood provided for eternal atonement, replacing inadequate animal blood. As the Bible book of Hebrews points out,

> For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins…And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, "he sat down at the right hand of God."[301]

The use of blood in all three major monotheisms, then, has a long tradition. What is common to these religious practices is that the blood of women is no where mentioned to be used in sacred rituals, nor is it invested with atoning value. Quite to the contrary, female blood, which is represented chiefly by menstrual blood, is portrayed as shameful and unclean.

Traditions of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity understand that the Mosaic Law was given to the nation of Israel by God. This law specifically proclaims women to be impure during their menses. As the book of Leviticus notes,

> When a woman has a discharge of blood that is her regular discharge from her body, she shall be in her impurity for seven days, and whoever touches her shall be unclean until

[299] See, for example, Leviticus chapter 5, *NRSV*.
[300] See, for example, *Sûrat* 22, and *Sûrat* 2:196 Abdullah Yusuf Alia translation *(AYA)*.
[301] Hebrews 10:4, 11, 12, *NRSV*

> the evening. Everything upon which she lies during her impurity shall be unclean; everything also upon which she sits shall be unclean.[302]

Later scripture details the extent to which menstruating women were considered impure. The prophet Ezekiel claimed that God spoke to him saying that when Israel followed other gods, "they defiled [the land] with their ways and their deeds; their conduct in my sight was like the uncleanness of a woman in her menstrual period."[303] So great was God's disgust that he destroyed the nation and scattered its people. The comparison suggests that menstruating women, too, are objects of defilement and disgust. Likewise, the Quran notes regarding menstruating women, "They are a hurt and a pollution: so keep away from women in their courses, and do not approach them until they are clean."[304] Menstruating women are considered to be so unclean that they must abstain from "prayer and visits to the mosque during their menses."[305] Conservative Islam generally observes segregation of men and women unless they are married, but during menstruation not even a woman's husband may have contact with her. In fact, menstruation is regarded as one of the reasons that women do not merit equal treatment with men. Barbara F. Stowasser provides a paraphrase of one noted conservative Egyptian nationalist, who says "…women resemble children. Like children, they are emotional and, lacking analytic insight, are given to unbalanced mood shifts, from joy to sorrow, from pain to pleasure, from hatred to love. Most importantly, women menstruate while men do not."[306]

With the major monotheisms drawing from the same cultural source, it should not be surprising that the deep anxiety about female menstrual blood is not isolated to the ideological

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[302] Leviticus 15: 19,20, *NRSV*
[303] Ezekiel 36:17, *NRSV*
[304] *Sûrat* 2:222, AYA.
[305] Sangeetha Madhavan and Aisse Diarra, "The Blood That Links: Menstrual Regulation among the Bamana of Mali," in *Regulating Menstruation: Beliefs, Practices, Interpretations*, ed. Etienne van de Walle and Elisha P. Renne (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 175.
[306] Barbara F. Stowasser, "Women's Issues in Modern Islamic Thought," in *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers*, ed. Judith E. Tucker (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 15.

"other" found in the person of the Muslim prisoner. Western, Judeo-Christian culture, for all its proclamations of enlightenment, also finds menstrual blood to be a source of fear and disgust. Melissa Raphael, a scholar of theology and religious studies, notes: "There seems little doubt that the biblical traditions have and continue to find menstrual blood repellent to the holy. It is quite outside or profane to the mechanisms of atonement and salvation which are lubricated by male sacrificial blood."[307] Menstrual blood is not a substance that can be discarded from the female body thereby restoring it to male purity. The blood is a sign of an inherently inferior and flawed body. As Shildrick and Price argue, the female body, in contrast to the properly contained male body, is "marked by the capacity of that which leaks from the body – menstrual blood is the best exemplar – to defile and contaminate."[308] As Lee and Sasser-Coen note,

> In terms of menstrual pollution and contamination…historically and cross-culturally, menstrual blood has been considered both magical and poisonous, and social interpretations of women's bleeding have structured and restricted women's lives. These interpretations have often tended to involve a discourse of pollution and the requirement of a separation or seclusion of individual women from the daily activities of others (especially men, and primarily husbands).[309]

Arguably, then, the narrative of menstrual pollution is as deeply embedded in Judeo-Christian culture as it is in Muslim culture. Watching any Western television program where women are presumed to be the primary audience will reveal a surplus of products – the "faceless messages of capitalism"[310] – that are designed to erase any sign of the offending "period." Women are encouraged to douche, spray, deodorize, and take diuretics – anything to hide menstruation from

[307] Melissa Raphael, *Thealogy and Embodiment: The Post-Patriarchal Reconstruction of Female Sacrality* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 1996), 171.
[308] Shildrick and Price, 7.
[309] Janet Lee and Jennifer Sasser-Coen, *Blood Stories: Menarche and the Politics of the Female Body in Contemporary U.S. Society* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 70.
[310] Lee and Sasser-Coen, 59.

the outside world. There are even oral contraceptives on the market that will reduce or eliminate the occurrence of "messy" monthly cycles.[311]

As the above examples demonstrate, blood has a long history of symbolism for Judeo-Christian and Islamic cultures, with distinct differences in treatment for the blood of men compared to the blood of women. Where women's blood seems irrevocably tied to their reproductive functions, men's blood is representative of greater symbolic value. Culturally, the blood of males, especially when it is shed in protection of the homeland in war, is afforded sacred status. Blood is understood as being inseparable from war – it is expected to be shed, and is the symbolic price paid for victory and defeat. But the blood that makes an appearance in the interrogation rooms of Gitmo is viewed as a different and distinctly inferior kind of blood. When a warrior spills "his" blood on the battlefield it is often a source of pride for his comrades and surviving loved ones, even as they mourn his loss. A war wound, far from something to be hidden, is referred to as a "red badge of courage."[312] It is a sign that a warrior has made great sacrifices for his country. Even the red color in the American flag symbolizes the blood of warriors who have fallen in defense of the homeland. Presidents since the founding of the United States have spoken reverential words in honor of soldiers, mostly male, whose blood has been shed in pursuit of duty. The current war is unique in that it is the first time when menstrual blood, the source of which is always biological women, was reported to have been visibly shed as part of military strategy. In essence, menstrual blood, used in interrogations in service of the war on terrorism, mingled with warrior blood, also shed in service of the war on terrorism. Needless to say, this feminine blood is not accorded the hallowed position of that of male warriors who die violently. Rather than a symbol of sacrifice and courage, female menstrual

[311] Karen Houppert, "Final Period," *New York Times*, 17 July 2007.
[312] From Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* (New York: Tor 1990).

blood is a sign of weakness and disease. This viewpoint was brought forcefully to public attention in 1995 when then House Speaker Newt Gingrich referred to women's monthly cycles as "infections" which make them ill-equipped to serve in combat.[313]

Perhaps the anxiety and disgust expressed regarding menstrual blood has something to do with its source. Where male blood, a warrior's blood, is reflective of a sacrifice that spills something that would not ordinarily be spilled, female blood comes unbidden from a body that tends to be uncontained. Menstrual blood, perceived as polluted and coming as it does without warning or control, analogizes the apprehension culturally expressed regarding women's bodies in general. As Lee and Sasser-Coen note with regard to the difference in perception of the male and female bodies:

> On the one hand, woman is associated with life, while on the other, her bleeding and oozing body – reminiscent of earthly vulnerabilities – is met with disgust. Male bodies are not so symbolically marked with such connotations. Men are more easily able to imagine their bodies free of such constraints, and they project their fears and hatred of frailty and mortality onto women's flesh.[314]

In exploring cultural understandings of menstrual blood, Sophie Laws found that men had decidedly more negative associations with menstrual blood than did women. One of her interviewees commented that menstrual blood seemed "dirty…like afterbirth or something like that…not something I'd like to be touching…whereas ordinary blood, I wouldn't mind that at all." This participant added that menstrual blood, unlike an ordinary cut, was impure and carried the "connotations of discharge."[315] This man's perception may encapsulate the negative cultural narrative with regard to menstrual blood when compared to "ordinary blood": It is understood as something dirty and polluted that is discharged or purged only from the female body. The male body and blood is not similarly sullied.

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[313] Clarence Page, "Newt's Notion of Truth Requires No Basis in Fact," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 24 January 1995.
[314] Lee and Sasser-Coen, 16.
[315] Sophie Laws, *Issues of Blood: The Politics of Menstruation* (Basingstoke, England: Macmillan, 1990), 33-34.

The disquiet about menstrual blood that Judeo-Christian culture shares with its ideological enemy, Islam, is reflected in the reporting of the women at Gitmo who wiped menstrual blood on their prisoners. Commentators were often explicit in their view of this act as a sexual act, even though the descriptions of the menstrual blood tactic were quite different from the overtly sexual interrogations. These acts were reported to be separate from those that were described in more erotic terms. Men were not smeared with menstrual blood in an attempt to titillate them. So the fact that commentators saw this behavior as explicitly sexual closely links women's menstrual blood to their sexuality, and represents a profound "leak" of something that is viewed as dangerous and in need of containment. One editorial describes these actions as "almost depraved sexual conduct,"[316] while another uses the word "grotesque."[317] An editorial listed the menstrual blood tactic among things that "violate American moral values,"[318] while another asked, "From under exactly what rock did the perpetrators of these filthy methods crawl?"[319] An opinion piece in a South Carolina newspaper refers to the tactic as "something out of a pornographic movie,"[320] to which another editorial adds that it is "bizarrely sadomasochistic."[321] An article in a Pittsburgh newspaper succinctly refers to the smearing of fake menstrual blood on captives as "pretty damn primitive."[322]

Certainly, smearing a subdued prisoner with a substance that he believes to be a violation of his closely held religious beliefs is an abhorrent abuse of power. But the outrage expressed regarding this blood seems excessive given its relatively minor role in interrogations. With many blood-letting abuses being performed in interrogation rooms, it is telling that so much rage is

[316] "A Type of Pain," *Intelligencer Journal*, 15 February 2005.
[317] Gene Lyons, "A Convenient Furor," *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, 18 May 2005.
[318] "The Women of Gitmo."
[319] "Iraqis Demonstrate Torture."
[320] "Torture in Guantánamo," *Herald*, 7 February 2005.
[321] Rui Wang, "United States Swimming in a Culture of Torture," *Arizona Daily Wildcat*, 16 February 2005.
[322] "Flushing Away the Truth," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 27 May 2005.

stirred up regarding this blood. Of course, the blood that causes so much anxiety and revulsion is distinctly female, and as such comes from a source that has long been viewed as polluted. This blood, more than other kinds of blood spilled in the war on terrorism, has drawn much outraged and indignant attention from media sources.

By displaying this offensive blood, the women violated both the cultural precepts of their prisoners and their own cultural norms. By displaying their blood, women interrogators are metaphorically implying refusal of the Judeo-Christian and Muslim topoi of home and family. They are in a place belonging to men – an extension of the battlefield – and in a role reserved for men – that of dominating warrior. These women are not at home, serving to reproduce individual men. Instead, they are assuming the place of the warrior, protecting the tribe, society, or culture. Their display of menstrual blood emphasizes that they have not been impregnated by any man. It may serve to flaunt their role transgression, and in so doing it may highlight the unique powers of women, which have been valued by men only when they have been under the control and utilization of individual men. Even in relatively progressive Western cultures, women have been granted only limited control over their biologically leaky bodies. The historical clash with Islam brings to the surface the lines of control, because the ideological control mechanisms in Muslim countries under Sharī‘ah remain in some sense at the origin point from which Western society sees itself as emerging. That military culture views this blood as an exceptionally productive tool against Muslim prisoners demonstrates an understanding of its symbolic power. But the Western commentators' expression of repugnance regarding this blood is demonstrative of Judeo-Christian culture's alignment with the thoroughly "othered" Islamic culture, so often described as unenlightened.

The display of this blood marks these interrogators definitively as women and as an anathema to the warrior. It proves that they are in a place they do not belong, doing a job for which they are not fit. Their blood cannot traditionally be pure male blood, such as that marked by blood-letting circumcisions, or that willingly spilled by the ultimate masculine atoning figure of Christ. When this kind of blood is spilled in sacrifice, Western commentators are so appalled at what the blood represents that they are unable to see it and accept it as a sacrifice. This kind of blood has no tradition of use in sacrifice either to atone or to save. It can only be used to shame both the woman who has allowed it to be seen, and the debased prisoner upon whom it is smeared as a sign of his feminizing humiliation. While almost anything goes in the interrogation room, clearly not menstrual blood. Drawing such a line reveals the deep level at which our ideological structures have not yet accommodated themselves to including all of what it is to be women as human and acceptable for "public" participation. Menstrual blood is no more biologically toxic than any other blood, and yet it is as threatening to the U.S. commentators as it is to the Muslim prisoners. Until menstrual blood can be treated as just blood, women's place in the public mind and the warrior's role may remain ideologically uncomfortable, contestable, insecure, and peculiarly threatening.

Conclusion

When Arab prisoners began arriving at Gitmo, an effort was made on the part of the Bush administration to assure the American people that these men were known to be dangerous terrorists. President Bush asserted that the prisoners would "not be treated as prisoners of war. They're illegal combatants. These are killers. These are terrorists."[323] Vice President Dick Cheney affirmed Bush's claim when he stated that the prisoners were "the worse of a very bad

[323] Hutcheson.

lot. They are very dangerous. They are devoted to killing millions of Americans…and they are perfectly prepared to die in the effort."[324] And Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, who had decided that Gitmo was "least worst place"[325] for the detainees declared them to be "among the best-trained, most-vicious…killers on the face of the earth."[326]

Despite the presumptive guilt of the prisoners, most of whom had yet to be charged with any crime, "the Pentagon has been steadily reducing the number of prisoners there."[327] Their numbers have declined from a high of 680 in 2003 to just over 300 in 2007.[328] Human rights organizations, such as the International Red Cross and Amnesty International, were vocal in their insistence that the prisoners needed to be charged or released, and the United Nation's brought its own pressure to bear when it determined that the prison should be closed. U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated that opposition to people being held in perpetuity, without prosecution, was "something that is common to every legal system."[329] Anan urged President Bush to close the prison. The future of Gitmo also became a point of debate early in the 2008 presidential campaign with former Democratic hopeful John Edwards promising to close the prison on his first day in office,[330] if elected, and former Republican hopeful Mitt Romney saying Gitmo not only needed to be kept open, it needed to be doubled.[331]

If Gitmo's future is uncertain, the same cannot be said for the interrogators who received so much attention for their actions. None of the women have been court-martialed or subject to civilian prosecution, nor are they likely to be. A military review determined that none of the

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[324] Robert Burns, "Administration Still Divided on Question of Applying Geneva Convention to Prisoners in Cuba," *AP Newswire*, 28 January 2002.
[325] Edmonson.
[326] Tom Infield, "Rumsfeld: Detainees Aren't POW's," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 28 January 2002.
[327] Carol Rosenberg, "U.S. Sends 16 Saudis Home from Guantánamo," *McClatchy-Tribune News Service*, 6 September 2007.
[328] Rosenberg, "U.S. Sends 16 Saudis Home."
[329] Edith M. Lederer, "Annan Says U.S. Should Close Gitmo Prison," *Associated Press*, 17 February 2006.
[330] Tyler Whitley, "Mitt Romney in Richmond," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 1 August 2007.
[331] Janet Hook, "Campaign '08: The Bush Factor," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 September 2007.

interrogation tactics in use at Gitmo constituted torture.[332] At least one woman interrogator was "verbally reprimanded" for using fake menstrual blood on a prisoner, but only because she used it to retaliate against a prisoner who had spit on her, not because the tactic was disapproved.[333] All of this indicates that what the civilian press and public respond to with such acrimony is contrarily perceived as a useful tool by those seeking intelligence from Muslim prisoners.

Perhaps it is not surprising that there has been a similar lack of successful prosecutions for the perpetrators of murder at Bagram. The last trial held, which was against Damien Corsetti (aka "Monster") in 2006, resulted in his acquittal.[334] Only one soldier was convicted at trial and he received no prison time and was given an honorable discharge.[335] According to Tim Golden's sources, one of the possible reasons convictions of the soldiers was blocked was because "Army judges and jurors…seemed to consider the soldiers' guilt or innocence with an acute sense of the sacrifices they had made in serving overseas."[336] It now appears that no one will be held responsible for the torture-murders of Habibullah and Dilawar.

Abu Ghraib, Gitmo, and Bagram demonstrate that men and women are equally capable of torturing fellow humans if the circumstances are deemed favorable. These cases also demonstrate that the United States armed forces, including its military, civilian, and covert agencies, have established a pattern of allowing torture of prisoners captured in the "war on terrorism." Official denials and word-parsing notwithstanding, the evidence is simply too vast to suggest otherwise. Media discourses provide a valuable public service in bringing such atrocities to the attention of the citizenry. Unfortunately, the media discourses are doing more than playing the role of watchdog of government sanctioned abuse. As I have argued in this chapter and the

[332] Errol Louis, "Now, U.S. Becomes the Enemy," *Daily News*, 3 January 2006.
[333] Dart.
[334] Tim Golden, "In Final Trail, G.I. Is Acquitted of Abusing Afghan Detainees," *New York Times*, 2 June 2006.
[335] Tim Golden, "Years after 2 Afghans Died, Abuse Case Falters," *New York Times*, 13 February 2006.
[336] Golden, "Abuse Case Falters."

previous chapter, these discourses do the work of socially disciplining women for their lapses of proper femininity, while maintaining the invisibility of male torturers. This disparity demonstrates that the vocal cultural prohibition against torture does not equally apply to men and women, which tends to negate its value as a prohibition.

The current conflict has been portrayed as good versus evil, specifically Judeo-Christian versus Islam, freedom and liberty versus fanaticism and oppression. At the intersections, one finds that gender expectations do not so much clash as they concur. Women's rights have made far greater strides in Western cultures than in cultures practicing *Sharī'ah*, but at a fundamental level, women across these cultures are understood – consciously or unconsciously – to be inferior to men. No matter how competent the woman, or how high the achievement, she cannot escape her physical body. Men, on the other hand, simply by virtue of being born male, may qualify as hero and savior. Their actions may subsequently disqualify them, but the shape and content of their bodies do not.

Up to this point, the male savior has remained a shadowy figure in news media. Male interrogators and soldiers do torture, and there is plenty of evidence for this point. But very few attain visibility. Most operate anonymously, unindicted by military or civilian justice or by mass media reporting. As Dick Cheney suggested, these ones work on "the dark side" and "in the shadows."[337] Where news media has been reluctant to give a visible face and body to these government sanctioned heroes, popular entertainment media has filled in the gap. As the next chapter will demonstrate, the shape of the male hero needed to fight "evil" has been honed since September 11th by a genre of television entertainment programming that depicts government agents fighting terrorism. This hero differs dramatically from that in past decades. This hero is

[337] Ken Herman, "Bush Urges Americans to Return to Work as Nation Awaits Market Reaction," *Cox News Service*, 16 September 2001.

strong, brave, self-sacrificing, tortured, and willing to torture. Most importantly, this hero is messianic in providing salvation, and above all, he is male.

CHAPTER 4

TORTURE TELEVISION: POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT DEPICTIONS OF TORTURE AND TORTURERS

The problem for those in power is how to get people to do the dirty work without turning them into monsters.

Slavoj Žižek[338]

Introduction

News media coverage of torture scandals, such as Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay, demonstrate the ways in which women torturers are subjected to higher scrutiny and standards than are men torturers, who are rendered nearly invisible in media discourses. As the "war on terrorism" began to consume media attention after September 11, 2001, fictional entertainment media, unsurprisingly, joined the fray. Terrorism was frequently used as a plot device in popular fictional television shows, and along with it came torture. After 9/11, argues cultural critic Tony Nadler, "Whether as the conscious strategy of producers or the coincidence of circumstance, fictional TV shows involving Middle East relations, terrorism, counterterrorism and war took on a more obviously political salience."[339] The *New Yorker* adds: "Since September 11th, depictions of torture have become much more common on American television."[340]

As news of Abu Ghraib captivated world media, the Western world's fascination with torture as a dramatic entertainment theme grew exponentially. More than just advantageously

Research for chapter was completed with the assistance of a Dean's Award grant from the University of Georgia Graduate School.

[338] Slavoj Žižek, "The Depraved Heroes of *24* Are the Himmlers of Hollywood," *Guardian* (2006), http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2006/jan/10/usnews.comment/print

[339] Tony Nadler, "Torture on TV: Progressive Journalism Tackles Popular Culture Responses to Bush's War on Terror," *Politics and Culture*, no. 1 (2007), http://aspen.conncoll.edu/politicsandculture/printer_page.cfm?key=542

[340] Jane Mayer, "Whatever It Takes," *New Yorker*, 2/19/07, 2007.

"ripped from the headlines," the popularity of these narratives is a telling social barometer. As Bonnie Dow notes, entertainment television can work "rhetorically to negotiate social issues: to define them, to represent them, and, ultimately, to offer visions of their meanings and implications."[341] The popularity of torture can tell us, as one television critic suggests, "that pain and suffering, as entertainment, unite us all in a way that humor and romance fail to."[342] But alternatively, in a fearful time, and faced with an enemy that seems to represent mythic "evil," audiences wish to see "good" prevailing in some measurable way. Robert Thompson, professor of television and popular culture at Syracuse University notes, "If in real life in the war on terror, we are not going to be able to kick the enemies' butts in noticeable ways, then we are going to demand to see the enemy's butt kicked in our fiction."[343] Perhaps what unites audiences, then, is not necessarily an enjoyment of witnessing pain, but rather the escapism of seeing traditionally masculine heroes prevail over enemies that have been socially constructed as irredeemably evil.

In this chapter, I will scrutinize the ways in which the popularity of torture themes on entertainment television, regardless of the reason for that popularity, have contributed to the work of using torture to reshape gender norms. Simultaneously, fictional programming has added to cultural narratives that use gender to reshape torture into an act that may be perceived as acceptable, even honorable. Successful television programs about terrorism and counterterrorism have flourished especially since 9/11. These programs portray men and women leading small armies of undercover government agents fighting against, torturing, and being tortured by (often) Arab terrorists. As we find in news media, portrayals of those implicated in torture vary

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[341] Bonnie J. Dow, *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women's Movement since 1970* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), xv.
[342] Karen Heller, "From *24* to the NFL, We Love to Watch Pain and Suffering," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 7 February 2007.
[343] Pam Fessler, "Jack Bauer: Quiet, Ruthless Defender of America," *National Public Radio* (2008), http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=88382495

depending upon the gender of those involved. As in news media, women who engage in torture are depicted as pathological and lacking proper femininity. Meanwhile, men who torture do so without the additional scrutiny of their psyches or whether or not they are demonstrating proper masculinity. Entertainment television does not simply reflect these themes; it enhances and adds to them. For instance, women who engage in torture in these programs are portrayed as excessively deviant either sexually or in pursuit of their career ambitions, often both. Men, on other hand, operate in a world where being tortured by their enemies, and in turn torturing them, is equated to the acts of a messianic savior.

That the male mythic hero suffers is not new. This "American monomyth," as termed by Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence, underwrites a wide swath of American popular cultural artifacts from *Star Trek* to *Taxi Driver*. According to Jewett and Lawrence, the American monomyth is concerned chiefly with redemption. They note, "It secularizes the Judeo-Christian redemption dramas that have arisen on American soil, combining elements from the selfless servant who impassively gives his life for others and the zealous crusader who destroys evil."[344] In essence, the hero must suffer; it is expected, and popular culture delivers. What seems to be a recent development is the hero who also tortures and remains heroic, indeed, messianic.

In order to argue successfully for this perceptual change in the notion of the heroic masculine savior, it is necessary to delve in detail into the popular fiction television programs that troll the depths of the current conflict for storylines that attempt to imitate reality. I will begin with a short description of each television program under consideration in this chapter. Second, I will examine the portrayal of women torturers in these programs. The propensity to

[344] Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence, *The American Monomyth*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1988), xii.

torture of secondary women characters is almost always suggestive of deviance on their part, whether that deviance is sexual or simply a demonstration of aggressive ambition. Either way, women who have a yen for torture appear to fall short of some vaguely defined, but culturally understood, notion of femininity. Third, following the examination of deviant female torturers, I will contrast their depictions with the portrayals of women warrior protagonists who torture. I argue here that torture violates societal notions of acceptable violence for women warriors. The major theme that separates these feminine warriors from the abnormal women torturers is their reluctance to perform torture, followed by their acts of redemption should they torture. Torture is depicted as a fall from grace for righteous women warriors and redemption seems to be necessary in order to restore them.

Fourth, after analyzing the ways in which women warriors occasionally perform torture, I turn my attention to their endurance of it. Torture is not just something that heroic and deviant figures inflict; it is also something that warriors, men *and* women, must endure as a test of their fitness. Although women warriors in these programs endure painful ordeals, usually without breaking, their "unnatural" relationship to violence prevents them from suffering their trials with the same fearlessness and stoicism of men. Fifth, I follow this examination of the women warriors' torture sessions by contrasting the ways in which masculine warriors bear up under their torture. This contrast emphasizes the cultural understanding of violence as something that is natural and expected for men, especially male warrior heroes. Sixth, I enhance the previous discussion by analyzing the ways in which the torture of women warriors is occasionally eroticized, whereas the torture of men does not readily lend itself to an erotic read. This contrast emphasizes the deep-seated cultural perceptions of men's unique ability to transcend their physical bodies, where women are fully personified by theirs. Finally, I give attention to the

reshaping of the masculine savior. This examination will proceed in three parts. First, I demonstrate how the enduring masculine savior is portrayed in Christ-themes by using the popular program *24* as a consummate text. Second, I argue that the blood of male warriors is displayed in fictional television programs as a visible metaphor of sacred sacrifice, and this is contrasted to the absence of female warrior blood. I conclude this section by showing the ways in which the heroic savior is constructed into one who not only endures torture, but as one who righteously inflicts it. I argue here that these portrayals demonstrate that only a select few male warrior heroes can rise to the level of messianic savior. I also argue that performing torture is not portrayed as a forgivable sin, but rather as a necessary component of the new messianic savior.

I begin with a description of each of the long-running television texts in use in this chapter. All but one began their runs after September 11, 2001. The programs I will be examining in detail are *La Femme Nikita*, *Alias*, *Sleeper Cell, The Unit,* and *24*.

Fighting Terrorists

La Femme Nikita

The exception to the above rule regarding these series' debuts is *La Femme Nikita*, loosely based on the 1990 French film of the same name. The television serial first aired on January 13, 1997. Although his program premiered prior to the notorious September 11th attacks, it is situated within a timeframe when modern terrorism, as represented by Islamic terrorists, was coming increasingly to public attention.[345] *La Femme Nikita* debuted on the USA basic cable station and became the most successful cable program of its time.[346] Where the film portrays a

[345] *La Femme Nikita* debuted after the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center, and the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing. The 1998 attacks on U.S. embassies in Africa and the 2000 attack on the *U.S.S. Cole* all occurred during this program's successful run.
[346] Laura Grindstaff, "A Pygmalion Tale Retold: Remaking *La Femme Nikita*," *Camera Obscura,* 16, (2001), 133.

violent, not terribly sympathetic criminal-turned-government-assassin, the television serial tells the story of an innocent, and traditionally beautiful, young woman (played by Australian actor Peta Wilson) living on the street, who is subsequently framed for murder by a shadowy government agency. This agency, known as Section One, operates in an unidentified Western country. Despite its international cast, Section One appears to operate largely based on American policy. Frequent references are made to the Department of Defense, and the organization shares an unspecified affiliation with the CIA. Nikita's new handlers give her a loser's choice: submit to training and employment as a Section One operative, or be "cancelled" by the agency. Nikita takes the only choice she has and for the rest of the series she battles terrorists while simultaneously fighting to avoid cancellation. Her life, and that of all of Section operatives, is held almost entirely at the discretion of the head of Section One, a man referred to by most as "Operations." Nikita maintains an uneasy, often fractious, relationship with Operations and several times is slated for cancellation by the ruthless leader. She stays alive, nonetheless, mostly through the help of the man who trains her and with whom she falls in love, a stoic man of few words named Michael Samuelle. Throughout the series it is made clear that Nikita despises the life she is forced to live as an anti-terrorist operative, but she has very little choice.

Nikita does her job competently, all the while longing to escape the prison of her life at Section One and build a normal life with her love, Michael. The series ends with Nikita's discovery that the man behind the scenes, who holds all of the power of the agency of which Section One is a part, is her father. She chooses to follow his wish that she take over as head of Section One instead of going away with Michael to live the life she has always wanted.

Alias

A similar premise to *La Femme Nikita* is found in the enormously popular network program, *Alias*, which first aired on September 30, 2001. The program achieved a great deal of critical success, garnering numerous nominations for major awards, including a Golden Globe win for its star.[347] The premise of *Alias* is a beautiful young woman named Sydney Bristow (played by American actor Jennifer Garner), who is recruited while in college into an organization known as SD-6 that she believes to be a secret arm of the CIA. When the series takes up, she is in graduate school. She has been trained in all manner of martial arts, weapons, and intelligence skills, and must hide her identity from her friends. When she tells her fiancé about her covert life, Sloane, the head of SD-6, has him killed. As events play out in the first episode, Sydney discovers that her estranged father, Jack, is also an SD-6 operative. Crucially, she also discovers that SD-6 is not part of the CIA but is part of a vast, multi-pronged, terrorist organization known as The Alliance. With the help of her new CIA handler, a man named Michael Vaughn, who she refers to simply as "Vaughn," Sydney becomes a double-agent, learning simultaneously that this is also a role her secretive father plays. Throughout the series five year run, the organization for which Sydney works changes several times, slipping each time further into super-secret "Black Ops" identity. Jack and Sloane are depicted as good and evil father-figures for Sydney, and she is always under the control of one or the other, often both. Like Nikita, Sydney longs to leave the agency and live a normal life with Vaughn, with whom she falls in love in the first season. But unlike Nikita, when she is eventually given a choice Sydney stays for honor, desiring to bring down the organizations against which she has been fighting for her entire career.

[347] "'Alias' (2001) Awards," (Internet Movie Database, 2008), http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0285333/awards.

La Femme Nikita and *Alias* represent two programs with women leading casts of characters assigned with the task of fighting terrorism, and for that they are unique. Their uniqueness does not lie in the fact that they are female warriors. Indeed, several successful programs, such as *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* and *Xena, Warrior Princess*, depicted strong, albeit mythical, female leads capable of engaging in physical combat and prevailing.[348] What is unique about *Nikita* and *Alias* is that these programs attempt to imitate an ostensible reality. They take place in contemporary times and refer to real places, world leaders, and actual conflicts – particularly, modern terrorism. Despite the repeated forays into "reality," both shows maintain a somewhat science-fiction flavor. Common to both programs is the ability of friendly and enemy agents to completely assume the identities of their enemies – whether through flawless plastic surgery (which is, then, easily reversed), or futuristic DNA manipulation. And *Alias*, especially, often delves into the supernatural with the complicated plot thread of a mysterious 500-year old set of artifacts created by a powerful seer named Rambaldi. The occasional side roads into the fantastic that both shows travel serve to remind the viewer that these programs do not completely mirror reality. Therefore, the fact that the stars are women agents who are as strong as, and who show as much ingenuity as, their male counterparts, is maintained firmly as fiction in the viewers periphery – a fact that is not as profoundly in evidence for the programs starring men in leading roles. These caveats notwithstanding, the militaristic bent to these types of programs would seem to lend themselves to leading men. *Nikita* and *Alias* consciously twist the genre by placing women in the leading roles, and to great critical, popular, and commercial success.

[348] Although racial implications are not part of this study that is not meant to suggest that they are not significant. Where several of the programs featuring male protagonists star men of color (e.g., *Sleeper Cell* and *The Unit*), the programs featuring women heroes cast exclusively white actors in these roles. This is the case for mythical heroes (e.g., *Buffy* and *Xena*) as well as contemporary heroes in *Alias* and *Nikita*. One implication is that women of color are so extremely othered and marginalized that they cannot be perceived as heroic even on a limited scale. Exploring these implications opens up promising areas for future research but is outside the scope of this project.

Sleeper Cell

Three other programs under consideration for this dissertation are predominantly led by men. *Sleeper Cell*, which ran for two seasons on the premium cable network Showtime, first aired on December 4, 2005. The premise of the show is an African American Muslim FBI agent who has infiltrated a terrorist sleeper cell in Los Angeles made up of Muslims from several nations. Darwyn al-Sayeed, the agent, is a complex character who maintains his Muslim faith and his sense of patriotism, while trying to bring down the terrorists who he believes dishonor both. As a counterbalance to Darwyn is the head of the cell, a fanatical and well-connected Arab man named Farik. Others in the cell include a Bosnian Muslim, a Frenchman, and a blond blue-eyed American convert to Islam. The character of Darwyn is a principled one whose faith is central to his life as an agent, and the storylines of the program do not ignore the importance of his faith to his activities. After Darwyn foils the plans of the cell in the first season, he is drawn into yet another cell in the second season. Both cells are led by the merciless Farik who acts as much as an apostate to Darwyn's notion of Islam as terrorist. The program ends in a draw between the two men with Darwyn alive, but unable to accomplish his goal of killing his nemesis, and Farik escaping, presumably to continue his violent jihad. Part of *Sleeper Cell's* complexity is explained by one television critic who described it as a show that "actually troubles to try to explain why people in other parts of the world might hate us enough to want to do us terrible harm."[349]

[349] John Leonard, "There Goes the Neighborhood," *New York Magazine* (2005), http://nymag.com/nymetro/arts/tv/reviews/15177/

The Unit

A network program that betrays less complexity (and considerably more jingoism) than *Sleeper Cell* is *The Unit*. Now in its third season on the CBS network, it first aired on March 7, 2006. *The Unit* tells the story of a secret group of Special Forces trained men who are sent all over the world on counterterrorist missions. It is clear from the outset that Unit members can only be men, and the place of women in this world is on the homefront. The program seeks as much gritty realism as, no doubt, network censors will allow. The men on their missions are shot in harsh, nearly overexposed, light or in the darkness of night with shaky handheld cameras that convey a sense of urgency and danger. The women, on the homefront, are shot in golden toned light with stationary cameras suggesting the warmth and calm serenity of home. The men are rugged and muscled, and the women traditionally attractive. The men have no desire to leave the Unit despite the extreme peril they face while on missions, and despite the fact that they receive low Army wages and no open acknowledgement for their work. The plots of these programs also frequently reveal that the men chose to stay despite their wives' expressed desire for them to leave. The women, however much they wish for their husbands to leave the Unit, loyally support their men by keeping their homes and families together.

The men of the Unit rarely resort to torture even as they readily use lethal means to finish their missions. They are, however, subjects of torture as part of their covert work. An overt message of the program seems to be that torture dishonors the American military. A more subtle suggestion, however, is that the threat of torture may be applied in dire circumstances. Civilian life and diplomacy are represented as an anathema to the hyper-masculinity of Special Forces. The program is unsubtle in its patriotic message, and frequently depicts Army life and personnel in a hierarchy above civilians. Those who oppose the war in Iraq are portrayed as ignorant and

unpatriotic, whereas Unit members and their wives support military engagement without question. Likewise, diplomacy is portrayed as a weak and unrealistic, even feminine, approach to solving international conflicts. As a review in the *Daily Standard* remarked regarding *The Unit*: "Conservatives have long been clamoring for a Hollywood vehicle that shows the war on terror for what it is: a struggle against terrorists who just so happen to be murderous, Islamic nutcases. *The Unit* delivers this and more…"[350]

24

Of all of the programs that are part of this genre, the FOX program, *24*, is the longest running, and has received the most critical acclaim.[351] *24* stars Canadian actor Kiefer Sutherland as counterterrorist super-agent Jack Bauer. As of this writing, *24* is about to begin the seventh season of its hugely popular run. The *Wall Street Journal* reports that *24* attracts up to 17 million viewers every week, and millions more watching on DVD.[352] The relentless excitement of this show has been described variously as "like doing nine lines of cocaine and washing it down with a dozen Red Bulls,"[353] and as a "weekly Monday-night heart attack."[354] Premiering on November 6, 2001, the show has won numerous awards, including the much-coveted Emmy, and Sutherland has won an Emmy, a Golden Globe, and several Screen Actors Guild awards, among others, for his portrayal of the tormented hero.[355] Jack works for the Los Angeles office of the fictional Counter Terrorist Unit (CTU), a branch of the CIA.

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[350] Sonny Bunch, "Gung-Ho: CBS's New Show, *The Unit*, Brings the War on Terror to Network TV," *The Daily Standard*, 16 March 2006.
[351] For a small sampling, see Alan James Frutkin, "All Eyes on '24'," *Media Week*, 11/5/01, 2001. See also, Paige Albiniak, "'24' Gives Fox a Happy Tuesday," *Broadcasting & Cable*, (2002).
[352] Rebecca Dana, "Reinventing '24'," *Wall Street Journal*, 2 February 2008.
[353] Jon Carroll, "Jon Carroll," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 15 March 2005.
[354] Heller.
[355] "'24' (2001) - Awards," (Internet Movie Database, 2008) http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0285331/awards.

The premise of the program is that Jack must take on and defeat terrorists that pose an imminent threat to American lives, and he has one day to accomplish his mission. A unique gimmick to *24* is that each one hour episode of each season represents one hour in the same action-packed day. So when the season ends, a single 24 hour day has passed. Each "day" is separated by at least a year, the goings on of which are exposited usually in the first hour of a new day. More than any other program in this genre, *24* has frequently and unapologetically used torture as a plot device. Jack, who is sketched as the clear hero as he literally saves the world each day, does not hesitate to use torture to extract information from terrorists and those who aid and abet them. The program also pushes the envelope in showing the brutal torture Jack both inflicts and endures when he is captured. Despite his willingness to use any means necessary, Jack is not portrayed as a conscienceless, one-dimensional, or even blindly patriotic character. Rather, he is a complex man who suffers a great deal of anguish and personal loss because of his commitment to his mission. In the first season, he loses his wife when he is unable to save her from a duplicitous mole in CTU. He goes on through the following seasons to lose his health, several relationships with women, friends, family, and his freedom. Still, when presented with bad choices, the path is clear to Jack even if unclear to others. He kills and tortures without faltering when he feels it is necessary. As the plot unfolds, the audience invariably is led to see that Jack's actions, however brutal, are justified.

24 bears the dubious distinction of having almost single-handedly brought the debate of torture in the "ticking time bomb" scenario to public consciousness. Academics, legal theorists, and politicians regularly engage the program's narrative when debating the ethics of employing torture when a large number of lives are at stake. During the 2008 presidential campaign,

Republican candidates referenced Jack Bauer's tactics as desirable in a state of emergency.[356] Despite its seemingly conservative, pro-torture bent, the program includes prominent fans from the left (former President Bill Clinton) and those who are leaders in opposing torture (Arizona Senator John McCain who even scored a small walk-on role in season 5).

All of these programs, to a greater or lesser degree, utilize torture as a dramatic element to their storylines. As I have argued in previous chapters, societal views and judgment of violence differs greatly depending upon whether the perpetrator is male or female. Generally, there is considerable uneasiness with regard to violent women. As Martha McCaughey notes, "Because men's aggression is taken for granted as natural, women's seems threatening to society in a different way. The fear that women's rebellion will cause social life to crumble still exists."[357] Thus, in order for violent women warriors in entertainment television to appeal to a broad audience, their displays of violence cannot match male warriors in frequency, intensity, or in motive. Excessive violence on the part of women tends to be interpreted as masculine and deviant. As Sherrie Inness points out, "One cannot separate ideas of masculinity from violence in our society – which is why, for example, a woman committing violence is inevitably at some point referred to as masculine."[358] If righteous women warriors are to have their actions viewed as justifiable they must forsake neither their control nor their femininity. In the next section, I will discuss the portrayals of women who torture in the popular television programs I describe above. I begin with an analysis of women torturers who violate societal rules of acceptable violence for women by displaying an inclination toward deviance.

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[356] Adam C. Smith, "Handicapping the Debate Field," *St. Petersburg Times*, 25 November 2007. See also, "Do GOP Candidates Realize 24 Is Just a TV Show?," *Grand Rapid Press*, 24 May 2007.
[357] Martha McCaughey, *Real Knockouts: The Physical Feminism of Women's Self-Defense* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 22.
[358] Sherrie A. Inness, *Tough Girls: Women Warriors and Wonder Women in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 45.

A Taste for Torture

Women torturers at Abu Ghraib and Gitmo, as written by news media, came under scrutiny in part because of their failure to properly perform femininity. More than the condemnation of torture itself, these women's vilification suggests that their acts of torture are particular demonstrations of unacceptable behavior for their gender. It is not simply that women are socially prohibited from acts of violence. Indeed, with the increase of women's numbers in the military, the combat exclusion notwithstanding, there is at least tacit social acceptance of women engaging in limited forms of violence. Women soldiers have been dying in Iraq since the beginning of the conflict, and as one newspaper article reports, "their deaths have not galvanized public opinion"[359] to further restrict the role of women in the military. So it would seem that some types of violence are deemed acceptable for women as long as certain boundaries are observed. Reporting about Abu Ghraib showed obsessive concern over the appearance of the women soldiers as being out of control with the violence they displayed and in their sexual lives, and to a lesser extent this was also true of some of the media discourses regarding the women of Gitmo. So it appears that women warriors must be visibly managed in order for their acts of violence to be socially sanctioned.

Another unwritten rule for women warriors is that their violence should be defensive rather than offensive. As Hilary Neroni notes in her treatment of violent women on film, female violence born of self-defense is considered less socially disruptive because it erupts, passes, and order is restored. Neroni argues, "While we can accept female violence (when she is protecting her role as the one protected), we have no way to make sense of the kind of violence" born of

[359] John Diedrich, "A Woman Warrior's Role," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 18 April 2004.

anger.[360] Thus, if women's violence is to be socially acceptable, it must be kept within a specific defensive frame. In the U.S. military, the combat exclusion prevents women from demonstrating the acts of offensive aggression necessary for a ground soldier. This almost guarantees that women soldiers who die in war will be victims of accidents or breaches of battle lines rather than casualties of active combat. Women who engage in torture violate both of the rules that women warriors must follow if their violence is to be judged appropriate. As reporting of Abu Ghraib suggested, the very fact of women performing torture is a violation of gender norms and suggests that they have escaped control by a superior (male) hierarchy. And the torture itself is clearly an offensive act rather than defensive behavior. Thus, where some forms of violence may be tolerated for women warriors, torture is not included.

What is implicitly suggested in news media reporting is more openly illustrated in popular entertainment television. Although torture is, to varying degrees, a regular plot device on all of the television programs under consideration here, the characters do not all employ it with the same level of zeal. All of these programs demonstrate an acceptance of the cultural ideology that "normal" women do not torture, and this is especially the case for the two programs that feature women in the leading roles, *Alias* and *La Femme Nikita*. Both programs contain periodic story lines that represent torture as an inappropriate expression of femininity by portraying secondary women characters whose use of torture is contrasted to the women protagonists' behavior.

An episode from the third season of *La Femme Nikita* provides an explicit demonstration of the above. Here, a woman terrorist named Caroline is portrayed as blatantly, sexually,

[360] Hilary Neroni, *The Violent Woman: Femininity, Narrative, and Violence in Contemporary American Cinema* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), 106.

psychotic.[361] Caroline works with her psychopathic brother, Simon, with whom she also has an incestuous relationship. The two make their living as freelance terrorists calling themselves "Black March." When Nikita is captured by the sibling team, Caroline takes charge of Nikita's torture, and here we see that Caroline's enjoyment of torture is enhanced by her deviant sexuality, and vice versa. Nikita is wearing black leather (a questionable choice for a covert operation where one must be mobile, but no doubt an important artistic addition to the scene), and is strapped on her back to a metal bed frame. Caroline, dressed in black and wearing a long black leather coat, straddles her holding wired metal clamps in both hands. She applies the clamps to either side of Nikita's neck, and as Nikita's body jerks from the electric shocks, Caroline throws her head back in orgasmic ecstasy.

Caroline's attitude toward her tormented prisoner is explicitly erotic. She tells Nikita they will become confidantes and lovers and then kisses her on the mouth. When Caroline warns Nikita, "I will ask and you will leap," the viewer is encouraged to see Caroline within a specific frame: she is a frightening anomaly so uncharacteristic of "normal" women that she must be something else. Caroline is portrayed as a monster driven by her own sadistic and prurient desires. In her torture scene with Caroline, Nikita is portrayed as a passive victim, and she derives no visible pleasure from the session. Rather, the dominant emotions she displays are pain and fear. Nikita does not escape on her own from her torturer, but is rescued by other members of Section. Even though Caroline escapes immediate retribution when she manages to avoid capture, she meets her end later in the same episode when her lust is used against her. Nikita, disguised with a dark wig, encounters Caroline in an empty nightclub restroom. When Caroline propositions Nikita sexually, Nikita is able to deliver Caroline's threat back to her: "Just ask, and I shall leap." With Caroline's words of control thrown back at her, Nikita impassively shoots this

[361] Terry Ingram, "Threshold of Pain," in *La Femme Nikita* (USA: Warner Brothers, 1999).

monstrous woman dead. That Caroline obtains her sexual thrills not only from sadism but also from women makes her so dangerous that there can be only one end for her, and protection for others, namely, death. This woman so blithely rejects control of her behavior – sadistic as well as sexual (though the two seem to be one and the same for Caroline) – and demonstrates such audacious aggression that she is portrayed as being beyond redemption. She meets her fabled end from a woman who largely avoids such transgressions.

Likewise, female antagonists in *Alias* are frequently shown using torture against their enemies. One of these women, Lauren, is briefly married to Vaughn, and over time it is revealed that she is a traitor. This revelation is accompanied by several major changes in the portrayal of the character. She goes from someone who appears to love her husband and desperately wants the relationship to thrive, to someone who has a casual sexual affair with an amoral mercenary who is in league with her in her traitorous plans. Like Lynndie England at Abu Ghraib, Lauren's sexual excesses are offered as evidence of her pathological deviance. Even her wardrobe changes as her character degenerates. It goes from conservative, demure, office wear to clingy and seductive black, often leather. It is implicit that the audience is expected to distrust Lauren for her treason as well as for her sexual offenses as the first keeps pace with the second. One reason that audiences might be expected to pronounce harsher judgment on Lauren when her sexual indiscretions come to light is that her aggressive sexuality is coded masculine. As Fred Fejes notes, a common conception regarding men suggests that, "In men, sex and aggression are linked, and men have more difficulty than women in controlling their sexual and aggressive drives."[362] Inness concurs with this societal viewpoint, and adds that in films with narratives of

[362] Fred J. Fejes, "Masculinity as Fact," in *Men, Masculinity, and the Media*, ed. Steve Craig (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992), 21.

violent women, "women who are too tough will be punished."[363] One of the ways they demonstrate that they are "too tough" is with aggressive displays of sexuality.

Part of Lauren's transformation is her propensity to violence. As she slides further and further into criminal behavior and away from redemption, she tortures and kills without emotion whenever necessary, including torturing Vaughn when he learns the truth about her, and killing her own father. Lauren is the anti-Sydney. Where Sydney affirms her femininity, despite her warrior status, by only engaging in sex with men with whom she has a close personal connection, and never straying from a committed relationship, Lauren displays a casual, masculine attitude toward sex and commitment. And where Sydney's infrequent acts of torture are followed by immediate acts of redemption (as described below), Lauren has no qualms about viciously torturing if it furthers her ends. Because she is a duplicitous traitor who has never been officially sanctioned as a warrior, all of her acts of violence exceed what is socially acceptable for a woman. Her violence and her deviant sexual behavior demonstrate that she is not operating under anyone's control.

Deviance for women does not only take the form of sexual transgressions. It appears, at times, that women can be portrayed as deviant if they demonstrate aggressive ambition. In a significant episode of *The Unit*, a woman is revealed as being responsible for the torture of the Unit men. In an episode from the first season entitled "SERE," the Unit men are sent to a facility where they are given training in survival, evasion, resistance, and escape.[364] As the torture progresses beyond training simulation to threatening the men's health and welfare, the revelation comes that a woman psychiatrist, Dr. Morrison, is driving the action, and using the men as guinea pigs in her psychological experiments. She orders the torture of the men and watches

[363] Inness, 74.
[364] Stephen De Paul, "SERE," in *The Unit* (USA: CBS Television, 2006).

impassively, either physically present in their cells, or on a video monitor. Throughout the episode, she shows no emotion except for an occasional flicker of irritation as the Unit men continually foil her efforts to break them. There is no suggestion that Dr. Morrison answers to any higher or male authority, so her ambition goes unchecked, and she is portrayed as a woman who operates incompetently and unethically under her own authority. The episode does not devote any time to examining the motives and psyches of the men who Dr. Morrison commands and who carry out her bidding. It is as if they are surrogates inflicting violence on her behalf – violating the rule that women's violence must defensive rather than offensive. Dr. Morrison comes across as cold, calculating, and slightly demented in her ambitions.

Dr. Morrison's greatest sin may be that she seems to feel no humanity or emotion for the Unit men, and instead is focused only on her objective – qualities that, ironically, the Unit men possess and which make them excellent soldiers. But embodied in a woman, these qualities are portrayed as aberrant and serve only to emphasize her abnormality. As things escalate, and the lives of the men begin to be threatened, Colonel Ryan, who heads the Unit, remarks, "I finally figured you out, lady. You're not here to train these men. You're here to test some theory." Dr. Morrison points out the value of studying subjects under torture using a precedent set by the Algerians as an example. The incoming head of SERE and a recurring character, Sergeant Cheals, who knows the Unit men personally, objects saying, "We do not follow in the footsteps of those who raise torture to an art form." Dr. Morrison is chastised by the men who remind her of their experience and military knowledge, simultaneously reminding her of her lack thereof. The irony of this episode is the inference that inexperienced, civilian women, as represented by Dr. Morrison, promote torture policies, where experienced, military men eschew such methods.

In this world, women, who stand in for feminized civilians – the very anathema of career military men – are the architects of torture.

Deviant female ambition is also displayed in an episode from day four of *24*. Through the first half of this day, CTU is led by a woman named Erin who is portrayed as severe and ruthless. She authorizes the torture of a woman tech named Sarah who seemed to be implicated in leaking classified information from CTU. When Sarah's alleged treason comes to light, Erin authorizes electrocution of her and a "medical" interrogation, involving an injection of a painful seizure medication. When it turns out that Sarah was innocent all along, having been framed by the real CTU mole, no one springs to Erin's defense as often Jack's contemporaries will do for him when he authorizes and performs acts of torture. Instead, she is portrayed as sidestepping any potential repercussions by making a deal to promote Sarah and give her a pay increase. On this day, Jack and Erin face situations that are nearly identical and both lead to the torturing of innocent people, with Erin being given even more compelling evidence of Sarah's guilt than Jack is given of the person that he subsequently tortures. Nonetheless, Erin's conduct is portrayed as highly questionable and self-serving, whereas Jack's is excused by others (if not necessarily by him). Erin's motivations are portrayed as a determination to keep control of CTU and to maintain her credibility with those who are above her. These are not Jack's motivations. The implication is that Erin, a woman driven by ambition instead of other, nobler motivations, lacks the clear-headed vision necessary for one to perform torture righteously. An ongoing plot thread through this early part of the day is that Erin has a schizophrenic daughter who is under her care. When her daughter suffers a psychotic break during the day, Erin has her brought to the CTU clinic rather than going home to see to her care. Erin's daughter's antics interrupt the smooth running of the office several times, and finally Erin ignores the repeated calls from the clinic to come and

attend to her daughter. The result is that her daughter commits suicide in the clinic. One possible interpretation of this plot thread is that Erin's inability to competently manage CTU is reflected in her questionable skills as a parent. She puts the management of CTU ahead of her daughter's care, and it turns out that she has failed on both accounts. Clearly, her sick daughter has suffered because of Erin's excessive ambition, and the workings of the government agency have suffered as well.

It is not only evil or dangerously ambitious women who are portrayed as unqualified to torture. In the next section, I explore the narratives surrounding the virtuous women warriors who torture, and subsequently seek redemption.

Torture and Redemption for Women Warriors

In contrast to the many, plainly evil or deeply flawed, female secondary characters, the women protagonists of *La Femme Nikita* and *Alias* very rarely engage in torture. When they do, their actions are portrayed as out-of-character and require explanation and redemption. But for the vast majority of the episodes in their respective runs, these women demonstrate an aversion for performing torture themselves and distaste for others who do it even if officially sanctioned. In this regard, the protagonist of *Alias*, Sydney Bristow, sets a high standard for the acceptable behavior of women caught in the intersections of femininity and counterterrorism. The ends do not justify the means for Sydney. It is not until the fifth season of its five year run that Sydney resorts to torturing an enemy, and her acts of torture are far less violent than those of male protagonists in all of these programs.

In an episode from season five, Sydney is shown hitting a subdued prisoner.[365] The prisoner, a hired gun named Curtis, turns out to be responsible for Vaughn's "death,"[366] making him more susceptible to the wrath of Sydney. This occurs in the same season where Sydney, along with the actor playing her, is pregnant. She uses her mood swings due to her pregnancy as a ruse to scare her prisoner into believing that she is capable of anything. She hits the man a few times, mostly out of the view of the camera, but stops before any serious damage is done. We see in a subsequent scene that the prisoner is slightly bruised but showing arrogant hubris and far from breaking. As part of a plan for the prisoner to lead the agents to his superiors, Sydney must allow him to escape. Although she initially resists this plan, it is in character for Sydney to set aside personal grievances for the greater good. In another episode, Sydney injects a prisoner with a substance similar to LSD in order to break him mentally and emotionally.[367] As the drug begins to do its work and the prisoner begins to hallucinate, Sydney is the only one able to calm him down and assure him that he is safe. Her demonstration of nurturing erases, in effect, the fact that she is the cause of his distress in the first place. It is as if Sydney must quickly redeem herself for breaking her own moral code, and breaking faith with the audience that has come to know her as a principled character whose violence does not cross the line into torture.

As the moral center of *Alias*, Sydney has a clear vision of right and wrong, and her vision of right does not include torture. When she threatens Curtis, viewers would be primed not take her threat seriously because they have come to know that Sydney Bristow's high moral character would never allow her to torture a helpless prisoner, even one that has caused her personal pain. A certain amount of violence is acceptable for her as a woman warrior, but Sydney always seems

[365] Frederick E.O. Toye, "...1..." in *Alias* (USA: ABC, 2005).
[366] Later episodes in this the last season of *Alias* reveal that Vaughn's death had been faked by Sydney and her father. This revelation makes Sydney's threatening stance toward Curtis even less credible.
[367] Jeffrey Bell, "Fait Accompli," in *Alias* (USA: ABC, 2005).

to know when to back off and preserve her integrity. The men in *Alias* do not always share space on Sydney's moral plane. In an episode from the fourth season, Sydney rebukes Vaughn after witnessing him torturing a captive by pouring acid on the man.[368] She tells him, "What I saw scared me…What he knew or didn't know is beside the point…The person you are right now is not the person you want to be!" Vaughn seems to take Sydney's words to heart, but in the next episode he tortures his nemesis, a man named Sark.[369] Vaughn's focus is not on Sark's crimes, but on the fact that Sark had an affair with Vaughn's wife, Lauren. Sydney learns of Vaughn's torture of the man from a fellow agent who tells her, "[He] didn't get any information out of him, but it had to feel good trying." Sydney says nothing to Vaughn about this instance of torture, and it seems that Vaughn's behavior has been sanctioned by those around him, if not officially than unofficially, as part of understandable masculine gendered (and heterosexual) behavior.

Like Sydney Bristow, the character of Nikita in *La Femme Nikita* is the conscience of this show. Unlike Sydney, Nikita will at times push the envelope in what she is willing to do for her mission. She has a markedly clear moral vision, but her notions of acceptable behavior differ somewhat from Sydney's. Nikita will, for example, have sex with the enemy, if necessary, as part of her cover – something Sydney never does. In one episode where Nikita is undercover in a brutal women's prison, she shows how far she is willing to go when she persuades the target of her investigation, a fellow inmate, that she is interested in her sexually.[370] Nikita also shows less distaste for using lethal means than does Sydney. She will, at times, appear to kill without hesitation, but she prefers not to unless absolutely necessary. Nikita may occasionally push the bounds of acceptable violence for women, but her sense of decency and propensity to nurture would tend to reassure the audience that she has not forsaken appropriate femininity. She is, for

[368] Lawrence Trilling, "Legacy," in *Alias* (USA: ABC, 2004).
[369] Ken Olin, "Resurrection," in *Alias* (USA: ABC, 2004).
[370] René Bonnière, "Open Heart," in *La Femme Nikita* (USA: Warner Brothers, 1998).

example, well known for her commitment to protecting children, as multiple episodes attest to. Her superiors feel no such inclination, and often Nikita's rebellion involves her decision to deviate from her mission in order to protect children who are in danger of being caught in the crossfire. Although Nikita shows less aversion to violence than does Sydney, like Sydney she rarely tortures, and her acts of torture are less brutal than those committed by male characters. When Nikita is reduced to torture, mitigating circumstances are involved that help to redeem her character.

In one episode for example, Nikita is shown unemotionally beating a bound prisoner to get him to cooperate.[371] When the professional torturers enter the room, she is told by her superiors that she may now leave. But she states impassively that she'd rather stay and watch. The audience is aware that this is not the "real" Nikita. Having been the subject of a rigorous mind control experiment by the two top officials of Section, both of whom are without scruple, Nikita has been transformed into little more than a robot. This explanation of her actions helps her friends, and the audience that has come to know her, reconcile her out-of-character behavior. When her enterprising and determined lover, Michael, finds a cure, Nikita is restored to her "true" self. Nikita's deprogramming involves a painful drug regimen and also a passionate love making session with Michael. Her painful ordeal, and her emotional coupling with Michael, redeems her, restoring her to her previous self from the emotionless automaton she had become. It is implicit that her heterosexual reunion with Michael, accompanied by her declaration of love for him, is the ultimate proof that she has been genuinely restored.

Popular entertainment television's depiction of women warriors fighting terrorism suggests that their boundaries of acceptable behavior are not flexible. That these women protagonists are employed by military organizations allows for a certain amount of violence,

[371] René Bonnière, "Into the Looking Glass," in *La Femme Nikita* (USA: Warner Brothers, 2000).

even killing, if necessary. Normally, however, Sydney and Nikita are not trigger happy and prefer nonlethal means. Torture is not part of their *modus operandi*, but should they perform acts of torture, redemptive moves are necessary to restore these women to righteous standing. Their violence is controlled and, largely, defensive. Sydney and Nikita work under the supervision of men, such as fathers, or father figures, and male lovers. They are not rogue agents but rather principled women whose exemplary morality would ease any anxiety audience members might feel when confronted with a violent woman warrior. Their violence pushes the acceptability of gender norms, but only to a certain limit at which they quickly pull back and restore gender order by demonstrating upright and traditionally appropriate feminine behavior.

Fictional television programming and news media reporting both suggest that there are correct and incorrect ways to perform torture, and that not everyone is qualified to perform it. The implication is that women, no matter the level of their professional expertise, are not qualified. Such violence is judged as socially inappropriate even for women warriors. Interestingly, fictional television programs seem to operate under the notion that warriors – male *and* female – must have their fitness as warriors tested by undergoing torture. All of the heroic characters in the programs under consideration here have experienced torture and prevailed. The difference in portrayals comes not from their ability to endure it, but in the attitudes with which they confront their trials, and the ways in which the audience is encouraged to read their torture. In the first case, women warriors often express fear bordering on panic, at times require rescue from men, and may also have breaking points. In contrast, men are portrayed as facing torture without fear, and with no threat of breaking their resolve. Regarding the ways in which their torture is depicted, the torture of women at times encourages an erotic read that is not explicitly invited with regard to men. The difference between the ways in which torture of men and women

warriors is faced and portrayed emphasizes an underlying perception of men containing salvific potential compared to women's lack thereof. I begin the exploration of tortured heroes by comparing and contrasting the attitudes with which the heroes of both sexes confront their trials.

Women Warriors Facing Torture with Fear and Trembling

As argued above, women warriors must operate within strict limitations if their violence is to be socially sanctioned. There also appears to be a certain amount of cultural uneasiness with respect to women's capacity to endure violence. The problem is not with the notion of women as victims of violence. That role is one that has been imposed upon women under patriarchy for centuries perhaps millennia. As Neroni points out, women's propensity to victimization provides validation for male violence. She argues that, "Male violence often has its justification in the fact that men are violent to *protect* women (or destroy another man's masculinity). And this is the traditional relationship that the woman has to violence – as the one *protected* from it"[372] (emphasis in original). Thus, women's portrayal as victims serves the purpose of reifying men's "natural" relationship to violence. This portrayal of women provides further evidence for those who support military women's combat exclusion. As Shannon Holland notes, "advocates for the combat exclusion often conjure up images of mutilated female bodies in order to emphasize women's 'natural vulnerability' to violence and, in particular, sexual assault."[373] So the notion of women as victims of violence is nothing new, and does not seem to cause undue societal anxiety. What does appear to be relatively novel with respect to popular fictional representations of women warriors is their ability to endure violence. As Inness remarks, these fictional women "can endure tremendous physical and emotional suffering and still emerge the victor. [They

[372] Neroni, 92.
[373] Shannon L. Holland, "The Dangers of Playing Dress-Up: Popular Representations of Jessica Lynch and the Controversy Regarding Women in Combat," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 92, (2006), 32.

have] the tight emotional and physical control that has been traditionally associated with men, not women."[374] I argue, however, that as in the case of women warriors inflicting violence, there are also limitations regarding the social acceptability of women warriors as victims of violence, especially torture.

With violence being socially accepted as the special province of men, it is unsurprising that when fictional male heroes are confronted with it, they show little or no fear. But with women warriors' uneasy relationship to violence, it seems socially necessary for them to show fear or some emotion demonstrating the foreignness of the experience when they are met with violence. As Neroni notes, violence "inevitably enhances a man's masculinity much as it would conversely detract from a woman's femininity."[375] Thus, for a fictional woman warrior to maintain her feminine appeal with a vast swath of audiences, she cannot trouble gender too much. In other words, even if she proves to be victorious, she cannot face the violence that confronts her with the same level of hubris that a male warrior would. In the television programs starring women as federal agents, both Sydney and Nikita have endured their share of torture in the five year runs of each program. But when compared to the attitudes of their male counterparts, these women have demonstrated considerably more fear, and evinced that they both have breaking points.

In the first episode of the series run of *Alias,* Sydney faces painful torture at the hands of an enemy when she is captured during a solo mission.[376] The story is told in flashback beginning with her capture. As the episode progresses, the audience learns that Sydney embarked on this solo endeavor in order to save her own life after Sloane discovers that she had told her fiancé about her secret life as an agent. In retaliation for her indiscretion, Sloane has her fiancé killed.

[374] Inness, 13.
[375] Neroni, 42.
[376] J.J. Abrams, "Truth Be Told," in *Alias* (USA: ABC, 2001).

After her fiancé's death, Sydney naively believes that she can simply quit SD-6. But with her refusal to report back to duty, Sloane decides that she, too, must be eliminated. She can prove that she has not turned traitor only by traveling to South East Asia to steal a prototype of a weapon of mass destruction. Thus her capture and subsequent torture. The episode begins with a view of Sydney's head being held under water by her captors. Then, gasping and coughing, she is thrown into a chair and restrained. As the suspenseful music swells, and distant footsteps are heard, the camera alternates between a closed door in Sydney's line of sight, and her own terrified expression. Eyes wide and her breath coming fast, she paints a picture of being on the edge of panic. Not knowing what awaits her, she is clearly terrified. It is not until several scenes later that the audience sees the object of her fright. He is a bookish looking Asian man who injects Sydney with some kind of opiate, and with a deadpan expression demands to know for whom she is working. Under the influence of the drug, Sydney's fear turns to silliness as she tells the man to write the letters "EMETIB" and then reverse it. She laughs carelessly as he realizes that she has told him to "BITE ME." At this, the torture session really starts.

It takes several flashbacks to build the scene. The man produces a variety of dental instruments, pries her mouth open, and begins to insert a pair of pliers. At this, Sydney manages one last burst of courage as she politely asks him to start with the molars. The camera pulls back to a distant overhead shot, and the scene cuts. The next time the action flashes to the torture session, Sydney's audacity and silliness are gone. She has only a smear of blood on her chin, but her face registers pain and fear. Her eyes are filled with tears at the prospect of enduring more, and she elicits an occasional whimper as the man continues to question her. Still, she refuses to give up the information her interrogator wants. Finally, she lures him close enough to head-butt him, and escape her restraints. Sydney shows how enterprising she is by escaping (without

killing anyone – a hallmark trait for her), and her high level of endurance by not breaking even when faced with excruciating pain. But she does not endure her trial stoically. She fears her interrogator, and the violence he promises to inflict.

Sydney shows an even greater level of fear, while simultaneously demonstrating her ability to be innovative, when a few episodes later she faces torture while undercover in a mental hospital in Bucharest.[377] Her mission is to extract information from another patient, named Shepard, who is suffering from amnesia. As it turns out, an enemy agent posing as a doctor is already installed at the hospital. He discovers Sydney's true identity and tortures her in an effort to get her to divulge the information he believes she has learned from Shepard. He restrains her, attaches electrodes to her fully clothed body, and submerges her in a tub of water. Most of this torture session takes place off camera. The action takes up again with the doctor ordering Sydney's death, realizing that she is telling the truth when she says she has been unable to extract any information from Shepard. Through some desperate fast talking, Sydney is able to convince the doctor to give her one more day to work on Shepard in exchange for her life. The torture in this episode seems less designed to show Sydney's moxie than to demonstrate her enemy's brutality. Her voice and quick breathing suggest that she is near panic. She is portrayed as genuinely afraid to die and desperate to make the pain stop – realistic, perhaps, but very different from the portrayal of male agents in similar circumstances in these programs.

While these two instances of torture in *Alias* show that this woman warrior is able to withstand a great deal of suffering in pursuit of her mission, they also suggest that violence is not something she experiences as natural to her. She faces it, but shows bald fear rising to the level of panic. Even as she shows an admirable ability for quick thinking, audiences may find her reaction to violence reassuring in its reifying of Sydney's femininity. She does not show

[377] Jack Bender, "Color-Blind," in *Alias* (USA: ABC, 2001).

masculine fearlessness in the face of violence and death, thus affirming the notion that, exceptional warrior though she is, she still retains her femininity.

Where Sydney shows fear as a somewhat reassuring emotion in response to violence, Nikita shows both fear and anguish when subjected to torture. Also, unlike Sydney, Nikita relies on others, usually her lover Michael, to rescue her from her predicaments. In an episode early in the first season, Nikita is captured and tortured by men who, unbeknownst to her, are working for a woman that she believed to be her friend. She is suspended from the ceiling by her wrists, soaked with water, and given electrical shocks. Although her treatment is clearly painful, Nikita endures, and even manages a level of sarcasm with her captors. When one compliments her on her ability to endure pain, telling her that she "has the courage of a man," Nikita snidely responds, "How would you know?" But all of her stoicism disappears when her "friend" enters the room. At this revelation of betrayal, Nikita's eyes fill with tears and her lips tremble with emotion. Even though she refuses to cooperate with her duplicitous captor, her anguish at her betrayal is evident. By the time the woman orders her execution, Nikita's former courage has dissipated. She is on the verge of both tears and panic as one of her male captor's points a gun at her. Before he can fire, however, Michael crashes through a window, gun blazing, and kills her would-be executioner. Nikita, now completely overcome with emotion, is rescued by the man who has trained her and continues to supervise her throughout her tenure as a field agent at Section One.

Nikita's second round of torture comes a few episodes later. In this episode, Nikita is captured, and Michael soon allows himself to be captured, by a ruthless terrorist group known as Red Cell.[378] The head of the cell, Dominic, takes the lead in Nikita's interrogation. He wants to know where Section One has established an auxiliary base, and he subjects Nikita to a rat cage in

[378] René Bonnière, "War," in *La Femme Nikita* (USA: Warner Brothers, 1997).

order to break her psychologically. Her face is inserted into an opening on one side of the cage, and an open flame is started on the other side. In theory, Dominic explains, the rats will do anything to escape the flame, including eating through Nikita's face. As soon as she sees the cage containing the rats, Nikita expression begins to dissolve into terror. Her eyes fill with tears and she is clearly on the verge of hyperventilating hysteria. Viewers are not allowed to witness the rat cage torture. Despite her evident fear, Nikita does not break under this torture. But she does break when she is forced to witness Michael's torture.[379] Before Dominic can inject a substance into Michael that will make him insane, Nikita reveals the location of the auxiliary base of Section One. Seeing Michael in peril makes Nikita collapse into sobs. It is evident that however much pain she can endure, she cannot bear the sight of the man she loves being subjected to torture. The big revelation of this episode is that Nikita had been given purposely the incorrect location of the auxiliary base with the full knowledge that she would break if she had to witness Michael's torture, thus allowing Section to stage an ambush of Red Cell. Nikita's vision, it seems, is reliably myopic – she is uninterested in the "Big Picture" when a personal relationship is at stake. Michael, on the other hand, allows himself to be captured thus putting himself physically on the line exactly for the larger agenda. Once Nikita has passed on the incorrect information to Red Cell, Michael leads the way in their successful escape.

The women warriors of *Alias* and *La Femme Nikita* show considerable courage and determination in enduring their experiences with torture. They are not, however, able to do so without emotional display or showing their fear. In this, they are quite different from the men who endure torture in all of these programs. The fearlessness and lack of emotion displayed by

[379] Interestingly, Nikita and Michael's torture is based on their greatest fears. It is revealed that Nikita's greatest fear is rats, while Michael's is dishonoring himself.

the men suggests that their relationship to violence is a natural one. Their trials are endured but clearly not feared.

Fearless Masculine Warriors

Portrayals of military men as fearless in the face of battle have a long tradition in popular culture. As Ralph R. Donald notes, "Fear is…an emotion that men in war must hide…[Therefore], when a war movie hero does admit fear, it is usually to punctuate the fact that fear is intentionally hidden."[380] In contrast to women, who experience violence as an anathema, Neroni suggests that violence is socially regarded "as a fundamental signifier of masculinity."[381] With men experiencing violence as something "natural" to masculinity, it is predictable that the male heroes in these programs – primary and secondary characters alike – do not display fear or excessive emotion when threatened with torture.

Throughout all the seasons of *La Femme Nikita*, Nikita operates under the watchful eye of Michael. He is her superior both in rank and experience, and is portrayed as a stoic man of few words. Michael's steady professionalism is contrasted to Nikita's occasional willfulness and shortsightedness. He also endures his trials without betraying the slightest hint of fear. In the episode where both of the agents have been captured by brutal members of Red Cell, Michael's attitude in the face of his torture is contrasted to Nikita's. Where she shows fear and anguish, ultimately betraying the information her interrogators seek, Michael does not. First, he allows himself to be captured, indicating that he is a willing captive. Then he submits to torture although he has the same information as Nikita, and could easily feed Red Cell the incorrect location of the auxiliary base. Instead, he allows himself to be subjected to painful torture, resulting in his

[380] Ralph R. Donald, "Masculinity and Machismo in Hollywood's War Films," in *Men, Masculinity, and the Media*, ed. Steve Craig (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1992), 131.
[381] Neroni, 42.

body being bruised and bloodied, yet he never speaks. When Dominic pushes a hypodermic needle into his neck, threatening to inject him with a substance that will make him insane – Michael's greatest fear – his face remains inexpressive, and he still refuses to speak. Once Nikita has given up the information Red Cell seeks, Michael reveals that his injuries are not as severe as he let on as he is able to lead Nikita to freedom.

Demonstrations of fearless masculinity are common to secondary characters in *Alias*. Chief among these is Sydney's father, Jack Bristow. Their relationship is a conflicted one, but over the years they draw very close, and Jack frequently operates outside of his agency's directives in order to protect his daughter. He is her superior in rank, and often she is required to report directly to him in the course of her duties. He has also endured a number of torture sessions, some of which come because of his desire to protect Sydney. In a pivotal episode from season two where SD-6 is finally taken down by federal agents, Jack's role as a double-agent is discovered by an SD-6 interrogator named Geiger. Geiger drugs Jack, and brings him to a gloomy basement room, where he is strapped to a chair. As Geiger preps him for torture, all the while asking him questions about who he works for, Jack remains impassive and shows no fear. He endures painful and dangerous bouts of electrocution without betraying emotion and refuses to speak. Meanwhile, Sydney, who knows what her father is going through, continually collapses into tears with everyone she talks to trying to get help for Jack. The climax of Jack's torture comes when Geiger warns him that his heart cannot take much more. Then he threatens to subject Sydney to torture as well. Even with his imminent death and the possibility of his daughter's suffering hanging over him, Jack does not break, and does not show even a shadow of fear. He is rescued by Sydney as the building housing SD-6 is invaded by federal agents. Sydney

experiences a new flood of tears upon seeing her father's abused body, but he is able to immediately console her and assure her that he is fine.

On numerous occasions, both *The Unit* and *24* contain plots that include the heroes facing torture that is at times brutal. But no matter the brutality of the torture, the men face it without visible signs of fear. The premium cable program, *Sleeper Cell*, which is able to push past the boundaries of what network censors will allow, also includes torture scenes, but relatively few for its hero. With Darwyn operating under deep cover, his only experiences with torture come when his true identity has been discovered, or is threatened with being discovered. One such occurrence takes place in the first season and demonstrates that Darwyn, like his heroic counterparts on network television, shows no signs of panic when faced with painful torture. In this scene, Farik learns that Darwyn has been under the surveillance by the Los Angeles Police Department after his girlfriend, Gayle, who is unaware of his identity as an FBI agent, becomes suspicious that he is a terrorist and reports him to the police.[382] In front of the entire cell, Farik applies a cattle prod to Darwyn's body all the while yelling at him, "What did you tell her?" Although writhing in pain, Darwyn does not break his cover. Because he endures his trial without fear or panic, Farik believes him to be a loyal jihadist. As Darwyn recovers from his torture, Farik tells him he is proud of him for showing an ability to remain calm under pressure. At no time does Darwyn's resolve threaten to break, and he does not allow the pain to overcome his will. This is in keeping with what the audience would have come to expect of a hero. As Donald notes, "Not even painful wounds are an acceptable reason for movie soldiers to resort to emotionalism."[383]

[382] Nick Gomez, "Intramural," in *Sleeper Cell* (USA: Showtime Networks, 2005).
[383] Donald, 132.

By enduring their torture without displays of fear or emotion, these fictional heroes imply that violence is not strange to them. The pain and suffering that is inflicted upon their bodies is implicitly portrayed as natural to masculinity and especially masculinity in the form of a heroic savior. Because they are men, they have a unique ability to transcend their bodies and function on will alone. This is a facility exclusive to men, as women warriors, however brave, are ultimately imprisoned in bodies that are culturally perceived as inferior. That the women warriors in these programs, at the end of the day, are their bodies is evident in the ways in which their torture is at times depicted. Where the torture of male warriors is always portrayed as brutally painful and often graphic, the torture of women warriors is at times portrayed erotically. In the next section, I scrutinize the occasionally erotic torture scenes when women are the victims and the lack of obvious eroticism when men are torture victims.

Sexualizing Torture

By successfully enduring painful trials, the women warriors on *Alias* and *La Femme Nikita* mark themselves as separate from the role of victim in which women are traditionally cast. But the violence they endure is not allowed to completely upset gender norms. They do not face torture with the level of fearlessness of men, and they cannot always exact their own rescues. Both of these characteristics of their trials tend to hold their femininity in place. Doing even further work in that regard is the way in which these characters' torture is sometimes portrayed as explicitly erotic. That violent or tough women are portrayed as sexy is common in entertainment media. As Inness points out, this portrayal "assures the audience that women are not abandoning their traditional roles as sex objects for men just because they are tough."[384] This description certainly fits Sydney and Nikita. Both of these women are extremely heterosexually

[384] Inness, 51.

attractive. They are young, white, fit, athletic, and usually clad in attire that makes the most of their physical features, often clingy black leather. Even their engaging in violence is choreographed in such a way as to draw attention to their physical beauty with the use of slow motion, camera shots that move over their bodies, and usually body-hugging and revealing wardrobes – frequently cocktail dresses. And for both women, on occasion, their torture scenes contain more than a hint of eroticism.

In the episode where Nikita endures torture at the behest of Julie, a woman Nikita had believed to be her friend, several aspects of the scene seem designed to eroticize Nikita.[385] She is doused with water that continuously drips on her as she receives electric shocks by her male captors. The water makes her tight black clothing even clingier, but does not run her makeup or wash away her lipstick. With each shock, she throws her head back and her cries of pain are more akin to moans of orgasm. As she levels her head to look at her tormentor through half closed eyes while eliciting a soft moan, she looks every inch the woman who has been sated sexually. Her wet hair hangs in her face adding to the slightly out-of-control, post-coitus look. The lighting of the scene complements her rosy hued skin, and moist, pink, full lips. At times the camera moves slowly over her bound body as if savoring the view. These full body shots, according to Fejes, are typical of commercial television's tendency to portray women as full bodies, and men "in terms of close face shots."[386] This tendency "may be a manifestation of deeply rooted cultural myths of men, pictorially represented by their faces, as intellect, and women, pictorially represented by their bodies, as heart or emotion."[387]

[385] Guy Magar, "Friend," in *La Femme Nikita* (USA: Warner Brothers, 1997).
[386] Fejes, 11.
[387] Fejes, 11.

Initially, Sydney's torture scene in the first episode of *Alias* gives overt hints of eroticism.[388] Like Nikita, Sydney is drenched with water, and her black clothing clings to her body. Despite her head being held under water, her make-up stays in place. She has dyed her hair fuchsia for her mission, and the lighting emphasizes the vivid colors of her hair and lips as contrasted to her pale skin and black clothing. Her dripping tresses hang in her face, and she peers through the strands at her captors with a direct gaze, lips parted, that begs comparison to advertising featuring seductive models. Her gaze and the hair in her face make her seem slightly demented and dangerous (but still very attractive) as if daring her male captors to approach her. Doing so, her look suggests, could result in their great physical harm, or in their being enveloped in her sexuality – perhaps both. For both of these women, the damage done to their bodies is not graphic, and they show few signs of their ordeals when they are over. In other words, they do not bleed copiously, swell, or display any other visible disfigurements. Their bodies, flawless before their torture sessions, remain so afterwards.

Interestingly, neither Nikita nor Sydney is ever stripped of clothing during their torture sessions, as the men in these programs sometimes are. Had they been, it would have been difficult for viewers to overlook their vulnerability to sexual assault. Indeed, a persistent societal anxiety regarding women in combat is their perception of being more vulnerable to rape than are men. Despite Nikita and Sydney facing frequent capture at the hands of dangerous, sometimes psychotic, men, they are never threatened with rape. If they were sexually assaulted, it would not only feminize them beyond the point of retaining their status as warriors, but it would also be an affront to the men in their lives, fathers and lovers, who train them and watch over them. As Holland notes: "Not only is rape conceptualized as a form of abuse associated with female victimage, but also rape represents the final symbolic expression of the humiliation of the male

[388] Abrams.

opponent."[389] Physical abuse short of rape is something these warrior women expect and tolerate as part of their mission. But rape is something that would extend beyond their bodies and impact the men in their lives. In keeping with cultural sensitivities, and mindful of ratings, these programs steer clear of situations where the women warriors become the spoils of war that women frequently are. If subjected to sexual assault, instead of being fantasy women heroes, they would have been reduced to mere mortals facing the ontological truth that all women face, namely, their vulnerability to rape. This vulnerability would have perhaps feminized them to the degree that they would no longer be able to retain that bit of masculinity that allows them to be women warriors doing work typically done by men. In sum, these torture scenes may at times invite an erotic read, and provide a showcase for these women's physical attractiveness, but the women are never threatened with the indignity of rape.

One thing that the eroticization of these torture scenes suggests is that these women are their bodies in very specific ways. They may not be raped, but they are sexualized, and therefore closely tied to their physical bodies. As such, these women cannot transcend their bodies in the ways that men seem to be able to. Indeed, the male bodies in these programs appear to be almost utilitarian. Their bodies are subjected to painful torture, but the focus is much more on the unbreakable wills of these men, not their physical bodies. The Cartesian notion of mind/body dualism is clearly in evidence here. Descartes argued for the view of the body as a machine necessary for life in the mortal coil, but separate from the rational mind. He argued,

> I knew that I was a substance the whole essence or nature of which was merely to think, and which, in order to exist, needed no place and depended on no material thing. Thus this "I," that is, the soul through which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body…[390]

[389] Holland, 32.
[390] Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Mediations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress, 3 ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1993), 19.

Descartes' conception of a mind/body split is consistent with other dualisms underlying Western cultural norms, such as culture/nature and masculinity/femininity. Women, cast in the second part of these binaries, are explicitly defined in terms of their bodies. According to Judith Butler, Christian and Cartesian views of the body understand it to be "so much inert matter, signifying nothing or, more specifically, signifying a profane void, the fallen state: deception, sin, the premonitional metaphorics of hell and the eternal feminine."[391] The body, then, is perceived to present a severe limitation. But men, recognized as possessing superior rationality, are culturally understood as able to transcend their bodies. As Suzanne Hatty points out, "Men often view their bodies as instruments: flesh in the service of an objective or a desire…It is almost as if the public acknowledgement of embodiment is, for men, a liability."[392]

Embodiment would indeed be a liability for those who are represented as messianic saviors, as being bound to their bodies would make them unable to provide the kind of transcendent sacrifice necessary for such a masculine hero. It is not simply that the hero be willing to sacrifice his body. As I argued in chapter three it is important that the right *kind* of body be offered in sacrifice. Thus, the bodies of the masculine protagonists in *Sleeper Cell*, *The Unit*, and *24* are not presented as obstacles, nor offered as eroticized objects. Interestingly, at times even the male enemy is portrayed as able to surpass the limits of his body and withstand torture without betraying fear or breaking. This suggests that, although not everyone is qualified to rise to the position of messianic savior one must, at the very least, be male.

When men are tortured in the programs starring male heroes, these portrayals are dissimilar from that of women under torture. Like the women, the men endure, but as I argue

[391] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 10th Anniversary ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999), 164.
[392] Suzanne E. Hatty, *Masculinities, Violence, and Culture* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2000), 119.

above, they do so without fear. But perhaps most importantly, the torture of men does not invite an erotic read. This is not to say that there may not be segments of the audience that would find these scenes erotic, especially audience members who derive pleasure from sadomasochistic imagery. But the most evident read, I suggest, is not a sexual one. Rather, the men's bodies are tested, but the focus is on their dominant wills.

Of all the men who endure torture in these programs, *24*'s Jack Bauer has endured it more frequently, brutally, and of longer duration than any others. The first plot arch involving Jack's torture in *24* comes in day two and contains what one TV critic referred to as "some of the most disturbing and graphic depictions of violence I've ever seen on a broadcast network entertainment program."[393] There is no doubt, these scenes are disturbing. Jack has been captured by the minions of a man, Peter Kingsley, who heads a greedy Western oil cartel. Their focus is capitalizing on a nuclear bomb smuggled into the country by an Arab terrorist, Syed Ali, which was detonated in the Mojave Desert when it could not be disarmed. The audience learns that the unscrupulous oilmen would have their Middle Eastern holdings triple in value if the United States went to war against the countries thought to have sponsored Ali. As it turns out, the countries in question are not involved, and Jack has the evidence to prove it. When he is cornered at a clinic, Jack sends the evidence off with another agent and acts as a decoy to lead the enemy away from the evidence. This results in his capture by Kingsley's minions.[394] He is stripped naked, his stomach contents checked by induced vomiting, and then suspended by his wrists from the ceiling while the head torturer, Stark, begins to subject him to graphic cutting, burning, and electrocution. Once he has made it clear to the minions that he will not cooperate,

[393] David Bianculli, "Savage Scenes Add to Characters' Struggles," *Daily News*, 17 April 2003.
[394] James Whitmore Jr., "Day 2: 2:00-3:00 A.M.," in *24* (USA: 20th Century Fox Television, 2003).

Jack does not speak again during his torture session. He endures everything they subject him to without breaking.

Although he is naked and, for all intents and purposes, vulnerable, his torture does not encourage a sexual interpretation. A scalpel is shown cutting into his side, his flesh is shown smoldering from a hot soldering iron, and his body twitches and convulses from electric shocks. Although his screams are muffled with a gag, his agony is clear. It would be difficult to interpret his screams as anything other than screams of intense pain. The camera does not move over his body, but beyond flashes to his injuries, it stays focused on his face. Jack is literally tortured to death during this two episode arch, but is revived by the minions who need the information he has. Ultimately, he gets just enough help from a frightened clinic doctor to be able to free himself from his restraints and kill all of the minions.[395] Unsurprisingly to those who follow the show, Jack needs very little assistance to escape. He is so well trained, and so dangerous, that he can always use even the slightest opening to not only save himself, but also to exact revenge.

The second season of the program *Sleeper Cell* contains depictions of the graphic torture of Darwyn's enemy and constant foil, Farik. Farik is captured by Americans at the end of season one and several episodes in season two reveal the disgustingly brutal treatment he receives at the hands of his American captors, and after his rendition to Saudi Arabia. The climax of Farik's torture comes when he is stripped naked and his Arab torturer, Hajjaj, pushes a white hot wire into his urethra.[396] Like Jack, Farik is naked and suspended from the ceiling by his arms. Also like Jack, Farik's nudity does not overtly suggest eroticism, even though his torture could accurately be described as sexual assault. The portrayal of Farik's sexual molestation is offered more as a constant ramping up of his humiliation than as a pleasurable scene for the audience

[395] James Whitmore Jr., "Day 2: 3:00-4:00 A.M.," in *24* (USA: 20th Century Fox Television, 2003).
[396] Vondie Curtis-Hall, "Torture," in *Sleeper Cell* (USA: Showtime Networks, 2006).

(although granted, again, that there may be an audience that would find this scene erotic). There is a heightened sense of menace as the man is completely vulnerable. Hajjaj is shown unemotionally running a blow torch over the wire while the American agent present tries to get Farik to reveal what he knows about terrorist activities. Farik does not break, and even earns the grudging respect of the American agent in charge of his interrogation. The set is gritty and ugly. It is dark, and appears to be dirty. Farik is covered in filth and his own sweat and blood. There is a sense of hopelessness about Farik's situation. Unlike Jack, it is clear that Farik could never affect his own rescue and would die in this terrible place if his follow jihadists did not intercede.

That Jack, unlike Farik, is not subjected to sexual assault in his nude torture session serves the purpose of preserving his masculinity and heterosexuality. He never faces the feminizing humiliation of having his body treated as a passive sexual object. If he was raped, or otherwise sexually molested, he would no longer qualify as a masculine messianic savior. That essential quality that the savior must possess, namely, unquestioned masculinity, would be compromised. Thus, even though he is nude, and painful procedures inflicted upon male genitalia is common in torture,[397] Jack receives no such treatment. Contrarily, Farik is sexually assaulted when his penis becomes the focus of his torture. Even though he endures his trials every bit as courageously as a hero would, his feminizing assault disqualifies him as a potential savior if his fatally flawed ideological position had not already done so. It is also of interest that the man who handles Farik's penis and commits the assault is not the American representative. Rather, it is an Arab man who sexually molests Farik while the American man stands by, arms folded, his presumed heterosexuality preserved.

Up to this point, the torturing of the protagonists and even antagonists of these shows has revealed several things. First, women warriors, even though they gamely endure their trials, do

[397] See Darius Rejali, *Torture and Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

not qualify as saviors. Having an ambivalent relationship to violence, they are unable to face torture without fear. Second, a savior must not be sexually objectified. Here, women would automatically face disqualification as even women warriors are consistently portrayed as sexually appealing and available. As Inness points out regarding tough women in popular culture, "no matter how tough she might appear on the surface, she still can be subjected to the ultimate indignity of rape."[398] Even though the women warriors in *Alias* and *La Femme Nikita* are not subjected to sexual assault, they are overtly sexually objectified, even having their torture scenes offered up for an erotic read. Clearly, women's sexual bodies are too present for them to ever be able to transcend them as a messianic savior must. Even if men are able to transcend their bodies, they do not all qualify as saviors. Being sexually objectified, or "blemished," would damage a man's masculinity to the point of his no longer being able to be perceived as a disembodied masculine hero.

While the qualifying messianic male savior may not exist in reality, popular entertainment television gives him form. This is evident perhaps nowhere as clearly as on *24*. Indeed, the theme of the valiant male savior who offers himself up for sacrifice is driven home more explicitly on *24* than in any of the other programs under consideration here. In fact, it seems as if a conscious effort has been made on the part of the creative team to inject messianic imagery into Jack's torture sessions. In the next section, I explore some of these messianic themes and discuss their implications for sanctifying the body of the male hero.

Messianic Imagery on *24*

With the action of several days of *24* frankly reflecting Western fears regarding the war on terrorism, the conceit of this program is its representation of reality. That politicians and

[398] Inness, 71.

academics debate its frequent ticking bomb scenario as a real life possibility suggests that *24* may have entered cultural consciousness to the extent to which many entertainment programs never do. As a hero, Jack Bauer's courage is beyond reproach. But Jack is portrayed as more than a hero. In appearance, attitude, and even in experiencing death and resurrection, Jack offers a vision of a messianic savior capable of fighting the kind of evil that threatens in the war on terrorism.

Appearance

When Jack makes his first appearance at the beginning of day six, he bears a resemblance to depictions of Christ on the day of the Passion. His hair and beard are long, he wears a ragged tunic, and when he removes his tunic, viewers can see that his body is covered with the scars of his torment at the hands of the Chinese. An interesting aspect to Jack's appearance here, as in the torture scene in day two, is the lack of body art which covers the actor's body. Kiefer Sutherland has a number of tattoos on his arms and shoulders, and the tattoos have been readily visible in many episodes of the program. However, in the scenes where Jack is tortured, or has been tortured and his body is displayed, his tattoos are covered with body makeup. There is no widely publicized explanation from the creative minds behind *24* for covering the actor's tattoos only in these key scenes, but the lack of body art emphasizes the messianic imagery in the torture scenes. With the tattoos, the tortured person is an individual man, part of a military culture where men commonly suffer. Without the tattoos, however, he is a Messiah whose body is "unblemished" and offered up as a sacrifice on behalf of many. Nothing diverts the viewer's attention from the wounds and scars of his undeserved torture. His nudity in day two and day six draws attention to

his wounds, and to the fact that he is offering up for sacrifice his body, even if that "gift" means a great deal of pain.

Attitude

Like Christ, Jack makes his sacrifice all the more meaningful because it is willing. On day two, he puts himself in position to be captured in order to divert his enemy from pursuing the agent that actually has the evidence being sought. On day six, he is willing to offer himself up to an Arab terrorist, Fayed, in order to make the civilian attacks stop. In fact, only a few minutes after he is taken off the plane that has brought him from China, he is told that he will be sacrificed to the vengeful Fayed.[399] A CTU agent, Curtis, stands nearby, weapon in hand, just in case Jack decides that he will not cooperate – and his concern is well founded. Jack has shown on more than one occasion that he can escape seemingly impossible situations, even if he is extraordinarily overmatched. But Jack reassures the CTU representatives that weapons are not necessary: "I know what's being asked of me, Curtis. You don't need your firearm." All he asks in return for his sacrifice is that his lover, Audrey, and his daughter, Kim, are not told of his return to the U.S., and he asks to clean up for his impending martyrdom. Jack's willingness to sacrifice himself is reminiscent of Christ who is reported in the book of Matthew as telling his avenging disciple in the Garden of Gethsemane that if he was not willing to be a martyr he could "appeal to my Father, who would at once send to my aid more than twelve legions of angels."[400] Like Christ, Jack has demonstrated his ability to get out of situations if he is unwilling to be in them. His willingness to submit to what lies ahead lends an almost divine flavor to his quest.

[399] Jon Cassar, "Day 6: 6:00-7:00 A.M.," in *24* (USA: 20th Century Fox Television, 2007).
[400] Matt. 26:53 *New English Bible* (*NE*)

Another messianic touch to Jack's sacrifice is his refusal to speak when he is tortured. Similarly, the Bible book of Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would maintain his silence when suffering his martyrdom: "He was afflicted, he submitted to be struck down and did not open his mouth; he was led like a sheep to the slaughter, like a ewe that is dumb before the shearers."[401] Jack's refusal to speak under torture is attested to with admiration by his enemies. When his Chinese captor turns him over to the American authorities on day six, he assures the Americans: "Please convey to your President that Mr. Bauer never broke his silence. He hasn't spoken a word in nearly two years."[402] Along with the messianic imagery, Jack's silence conveys more than the stoicism of a masculine hero. Even if his torture should result in his death, the people he dies for – innocent civilians who will never know him – will remain safe. And like Christ, Jack gives himself on behalf of thankless others. As Isaiah notes regarding the Messiah,

> Yet on himself he bore our sufferings, our torments he endured, while we counted him smitten by God, struck down by disease and misery; but he was pierced for our transgressions, tortured for our iniquities; the chastisement he bore is health for us and by his scourging we are healed.[403]

On many occasions in the series, those around Jack have shown a lack of appreciation for his sacrifices. The lack of gratitude for Jack's service is demonstrated in a scene from day six when his former boss, the Secretary of Defense (also Audrey's father), dresses him down telling him, "You're cursed Jack. Everything you touch one way or another ends up dead."[404] Some viewers could be primed to respond with outrage to the Secretary's lack of gratitude for all that Jack has done. Later, in the last hour of the day, Jack finally verbalizes his indignation on his own behalf and, indeed, on the audience's behalf as well. He faces off with the Secretary and tells him, at gunpoint, just how he feels about how he has been treated.

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[401] Is. 53:7 *NE*
[402] Cassar.
[403] Is. 53: 4,5 *NE*
[404] Brad Turner, "Day 6: 1:00-2:00 A.M.," in *24* (USA: 20th Century Fox Television, 2007).

> Earlier today, you said that I was cursed. That anyone I touched ended up dead or ruined…How dare you! The only thing I did, the only thing I have *ever* done, is what you or people like you have asked of me![405]

The injustice of Jack's treatment here, again, carries messianic overtones. As prophesied about the Messiah, "Without protection, without justice, he was taken away; and who gave a thought to his fate, how he was cut off from the world of living men, stricken to the death for my people's transgressions?"[406]

Chagrined by Jack's denunciation, the Secretary finally admits what the audience has known all along, namely, that Jack has been treated unjustly, and with a lack of appreciation by those he has served. "I know the sacrifices you've made," the Secretary admits. "I know this country owes you more than it'll ever repay." Jack is uninterested in the Secretary's gratitude, and, as a messianic savior, there could never be enough gratitude expressed for what he has given. The audience knows that Jack, as a hero, does not ask for accolades, or expect to be repaid for his sacrifices. A savior's sacrifice is too valuable a thing upon which to place a price.

Death and resurrection

Another overt messianic theme that appears in *24* is that of death and resurrection of the hero. Jack's torture has resulted in his death, both literal and symbolic. As with the Messiah, death of the savior is necessary. As Isaiah notes,

> I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall share the spoil with the mighty, because he exposed himself to face death and was reckoned among transgressors, because he bore the sin of many and interceded for their transgressions.[407]

The death of a messianic savior is not comparable to the death of a warrior who dies unintentionally while engaged in a dangerous duty. Rather, the messianic savior's death is

[405] Brad Turner, "Day 6: 5:00-6:00 A.M.," in *24* (USA: 20th Century Fox Television, 2007).
[406] Is. 53:8 *NE*
[407] Is. 53:12 *NE*

accounted as higher in value because "he" offers himself up for certain death in order for others to avoid a similar fate – even if they never appreciate his sacrifice. Also, the messianic savior's act of selflessness is rewarded by divine resurrection. On day two, in a fit of frustration over Jack's refusal to talk, his torturer, Stark, shocks him with a taser until his heart stops. The minions must frantically resuscitate him as their boss is convinced that he has evidence that will interfere with their plans to start World War III.[408] Jack comes back from the dead, and within minutes he has escaped his restraints and killed all of his tormentors. Like the resurrected Christ, Jack comes back from the dead as an avenging warrior to complete his mission.

Jack is also resurrected from symbolic death at the beginning of day six. After 20 months in a Chinese prison, a virtual death sentence for anyone else, Jack is returned to the U.S. only to be given to his enemies to finish the job begun by the Chinese. As he contemplates his fate, he tells a CTU official,

> Do you understand the difference between dying for nothing and dying for something? The only reason I fought so hard to stay in alive in China was because I didn't want to die for nothing. But today, I can die for something, my way, my choice.[409]

Jack verbalizes here what the audience likely already intuits, namely, that he does not fear death. As a righteous warrior and savior he can make his death meaningful in a way that others cannot. When he later discovers that he and U.S. officials have been duped and that Fayed has no intention of stopping the terrorist attacks, Jack does not allow himself to be killed because his death would seem meaningless. A savior's blood is a valuable and finite commodity and must not be spilled unless it can redeem the lives of others – even if those others are unappreciative and unworthy.

[408] Whitmore Jr., "Day 2: 3:00-4:00 A.M.."
[409] Cassar.

The theme of sacred savior's blood is recurring on *24*, but also evident in several of the other programs featuring government agents fighting terrorism. Not surprisingly, the blood that is portrayed as sacred is male. Female blood in any form is conspicuous by its absence even in the programs that feature women warriors. They do bleed, at times, but their blood is not showcased in any explicit way. Even if they bleed in the course of their duty, the blood they shed is in small quantities, and they are quickly restored to traditional feminine beauty. This is not the case for male heroes whose blood is often displayed as if it is of symbolic value. Interestingly, on several different occasions, male blood is even displayed by women characters as a sign of their acceptance of its value. As I argued in chapter three, male blood is culturally understood, consciously or unconsciously, to have higher value than female blood, which frequently seems to be represented by menstrual blood. Male blood contains the potential to provide salvation, whereas female blood only seems able to pollute. In the next section, I explore the symbolic display of male blood in these programs and suggest that this adds a layer to the view of male heroes as potentially messianic saviors.

Sacred Male Blood

The blood of Nikita and Sydney is rarely on display in these programs. In keeping with the aesthetic of these shows, the women would be hard pressed to maintain their attractiveness if their blood were visible. On occasion, however, women in several of these programs wear male blood for effect. It is telling that this blood is worn on the female body, but it is not their own. When we think of blood on the clothing of women who are not warriors, perhaps the immediate thought is that of an embarrassing leak of menstrual blood. This would be something to be erased in private as quickly as possible. But in the instances in these programs of women wearing male

blood, the blood is displayed without shame, and as vehicles of righteous arguments. In other words, the male blood makes an argument that female words, taken alone, perhaps could not.

In the first episode of *Alias*, Sydney is shown in several scenes covered in blood, but the blood is not her own.[410] When she finds her fiancé, Danny, brutally murdered, she ends up with his blood all over her shirt, hands, and face. Rather than change her clothes and wash off the blood, she goes to SD-6 headquarters to confront Sloane. Wearing Danny's blood adds to the dramatic tension of the scene. This is not her blood which was shed in the line of duty. Rather this is the blood of an innocent man whose life was tragically cut short. His life and blood cannot be replaced. She wears his blood much the way a widow might drape herself in black. Despite being the one to reveal the information that resulted in Danny's death, Sydney is not the one sacrificed. He was not a warrior, as is Sydney, but his blood is clearly afforded high value. In essence, Danny's blood bought Sydney's life. With his death, Sydney is given a second chance to prove herself as a reliable agent of SD-6. As a man, Danny had the potential to be a savior, and his blood is representative of something sacred.

Several episodes of *The Unit* contain a theme emphasizing the sacredness of male warrior blood through its display. One episode is particularly explicit in its view of the hallowed nature of male blood by having a woman display this blood on her body. In this episode, one of the Unit men, Mack, is injured during a training exercise. He subsequently has a violent confrontation with his wife, Tiffy, where his blood is smeared on her shirt.[411] Part of the revelation of this episode is that Mack has a history of abusing Tiffy, which she dismisses as part of their passionate relationship. "I goaded him," she tells a friend who knows of Mack's violent past and is concerned that his old ways are resurfacing. Tiffy insists that her relationship with Mack is just

[410] Abrams.
[411] Steve Gomer, "200th Hour," in *The Unit* (USA: CBS Television, 2006).

complicated. “We’ll never be easy,” she explains to her friend, “but that’s us. It’s fireworks.” Later, still wearing Mack’s blood on her shirt, Tiffy confronts a woman senator who is visiting the base and meeting with wives to talk about funding mundane military family facilities. Tiffy uses her husband’s blood on her shirt to emphasize her argument for increased funding for training for these heroes. She does not change her shirt after her confrontation with Mack for the entire episode. Even after the conflict with the senator is resolved, and the wives are shown sitting around in a kitchen with the senator eating brownies and chatting, Tiffy is still wearing her blood-stained shirt.

Apparently, Mack’s past as a spousal abuser does not negatively impact his qualification for the elite team, nor is it suggested that it should dim the viewer’s image of him as a warrior hero whose shed blood is sacred. If anything, Mack’s past seems to amplify his position as a warrior. His masculinity and his propensity to violence are beyond question, and even Tiffy excuses his behavior as “fireworks” instead of unacceptable violence.

This is not the only episode of *The Unit* that uses male warrior blood as a visual metaphor of the value of male sacrifice in particular. In one episode, for example, it is revealed that in the no-girls-allowed place where the Unit men relax after missions for drinking alcohol and reflecting on their adventures, there is something called the “Wall of Fame.”[412] On this wall artifacts are displayed from missions including bloody equipment and/or clothing from the men’s first battle wounds. It is not the blood of enemies that is displayed and considered to be important objet d'art; rather, it is the blood of the Unit heroes. Their blood is expected to be shed, and being displayed on the Wall of Fame is depicted as highly desirable – in fact, in this episode one soldier complains that it took him three years in the Unit to get something on the wall. The expectation that their blood would be shed is counterintuitive. It would seem to be the mark of a

[412] Terrence O'Hara, "Extreme Rendition," in *The Unit* (USA: CBS Television, 2006).

competent warrior that he avoids injury. But for the Unit men, who operate in secret and whose work is never given public appreciation or accolades, the Wall of Fame provides visual proof of their sacrifices and, like a trophy, their blood is forever displayed for other soldiers to see. It is not enough for them to have stories of their successes. Rather, the shedding of their blood is a visible rite of passage that seals their identities as warriors.

In the final episode of *Sleeper Cell*, Darwyn's blood is also represented as a visual metaphor of his struggles as a warrior. After having been beaten by Farik and his followers, Darwyn is bleeding.[413] He is dressed completely in brilliant white, and the blood stands out starkly on his clothing as the only sign of color. At the Yemini training camp is Farik's fellow jihadist, a Bosnian Muslim named Ilija, who had known Darwyn when they were both in the Los Angeles cell in the first season. As Darwyn is being prepared for execution, Ilija kneels beside him. He speaks tenderly to Darwyn about their mutual sacrifices for their separate causes (Darwyn's girlfriend, Gayle, had been murdered, and Ilija had murdered the woman he loved in service of his jihad). Ilija, who treats Darwyn with respect and seems to regret that their lives have come to this, takes a white handkerchief from his pocket and reverently daubs at Darwyn's blood, as if it is an honor for him to be in contact with this sacred substance. Instead of throwing the bloody handkerchief away, Ilija returns it to his pocket as if it is now a keepsake. Although Ilija and Darwyn are mortal enemies, and on any other day would not hesitate to kill each other, Ilija treats Darwyn's blood as something holy. Where Farik treats Darwyn as an apostate to Islam, Ilija gives him the respect of a warrior, and as one who is willingly sacrificing himself for the cause in which he believes. Ilija even assures Darwyn that after his execution, he will attain paradise, suggesting that Allah respects his sacrifice.

[413] Charles S. Dutton, "Reunion," in *Sleeper Cell* (USA Showtime Networks, 2006).

Of course, Jack Bauer has lost much blood as a repeated savior of his country and beyond. In the first hour of day six, he is viciously tortured by the treacherous Fayed. When Jack is left in the torture room with only one guard, he manages to kill the guard and escape. For the better part of two episodes, he wears the shirt that is soaked in his blood.[414] Despite his being subjected to painful and debilitating torture in the first hour of his return to U.S. soil, Jack does not allow that to become an obstacle in his quest to save innocent lives. The blood on his shirt is a constant reminder to the viewer of Jack's monumental and willing sacrifice. Even though copious amounts of his blood has been spilled at the very beginning of this long day, he does not allow that to stop him, or even slow him down. Unlike the blood of his enemies, which Jack is not squeamish about spilling, when Jack's blood is spilled the audience is encouraged to see the blood of someone who does not deserve his wounds, but willingly accepts them so that others may avoid such a fate. No less is expected from a mythic hero. As Janice Hocker Rushing points out: "A hero is not of truly mythic proportions unless his struggle is difficult and his success is wrought from sacrifice."[415]

By displaying male blood and treating it as a substance of high value, television entertainment programming is tapping into a deep seated cultural narrative. Male blood is a valuable commodity in part because men, by virtue of being men, are potential saviors. Their actions may disqualify them from becoming messianic heroes, but their bodies and blood provide them with the necessary prerequisite. Women cannot attain to this status. Even women warriors are unqualified as saviors partly because of their unruly bodies and polluted blood, but also because that a woman can be a true warrior is a highly questionable enterprise. She may be given the label of warrior, but her uneasy relationship to violence and her inability to transcend her

[414] Jon Cassar, "Day 6: 7:00-8:00 A.M.," in *24* (20th Century Fox, 2007).
[415] Janice Hocker Rushing, "The Rhetoric of the American Western Myth," *Communication Monographs,* 50, (1983).

body prohibits her from being a warrior in the same vein as men. Therefore, she can never be a savior in the messianic sense.

The portrayal of male government agents in entertainment television as warriors of almost sacred status is not necessarily a recent development. As the quote above from Rushing suggests, the sacrificing hero is well embedded in the traditions of Western culture. But entertainment programming after September 11th introduced a new characteristic to the masculine warrior: Rather than only proving himself by withstanding torture, he proves himself by inflicting torture on the enemy. Combining the themes of Christ-like sacrifice with the previously prohibited acts of torture transforms both the hero and the vision of Christ. The hero becomes one who is forced to torture the enemy in order to save the lives of others, and the lessons of Christ are transformed from those of peace and pacifism to violence justified as righteous. In the next section, I explore the torturing hero. He is portrayed as one whose hand is forced by his enemy, and whose subsequent acts of torture save those whose lives have been entrusted in him. He is not depicted as sadistic; rather, the remorse (but not repentance) he shows for his actions redeem him from becoming a brutal monster, and allows the audience to continue identifying him as a savior.

The Savior Who Tortures

As previously noted in this chapter, the women protagonists of these programs rarely torture. If they do, subsequent acts of redemption are necessary to restore these women to righteous standing, and to restore the gender norms their acts have troubled. Secondary women characters frequently have their acts of torture explained by their overall deviance. It would be inaccurate to claim that all men who engage in torture do so with their characters remaining

unblemished. Indeed, enemy agents frequently engage in torture on these programs, and frequently it is the heroes who are recipients. For these men, their acts of torture are usually motivated by greed for either money or power. For example, the men who tortured Jack in day two of *24* were doing so at the behest of a greedy oilman, and the men who tortured Nikita and Michael in the rat cage episode were motivated by a lust for power. But for the men heroes who torture, they are motivated by a vocation of saving innocent lives. They are also portrayed as reluctant. The performance of torture is not something they enjoy; rather, the actions of the enemy compel them into these drastic acts of violence.

In the second season of *Sleeper Cell*, the American and Arab agents who torture Farik are portrayed as logical, and ultimately doing a dirty job that must be done. In one telling scene, an American military intelligence man who directs the Arab official, Hajjaj, to torture Farik, verbally attacks the entrenched Farik who has already endured much physical abuse.

> Do you think I fucking enjoy this? Americans hate this shit! It's not who we are! But to tell you the truth, I don't care, because you took off the fucking gloves. I do things I hate myself for and I blame you for that. All of you. If you would just cooperate, I can get Hajjaj to stop.[416]

Farik still refuses to cooperate, and claims to understand Hajjaj. He tells the American, "He does what he believes is necessary. But you Americans are so obsessed with yourselves. You care more about analyzing your guilt than achieving victory. That is why we will win and you will lose." Just after this exchange, Hajjaj, who does not add his voice to the conversation, continues his brutal torture of Farik. The words spoken by both the American agent and Farik suggest that both perceive torture as a necessary part of the conflict in which the two are engaged. The American claims he hates himself for what he is being forced to do, but offers no apologies and proceeds to authorize further torture. His claim of self-loathing is not insincere; throughout

[416] Curtis-Hall.

Farik's torture, the American agent is shown looking away from the scene as if he is disgusted by what he has been "forced" to authorize. In contrast to the American agent's view, Farik claims that the American aversion to doing what is necessary is a weakness to be exploited. While both Farik and the American agent would authorize torture if deemed necessary, their attitudes are explicitly contrasted. Where the American agent feels remorse for what he perceives as Farik's actions having precipitated, Farik would proceed without guilt or feeling the need to analyze his actions. The perception is thus encouraged that one's attitude regarding the performance of torture is the most important mitigating feature.

Of all the male protagonists in these programs who torture as part of their heroic duties, *24*'s Jack Bauer represents the apex. Six seasons of *24* have aired as of this writing, and Jack has tortured suspected terrorists or their abettors in every one. Despite his willingness to use extreme methods when he feels it is necessary, Jack is not portrayed as an immoral character. It would be inaccurate and simplistic to suggest that the legions of fans that obsessively follow the show have sanctified a psychopath as a hero. Jack is depicted as torturing because his enemies have left him with no other choice, and his personal remorse for his actions are a major redemptive force for this character. As a man of action, Jack spends little time justifying his behavior. The incessant ticking clock suggests that he cannot stop for existential crises. Still, the narrative is structured in such a way so as to allow for expressions of his reluctance to take extreme action even when the plot points to his having no other choice.

For example, on day two Jack applies vicious physical and psychological torture to an Arab terrorist, Syed Ali, who knows the location of a nuclear device in Los Angeles that is set to go off within hours (the classic "ticking time bomb" scenario).[417] The climax of the torture comes when Ali is allowed to see his family on closed circuit television screens, bound and

[417] Fred Keller, "Day 2: 7:00-8:00 P.M.," in *24* (USA: 20th Century Fox Television, 2003).

gagged in their own country, and Jack tells him that the masked gunman on the screen are waiting for Jack's order to kill them. Jack tells Ali, "I despise you for what you're making me do." When Ali remains obstinate, Jack orders the gunmen to kill Ali's oldest son, who is then shot point blank before Ali's disbelieving eyes. As Jack prepares to order the execution of Ali's last remaining child, Ali breaks. He gives Jack accurate information as to the location of the bomb, and Jack spares his child. Before the audience can begin to form an opinion of Jack as a cold blooded murderer and not as a hero, the revelation comes that the entire execution had been staged. Ali's son is not dead. Viewers are allowed to maintain their vision of Jack as a hero who, while willing to take extreme steps to accomplish his mission, does have a line that he will not cross. The terrorist Ali believes he saw his son executed, causing him to break psychologically.[418] But audience members are left to see Jack's actions, however brutal and cruel, as necessary and effective. And ultimately, the perception is encouraged that the blame falls on Ali's own fanaticism not Jack's lack of moral character.

Jack's ability to perform torture is not an incidental characteristic in his portrayal as a hero. In fact, this ability is depicted as crucial. When Jack is released from Chinese custody at the beginning of day six, it is evident that he is a changed man. In the second episode, he begins to torture a prisoner in custody by plunging a pen into the man's wound.[419] As the man weeps and screams in pain, Jack's face registers pity and horror and he stops hurting the prisoner. When Assad, a reformed terrorist that Jack briefly works alongside, asks him why he stopped, Jack replies that the prisoner had nothing to say; Jack claims he could see it in his eyes. With this, Assad steps in and tortures the information they need out of the prisoner before killing him. Jack

[418] Hours later, just before Ali is about to be transported to Guantánamo Bay, Jack informs him that his son is not dead. In an unintentionally ironic line of dialog, Jack tells the beleaguered Ali that he will be allowed to contact his family once he arrives at Gitmo, suggesting that the Cuban military prison would allow such amenities for an "enemy combatant" responsible for smuggling a nuclear bomb onto U.S. soil.
[419] Cassar, "Day 6: 7:00 A.M.-8:00 A.M."

looks on in dismay at the scene, and then tells Assad, “I don’t know how to do this anymore.” Assad assures him, “You’ll remember.” But a few episodes later, Jack is still portrayed as being unable to unemotionally perform his former ruthless acts. In this episode, Jack is forced to kill his friend and former partner, Curtis, after he threatens Assad’s life. [420] After shooting Curtis, Jack stumbles away, vomits, and then collapses in misery against a tree. His grief is so palpable and physical that he is unable even to remain standing. Almost immediately his phone rings and Bill, the head of CTU, is on the line telling him that his actions were justified and that they still need his help. Choking back his tears, Jack tells Bill that he cannot continue. “I can’t do this anymore,” he says. “The hell you can’t!” Bill retorts, and insists that the country needs him. Jack asks Bill to convey his apologies to the President, and he hangs up.

These first few episodes of day six suggest that Jack lost something during his period of imprisonment and torture in China, namely, his ability to ruthlessly inflict pain as a means to an end. The creators of the program had the opportunity to take Jack’s character in a new direction, perhaps having him reform his ways and atone for his brutal actions of the past. But it is clear that the creative team of *24*, and quite likely the audience as well, are uninterested in seeing Jack as a pacifist. And it is important to remember that Jack’s acts of violence and torture, while often vicious, have never been written as unjustified. Rather, his ability to perform these actions has been portrayed as illustrative of his heroic character. Jack’s performance of torture has been depicted as unselfish acts of sacrifice on his part, and one of the things that marks him as a savior. So Jack’s inability to use extreme methods at the beginning of day six is suggestive of his loss of ability to be heroic. As a sign of healing, then, Jack must resume his former ways. And he does so. After the terrorists detonate a dirty bomb in Valencia killing thousands of civilians, Jack is jolted back into action. A few hours later, through some complicated plot twists, the

[420] Brad Turner, "Day 6: 9:00-10:00 A.M.," in *24* (USA: 20th Century Fox Television, 2007).

investigation takes Jack to his estranged brother's doorstep.[421] Jack's brother, Graem, is implicated in the terrorists' actions of the day, and Jack does not hesitate to torture him in this episode and again a few hours later.[422] Although it may seem shocking that a hero would inflict torture upon his own flesh and blood, the audience has been privy to Graem's behind the scenes machinations, which resulted in the deaths of a former president and several of Jack's close friends, as well as Jack's imprisonment in China. When Jack tells Graem, subsequent to torturing him, "You brought this on yourself," the audience has received enough information to be primed to agree with Jack. Evidently, part of Jack's symbolic resurrection and healing is the restoration of his ability to torture as part of his interrogations, and the fact that he is able to torture his brother is suggestive of his becoming again the man, and hero, that he once was.

Jack's portrayal throughout this series as a Christ-like savior, coupled with his restoration as a torturing warrior hero, suggests that his version of providing messianic salvation does not include Christ's teachings of peace and pacifism. Indeed, the cultural narrative regarding the war on terrorism, including the rhetoric from a variety of Christian leaders, as argued in chapter one, shows little interest in following Christ's admonition to "turn the other cheek" in the face of enemy assault. A heroic savior capable of taking on the kind of evil represented by the "new paradigm" presented by Islamic terrorists would have to abandon Christ's teachings in life, and more closely mimic the warrior image of the risen Christ. The blood-letting tendencies of the warrior Christ, as depicted in the Bible book of Revelation, suggests no squeamishness regarding violence. Popular entertainment television has enhanced the cultural narrative by combining the hero's salvific sacrifices with his performance of "necessary" torture. In this narrative, the hero, like Christ, is worthy of offering his life in exchange for many, and is also capable of performing

[421] Milan Cheylov, "Day 6: 10:00-11:00 A.M.," in *24* (USA: 20th Century Fox, 2007).
[422] Jon Cassar, "Day 6: 12:00-1:00 P.M.," in *24* (USA: 20th Century Fox, 2007).

extreme acts of brutality also in exchange for many. The hero's acts of violence are always balanced by his sacrificial acts of salvation, and his redemptive expressions of remorse.

The remorse expressed by the heroes is often extremely anguished. Importantly, these expressions of remorse are not expressions of repentance. With repentance, the penitent would ask for forgiveness of sins and go forward determined to sin no more. This is not the case for the heroes in these fictional programs. Even as their remorse is portrayed as genuine and coming from a place of great personal pain, they do not reform. In fact, as argued above, reform is depicted as the undoing of the hero. While the foci of *The Unit* is more on the bravery and ingenuity of the heroes, with little attention given to their inner lives, *Sleeper Cell* and especially *24* delve into the toll their violent choices takes on these heroes. In the last episode of the first season of *Sleeper Cell*, the audience witnesses Darwyn's despair when, after a protracted physical fight, he kills one of the cell members.[423] The suggestion is that Darwyn feels sorrow for taking a human life who is also his Muslim brother, however misguided. He allows himself to express his anguish, but then presses on in his quest. As noted above for *24*, Jack's remorse at times precipitates emotional collapse. He is shown, for example, at the end of day three sobbing alone in his car when the action stops and he can finally reflect on the horrible things he has been forced to do on this day.[424] His display of emotion is short-lived, however, as a radio call summons him back to duty despite his evident emotional exhaustion.

This grief and remorse demonstrated by the hero does not feminize these characters. Rather it redeems them from becoming the cardboard, testosterone-driven characters of the Stallone, Van Damme, and Schwarzenegger variety that were so popular in films of the 1980's. Importantly, these characters' anguish also acts as a palliative for audience members in order for

[423] Janet Tamaro, "Youmud Din," in *Sleeper Cell* (USA: Showtime Networks, 2005).
[424] Jon Cassar, "Day 3: 12:00-1:00 P.M.," in *24* (20th Century Fox Television, 2004).

them to continue to see these men as heroes, while simultaneously avoiding seeing themselves as sadists. This is in keeping with the principle of "dirty hands" as coined by Sartre.[425] Social science scholar Michael Walzer explains that a heroic public figure who is forced to perform morally questionable actions must display remorse if "he" is to continue to be perceived as a "good man." Walzer's use of the universal masculine pronoun here serves as more than just a writing simplification. As I have argued, for women torturers, the principle of dirty hands is irrelevant. Offensive violence at the hands of women is rarely judged to be socially acceptable, and redemptive moves are crucial to undo the damage when women warriors stray beyond tolerable limits. But for the male hero who must resort to the taboo of torture, Walzer notes, "if he did not feel guilty, he would not be such a good man."[426] It is not enough for the audience to hear second-hand about the hero's remorse, Walzer argues, "above all, we want a record of his anguish. This is a sign of our own conscientiousness."[427] Put differently, viewers can hold Jack and other torturing heroes in high esteem despite their normally unacceptable behavior because these heroes suffer for their deeds. Torture, an evil to be sure, but a necessary one, will be used only when absolutely unavoidable by righteous male saviors who balance the scales by demonstrating appropriate remorse. That remorse enables the hero to stand on the edge of the abyss without actually falling in, and the audience can then safely continue to identify with this conflicted, but ultimately righteous, man.

One of the lessons of these programs is that torture is not to be undertaken lightly. While torture is very common in all of these programs, the depiction of its use is not evenhanded. In other words, torture is portrayed as an extremely dangerous and morally questionable tool that

[425] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Dirty Hands," in *No Exit and Three Other Plays* (New York: Vintage International, 1989).
[426] Michael Walzer, "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands," in *Torture: A Collection*, ed. Sanford Levinson (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2004), 68.
[427] Walzer, 70.

not everyone is capable of wielding. Women, for example, seem unqualified to perform torture in a way that escapes the moral landmines intrinsic to its use. Many men, especially those with selfish motives, or those who do not fight on the side of righteousness, are also unqualified. Only men who have not lost their salvific masculinity, and whose acts of sacrifice rise to the level of messianic, are capable of torturing others without facing social condemnation. However unlikely it is that such men exist in reality, popular entertainment television has filled an apparent cultural niche in providing a visible shape to this savior.

Conclusion

In 2006, President Bush defended the CIA program of using "aggressive interrogation" techniques (more cynically referred to by critics as "torture lite"). The President insisted that these techniques are "the single most potent tool we have in the war on terrorism."[428] Subjecting suspected terrorists to aggressive interrogations has already yielded useful results, according to the President, who claims, "Were it not for this program, our intelligence community believes that al Qaeda and its allies would have succeeded in launching another attack against the American homeland."[429] Bush is not specific about what attacks have been thwarted, or even what interrogation methods are being used, but it is clear that the current administration will continue to pursue tough interrogation protocols which it claims fall short of torture. The secrecy, suggests a *New York Times* reporter, is more than just a way of keeping al Qaeda operatives in the dark regarding interrogation techniques: "In effect, officials want al Qaeda to

[428] "The Torture Compromise," *Sentinel & Enterprise*, 25 September 2006.
[429] Jed Graham, "Bush Defends Tough Terror Questioning after Key GOP Senators Reject His Plan," *Investor's Business Daily*, 18 September 2006.

believe that the United States does torture, while convincing the rest of the world that it does not."[430]

Given the overriding themes of the popular television programs I have analyzed in this chapter, it seems certain that Hollywood at least is not persuaded that the U.S. should not torture. And the narratives contained in these programs suggest that torture in the hands of a masculine, messianic hero is a useful tool in the war on terrorism. Characters such as *24*'s Jack Bauer have so much cultural resonance that political candidates reference him as a symbol of the ability to do the difficult thing in impossible circumstances. As former presidential candidate Tom Tancredo said when responding to a question regarding using torture in a "ticking time bomb" scenario, "I'm looking for Jack Bauer at that time, let me tell you."[431] While referencing a fictional character in response to a difficult question may simply be a clever dodge, this figure may serve as a metaphor for a larger cultural longing. As Stephanie Romanski, who runs one of the many *24* fan websites, wistfully stated on a program on National Public Radio, "Maybe there is a Jack Bauer out there, or maybe there is a team out there, you know – kind of dedicated to making sure we stay safe. I want to believe that."[432] That longing may be for a messianic masculine savior in whom we may rest confidently will exact justice without error, and save many lives in the process. In the hands of this man, torture need not be questioned. By his willingness to sacrifice himself on behalf of others, he reflects the qualities of the iconic figure of Christ. Rather than his propensity to torture being suggestive of an imperfect reflection, the pacifism of Christ's teaching gives way to the warrior figure of the risen Christ.

It would be a vast simplification to suggest that popular entertainment media alone has reshaped masculinity into that which may torture and remain noble. The very fact that these

[430] Scott Shane, "On Torture, 2 Messages and a High Political Cost," *New York Times*, 30 October 2007.
[431] "Do GOP Candidates Realize."
[432] Fessler.

characters achieve such popularity suggests a cultural significance that predates their appearance. In the "real" world, professional male interrogators who employ torture remain hidden and anonymous. We do not know who these men are, and their acts are not for public consumption. What popular entertainment media provides are faces and stories that can be used easily to enhance that which we do not know. It may be comforting to believe that those who do the ugly work of torture since September 11th are heroic men who never make mistakes, always get results, but who, in the end, bear the remorse and anguish so that the rest of us do not have to. When times are tough, the politicians tell us, we need Jack Bauer, not Sydney Bristow and her nonlethal methods and reminders of what authorizing torture does to *us*. Popular entertainment media, like news media, seems to suggest that performing torture is the business of men and the only price that is paid is personal.

CHAPTER 5

QUESTIONING TORTURE: "WHERE ARE WE NOW?"

One can thus condemn unconditionally, as I do here, the attack of September 11 without having to ignore the real or alleged conditions that made it possible.

Jacques Derrida[433]

It is one matter to suffer violence and quite another to use that fact to ground a framework in which one's injury authorizes limitless aggression against targets that may or may not be related to the sources of one's own suffering.

Judith Butler[434]

Introduction

During World War II, a member of the Resistance Movement, Jean Améry endured torture at the hands of the SS at Auschwitz. Decades later he wrote of his experiences in an essay entitled "Torture." Améry declared that "whoever was tortured, stays tortured." He expanded on this statement:

> Whoever has succumbed to torture can no longer feel at home in the world. The shame of destruction cannot be erased…It is fear that henceforth reigns over him. Fear – and also what is called resentments. They remain, and have scarcely a chance to concentrate into a seething, purifying thirst for revenge.[435]

Put in more colloquial terms, violence begets violence. Weeks after the Abu Ghraib photographs were released, the world received a grisly demonstration of this axiom when American citizen Nicholas Berg was executed by a group of militants in Iraq. His beheading was videotaped, broadcast on the internet, and available for anyone to see at the click of a mouse. His

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[433] Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues in Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 107.
[434] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004), 4.
[435] Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realties*, trans. Sidney Rosenfield and Stella P. Rosenfield (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1980), 40.

executioners read a brief statement that said, in part, "[W]e tell you that the dignity of the Muslim men and women in Abu Ghraib and others is not redeemed except by blood and souls. You will not receive anything from us but coffins after coffins…slaughtered in this way."[436] Nicholas Berg's gruesome execution may not have balanced the proverbial scales of justice, nor did it stop the escalating violence in the war on terrorism, but it did suggest that this is a war that is without fronts. It also suggested that the word "civilian" may have been irrevocably altered. The Bush administration has asserted that violence against U.S. civilians is evidence of the barbarism of the enemy. But an alternative view may be that acts of violence against American civilians indicate that they may be perceived to share responsibility for the actions of their political and military representatives. It may indicate that in this war without fronts, all American citizens are legitimate targets. Whether it is portrayed as the enemy's barbarism, or the civilians' burden of responsibility in a democracy, the reality is that safety in today's world is depicted as a commodity in short supply. Unfortunately, the answer to the problem given by U.S. leaders has been that desperate times call for desperate measures. Few measures could be more desperate than torture as a remedy for keeping Americans safe.

In this dissertation, I have attempted to shine light on discourses that help make possible a growing societal acceptability of torture. As this project nears its end, it is an appropriate time to revisit the concepts that help to tie these discourses together. First, it is important to re-emphasize some of the dominant cultural strains of thought regarding masculinity and its "natural" connection to violence. When masculinity is perceived in this way, it may be further understood as a necessary component in a fight against "evil." This discussion leads back to the critical orientation of this project and how that orientation enables us to see the strands of discourse that shore up notions of acceptable torture. Finally, I will end this project with a brief

[436] Sewell Chan and Ariana Eunjung Cha, "American Beheaded on Web Video," *Washington Post*, 12 May 2004.

discussion of where we are now as a society, with regard to torture, and to suggest some possibilities that may alter our trajectory.

Delivering Us from Evil

In a recent interview, Eve Ensler, best known for her play *The Vagina Monologues*, commented with regard to the women of Abu Ghraib:

> [I]t's just hard to believe. It's hard to imagine that women's hearts have been so hurt and numbed, that women's ability to empathize has been so tragically damaged that we are capable of torture. But it's true. Women are capable of torture.[437]

Ensler admits that her surprise about the torture performed by the women of Abu Ghraib is a naïve form of feminism. Of course women are capable of acts of violence, and Abu Ghraib is not the first evidence of this fact. Interestingly, Ensler uncritically suggests that the women of Abu Ghraib are examples of what she believes *all* women may be capable of, as if the actions of the three women soldiers provided a surprising revelation of the psyches of women everywhere. What Ensler's comment demonstrates is the widespread cultural mythology that women could commit such acts only if their "hearts have been so hurt and numbed" or they have been "so tragically damaged." Such comments are based in the assumption that women's essences make them naturally nonviolent and peace loving, and it is only through damaging outside influences that violence becomes thinkable for individual women. This might be less problematic if this essentializing narrative was applied to human beings generally. After all, it may be comforting to imagine that people start out as pacifists and only deviate from that path if they are damaged along the way. But such explanatory traditions are extremely rare with regard to men. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, one of the reasons there are so few voices raised in inquiry

[437] Tara McKelvey, "'I Still Don't Get How You Can Put a Leash on a Human Being.' an Interview with Eve Ensler," in *One of the Guys: Women as Aggressors and Torturers*, ed. Tara McKelvey (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2007).

when men commit acts of violence, such as torture, is because of the stipulation that violence is a "natural" and even a defining part of masculinity.

Few human events emphasize the belief in an innate connection between violence and masculinity as vividly as war, and since September 11, 2001, American masculinity, with its perceived natural right to use violence in order to protect, has been described as making a popular comeback. Michael Kimmel points out that, following 9/11, "masculinity – both 'ours' and that of the terrorists – has been very much debated and discussed…[The perception is that] the terrorists are cowardly and diabolical; American men are courageous but peace-loving."[438] Kimmel argues that a "new masculinity" began to arise after the attacks on New York and Washington that featured everyday heroes, in the form of manly, muscular police and firefighters. The perception seemed to be, according to Kimmel, that "[r]eal men were back – and we were safer for it."[439] Even President Bush's handlers betrayed an interest in portraying him as a strong masculine figure by providing photo ops of him in 2003 making a dramatic jet landing on the deck of the *U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln,* dressed in full fighter pilot gear, to declare with regard to the war in Iraq, "Mission Accomplished." The staged event, notes Bruce Lincoln, "conveyed the impression of a warrior president and a triumphant hero descended from the clouds, master of air, land, and sea."[440]

Reports following the carrier landing provided evidence that the spectacle had been well planned by White House media experts to showcase the president. One article reported that the entire event had been choreographed by a Bush administration media specialist who was a former television producer. According to this report, nothing was left to chance, including

[438] Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, Second ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 248.
[439] Kimmel, 249.
[440] Bruce Lincoln, *Religion, Empire, & Torture: The Case of Achaemenian Persia, with a Postscript on Abu Ghraib* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2207), 99.

> the members of the Lincoln crew arrayed in coordinated shirt colors over Mr. Bush's right shoulder and the "Mission Accomplished" banner placed to perfectly capture the president and the celebratory two words in a single shot. The speech was specifically timed for what image makers call "magic hour light," which cast a gold glow on Mr. Bush.[441]

The event was opened up to criticism almost immediately when it was reported that the carrier was anchored 30 miles off the coast of San Diego – an easy helicopter trip – and that the ship was turned when it neared the coast so that the city skyline would not be visible in camera shots.[442] Several media commentators saw it as a transparent attempt to kick off the president's campaign for re-election with flourish. Columnist Maureen Dowd described the carrier landing as an attempt to portray Bush as "a reluctant hero, a man of few words," and summed up the media event as, "Testosterone as a campaign accessory."[443] Another editorial referred to the event as "the shameless 'Top Gun' scam, in which the president gleefully executed The Full Hollywood."[444] Retired General Wesley Clark was even more scathing of the stunt, referring to Bush as "prancing on the deck of an aircraft carrier."[445] The limited success of the incident notwithstanding, it suggested that the president's handlers were responding to what they saw as a public yearning, namely, the view of the president as a warrior hero in whose hands its safety could be entrusted.

Mass media discourses regarding those who fight the war on terrorism suggest that masculinity is not an incidental characteristic of warrior heroes. To fight a war against an "evil" enemy by definition requires an adjustment in thinking regarding the rules of warfare. Multiple discourses have framed the extreme Muslim enemy as brutal to the point of being nonhuman. Take, for example, the use of the word "evil" in describing those terrorists whose motivations are

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[441] Elisabeth Bumiller, "Keepers of Bush's Image Lift Stagecraft to New Heights," *New York Times*, 16 May 2003.
[442] Dana Milbank, "Explanation for Bush's Carrier Landing Altered," *Washington Post*, 7 May 2003.
[443] Maureen Dowd, "Gender Myths Alive on Screen," *Times Union*, 18 May 2003.
[444] "Bush's TV Image Is Remote from Reality," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 21 May 2003.
[445] Kimmel, 250.

based in their narrow interpretation of Islam. President Bush was the most visible public figure to use this term to describe the terrorists immediately following September 11th. He described the battle as a war between good and evil, and repeatedly referred to the enemy as "evildoers."[446] While a number of media commentators adopted Bush's terminology in describing the enemy, a growing number admitted to a sense of apprehension about the usage of a term that is so emotive, and simultaneously so vague. "It is the prospect of fighting a battle that no one can tell when it's won,"[447] commented one editorialist shortly after the attacks on New York and Washington. The writer went on to note, "[E]very time my president speaks of a tireless crusade to rid the world of evil, I get a little more uneasy." A writer for the *Village Voice* was even more explicit about his uneasiness.

> George W. Bush has set the terms of the impending battle: the good people of the world against the "evil folks," making it appear as if every nation in the coalition against terrorism – including the U.S. – is a bastion of human rights, while Afghanistan's Taliban and any other country that doesn't join in the coalition are the planet's only torturers, murderers, and supporters of terrorism.[448]

Both of these commentators object to the term "evil" on the basis of its tendency to present an extremely complex situation in simplistic terms. How, for example, does a nation know when it has defeated evil? Who is included among those who are termed as evil? What methods of warfare are appropriate for use against evil? As the official narrative of the war on terrorism widened to include Iraq, another newspaper editorialist added to the discourse questioning unspoken assumptions. Referring to the "smug moralizing that casts the war in Iraq as part of a broader battle between 'good' and 'evil,'"[449] one commentator warned about the tendencies of

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[446] Martin Walker, "Bush: Anti-Terror Campaign 'Good Versus Evil'," *United Press International*, 25 September 2001.
[447] Susan Nielsen, "With Infinite Unease, We Face Unending War on Terror," *Oregonian*, 23 September 2001.
[448] Michelangelo Signorile, "Hate Crimes," *Village Voice*, 9 October 2001.
[449] "Failures at the Top," *St. Petersburg Times*, 6 May 2004.

such terms to excuse any behavior by those termed "good" while reducing those among the "evil" to subhuman status. The writer argues that the notion of good versus evil,

> suggests that our troops and political leaders are above having to be subjected to the kinds of standards and safeguards (such as international inspections of prisons under our military control) that apply to lesser societies. It leads to a mind-set in which enemies, or perceived enemies, become less than human. And it leads to a defensiveness that casts any scrutiny or criticism as an assault on the righteousness of the cause.[450]

Indeed, the use of a term as volatile as "evil" presents obstacles to democratic deliberation and decisions of foreign policy. Can one negotiate with evil? Is it appropriate to use diplomacy with evil? Rhetorical scholar Christian Spielvogel, drawing on work by Sam Keen, argues that framing the conflict as one between good and evil,

> absolves humankind of agency by placing "God" in control of events, limits the range of options to peacefully resolve the conflict, and raises the conflict to dangerously apocalyptic levels by casting the participants and their motives in ultimate, theistic terms.[451]

David Zarefsky argues further that such Manichean framing prevents debate and criticism, as any objection to the actions described as "good" puts one automatically in league with "evil." Zarefsky concludes that with such characterization, "[t]he space for challenging the official view is closed."[452] It is beyond the scope of my project to determine whether or not this framing has effectively curtailed criticism of the Bush administration. What I have argued is that categorizing the enemy as so monstrous as to be beyond redemption has severely limited possible courses of action, and has required the construction of a messianic hero capable of prevailing against evil. As I have noted, there seems to be an unconscious societal longing for the messianic hero who will provide salvation from the extremely dangerous "evil" faced in the war on terrorism.

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[450] "Failures at the Top."
[451] Christian Spielvogel, "'You Know Where I Stand:' Moral Framing of the War on Terrorism and the Iraq War in the 2004 Presidential Campaign," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs,* 8, (2005), 557.
[452] David Zarefsky, "Strategic Maneuvering through Persuasive Definitions: Implications for Dialectic and Rhetoric," *Argumentation,* 20, (2006), 410.

The two case studies and the fictional television programs I have analyzed contribute to the larger cultural construction of this warrior hero. The first case, Abu Ghraib, showed clearly who he is not. He is not depicted as a failed male soldier whose lack of professionalism was so unwisely caught on film. The savior is also manifestly not portrayed as female, especially not those uncontained, sexually charged gender outlaws the world came to know from the abuse photographs. The second case study adds evidence to this last point, namely, that women may be unqualified by cultural mythologies to provide salvation. Their reduction to their sexual bodies and the discourses regarding their "polluted" blood emphasize their lack of qualification as messianic warriors. That these women were perceived by military standards to be invaluable "tools" against Arab men, but were then vilified by civilian commentators, accentuates that Judeo-Christian cultural understandings of women's bodies and blood shares some fundamental grounds with the "enemy" Islam.

Where news media helps to provide evidence of who the savior *is not*, fictional television programming has used dramatic license to suggest who he *is*. He is sketched as one who can withstand any amount of torture, and face it without betraying fear or emotion. He is one whose body is utilitarian and can be transcended, and whose blood is so sacred that it can be used as a visual metaphor of courage and sacrifice. He is someone who can torture righteously. He will show no repentance for his acts of torture, but he will show remorse for the acts he is forced to perform. And, indeed, he is forced to perform them, not only by the intractable, animalistic enemy, but also by the very fact of his being a hero. As I have argued, the messianic warrior hero may even be undergoing construction as one who *must* torture if he is to maintain his heroic credentials. This construction of a mythic messianic savior can only exist by defining what he is not. As Kenneth Burke noted, the act of defining selects a portion of reality while deflecting and

rejecting other possible realities.[453] What I have attempted in this dissertation is to explore the ways in which such defining takes place by scrutinizing seemingly unrelated discourses to see how they have contributed to the overall narratives that redefine gender through the use of torture. In the next section I briefly return to my critical orientation and discuss how critical rhetoric provides useful tools for a project that is both scholarly and political.

A Critical Rhetoric Revisited

In his 1983 article in the *Journal of Communication*, Vincent Mosco wrote of "the dense web connecting seemingly unrelated forces in society"[454] and how critical research can lay bare the web. Drawing upon Mosco's metaphor, Raymie McKerrow elucidates the role of critical rhetoric as "serving a demystifying function."[455] As McKerrow puts it, critical rhetoric can serve this function, and expose the "dense web," "by demonstrating the silent and often non-deliberate ways in which rhetoric conceals as much as it reveals through its relationship with power/knowledge."[456] It is my hope, as I near the end of this project, that I have contributed to the effort of revealing the web that connects seemingly unconnected discourses that help to make the practice of torture achieve a level of social acceptability.

One aspect of these discourses is that they are influenced by worldviews that operate at a deep structural level, and are exercised across cultures. The view of male bodies and blood as elementally sacred, in contrast to uncontained and troubling female bodies and blood, is present in ancient ideologies that underwrite all three of the world's major monotheisms. One need not consciously ascribe to such worldviews in order to be influenced by them. That these "discursive

[453] Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 50.
[454] V. Mosco, "Critical Research and Role of Labor," *Journal of Communication*, 33, (1983).
[455] Raymie E. McKerrow, "Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis," *Communication Monographs*, 45, (1989), 92.
[456] McKerrow, 92.

formations"[457] have been iterated and enlarged through generations speaks to their ability to influence and direct ways of thinking and being that may often remain hidden. Americans still clearly share in these formations. My goal, then, in undertaking this project has been to explore some of the assumptions that make possible egregious human rights' abuses in the name of American heroism. A critical rhetoric is ideally suited for such an emancipatory project. John Sloop points out, "If successful, a critical rhetoric project…gathers discourses from the public involving gender and sexual norms and the popularly understood 'morals' underpinning these norms."[458] By explicitly interrogating these unspoken "morals" and "norms," a critical rhetoric assists in exposing their existence. As McKerrow notes, "On demonstrating the manner in which our social relations constrain us, often in ways that are virtually invisible, which occur at such a deep and remote level in our past as to be anonymous, the possibility of revolt is opened."[459]

As I have argued in this dissertation, the entrenched belief in the high value of male blood is one of the invisible cultural norms that make possible the creation of a messianic warrior hero by denigrating and constraining women and conceptions of femininity. Complementing this dogma is the invisibility of masculinity as a gender performance, or even its existence as a gender. Adding to this narrative chain is the framing of the conflict in terms of good and evil ideologies, and Judeo-Christianity against Islam. Though these worldviews may seem to operate independently of each other, I have attempted in this project to show that the convergences of these discourses in this cultural moment have precipitated the creation of a perception of a hierarchy of warriors culminating in a masculine messianic hero who is authorized to perform torture in service of the greater good.

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[457] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & the Discourse of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, a division of Random House, Inc., 1972).
[458] John M. Sloop, *Disciplining Gender: Rhetorics of Sex Identity in Contemporary US Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 144.
[459] McKerrow, 97.

One of the things this project has demonstrated is how many more cultural artifacts may contain these very same gendered assumptions that make torture a more socially palatable enterprise. I have scrutinized two case studies, and one relatively small genre of popular entertainment television. Others areas for exploration include, but are not limited to, other popular television genres that use torture as a narrative. Specifically, a number of popular science fiction dramas regularly engage torture as a plot device, and it would be a fruitful investigation to determine how these programs differ from the ones I have analyzed – if they do differ. Another area for investigation is feature films, both those that seriously engage torture as part of foreign policy in the war on terrorism, and those that are part of an increasingly popular genre known as "torture porn."[460] This genre is represented by such films as the *Saw* franchise, *Hostel*, *Wolf Creek*, *The Devil's Rejects*, *Captivity*, etc. These films have been described as, "bloody and cruel and often crudely acted. But they're typically stylish and, at times, thoroughly scary," even as their emphasis is described as being "purely on torture and pain and death."[461] Subjecting these films to a critical rhetoric may provide insights into why these films have achieved a level of popularity and are not simply dismissed as stylized snuff films.

Widening the scope of critical investigation may reveal any number of hidden assumptions that support discourses amenable to torture. As a critical rhetorician it is my belief that the way we as a society think about torture and talk about torture provides a material contribution to policies allowing for torture. The next section provides a few concluding thoughts by discussing where torture stands now in U.S. policy and where it could go in the future.

[460] Dan Webster, "New Horror Genre Is Matter of Taste," *Spokesman Review*, 7 March 2008.
[461] Webster.

Conclusion: Looking Ahead

To borrow a phrase from Kenneth Burke, "Where are we now?"[462]

In March, 2008, President Bush vetoed a bill that would have required CIA interrogators to follow methods mandated in the Army Field Manual.[463] These methods exclude such things as waterboarding, electrocution, and mock executions. In his radio address on the day of the veto, Bush explained his reasons for his action. He claimed that the bill would deprive the intelligence community of "the tools they need to stop the terrorists."[464] Bush argued that because the Army Field Manual is a public document, terrorists could obtain it and train to resist these methods. The president made a point of warning his audience that the American people are not safe from Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda who remain determined to attack again on U.S. soil. "The bill Congress sent to me," the president stated, "would deprive the CIA of the authority to use these safe and lawful techniques." The president differentiated these techniques from those found in the Army Field Manual by claiming that the techniques in the "manual were designed for use by soldiers questioning lawful combatants captured on the battlefield. They were not intended for intelligence professionals trained to question hardened terrorists." The president concluded his address by claiming that it is because of the work of these very "intelligence professionals" that the United States has not suffered any attacks in over six-and-a-half years.

President Bush's confidence in the "tools" he proclaims as necessary is in contrast to notable military leaders. Included among these is General David Petraeus, the Commanding General of Iraq. According to Petraeus, the methods in the Army Field Manual "work effectively

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[462] Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 45.
[463] Steven Lee Myers, "Bush Vetoes Bill on CIA Tactics, Affirming Legacy," *New York Times*, 9 March 2008.
[464] George W. Bush, "President's Radio Address," White House, http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2008/03/print/20080308.html

and humanely in eliciting information from detainees."[465] Petraeus is on record in his belief that torture is wrong, illegal, and neither useful nor necessary.[466] Similarly, retired Marine Major General Fred Haynes argued, "I think that it doesn't make any difference whether it's a war of insurgents or whether we're against uniformed people…torture is inhumane. It's against moral law…And it's against international and national law."[467] Despite this lack of support from military leaders, and that Congress showed overwhelming support for a 2005 bill requiring humane treatment of detainees,[468] congressional leaders were unable to muster enough votes to override Bush's veto.[469] In a somewhat surprising turn of events, one of the opponents of the 2008 bill was Senator John McCain, the primary architect of the 2005 Detainee Treatment Act. The presumptive Republican nominee for president argued that "he believed it would be a mistake to limit CIA interrogators to using only those techniques that were enumerated in the Field Manual."[470] The president and Senator McCain show a great deal of confidence in these unspecified techniques despite the fact that, according to an Air Force colonel and veteran interrogator, the government spends "almost nothing on studying interrogations."[471] With the acknowledgement from various officials that prevailing in the current conflict depends largely upon intelligence gathered from suspected terrorists, "experts say there has been little serious research to answer [the] crucial question" of "How do you get a terrorist to talk?"[472] The Bush Administration seems determined to use unnamed techniques while asking the American people

[465] "Military Leaders Support Interrogation Guidelines in Army Field Manual," *Congressional Documents and Publications*, 11 March 2008.
[466] "Military Leaders Support."
[467] "Military Leaders Support."
[468] Joseph L. Galloway and James Kuhnhenn, "Senate Votes for Torture Ban in Spending Bill," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 6 October 2005.
[469] "House Fails to Overturn Veto of Torture Bill," *Bismarck Tribune*, 12 March 2008.
[470] Michael Cooper, "McCain Draws Criticism on Torture Bill," *New York Times*, 17 February 2008.
[471] Scott Shane, "The Unstudied Art of Interrogation," *New York Times*, 9 March 2008.
[472] Shane.

to believe that these "tools" are "safe and lawful."[473] In addition to trusting a secretive administration regarding interrogation methods, the public is asked implicitly to trust those "intelligence professionals" who are given credit for keeping America safe.

With so few resources going toward research in methods of interrogation that may provide useful and legitimate intelligence, it is difficult to defend the position that "enhanced interrogation" methods are the "most valuable tools in the war on terror."[474] Rather, the unspoken beliefs of those who make and enforce policy may be that those who have been determined to be "evil" deserve no better, and diplomacy is reserved for those who have not been equated to animals. Having framed the enemy as pure evil, all that these limited imaginations permit is dosing them with evil. As Žižek argues, "for the most part, torture is not done in order to resolve a 'ticking-clock' situation, but for completely different reasons (to punish or break down the enemy psychologically, to terrorize the population to be subdued, and so on)."[475] While denying that the United States engages in torture, the Bush administration is clearly interested in asserting the right to use techniques that challenge this claim. As the nation has moved further away from the events that unfolded on September 11, 2001, and as a war with no end in sight continues to be waged in Iraq, more and more voices have been raised in outrage regarding the use of torture. It is the rare media commentary and, lately, even the rare evangelical Bush supporter,[476] who has attempted to legitimate the use of torture. Nonetheless, the totality of mass media discourses regarding the use of torture has not been as condemnatory as it may appear. Instead, a scrutiny of media discourses suggest that torture, like so many other

[473] Bush.
[474] Bush.
[475] Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (New York: Verso, 2002), 104.
[476] Rachel Zoll, "Evangelicals Condemn Torture," *Associated Press*, 12 March 2007.

things human beings engage in, is a gendered affair. As such, the degree of condemnation varies with the gender performance of the perpetrator.

The cases of abuse at Abu Ghraib, Gitmo, and Bagram seem to prove that men and women are equally capable of perpetrating acts of torture justified by the "new paradigm" of the war on terrorism. Unfortunately, the media discourses tell us much more than that men and women are equal opportunity torturers. They tell us that in the cultures clashing in the current international conflict, women cannot escape their sexual bodies, and are judged partly based on unspoken ancient traditions that describe their bodies and blood as solely sexual and as polluted. These discourses imply double discipline for women who perform torture, namely, legal and social discipline. Simultaneous discourses vaunt the blood of their male counterparts as a sacred substance that makes the bearers of this blood potential saviors. Women are portrayed as being unequal to the task of performing torture as their polluted blood, ideal for the job of emasculating Arab prisoners, offends the tenets of their own society. Meanwhile, male interrogators, who operate in the shadows, are credited with using torture effectively to keep America safe. Violence is perceived as a natural component of masculinity, where women – even women warriors – are depicted as having an ambivalent relationship to violence. This ambivalence makes women unsuited to perform the violence of torture, where some men, especially in popular fiction television programs, are portrayed as ideally suited for such a task.

These discourses bring to light the implication of focusing on the sex of interrogators and soldiers when women are involved in torture and ignoring it when men are perpetrators. Few of the legitimate reporters and commentators that contributed to the discourses surrounding torture cases have implied approval of torture. There may be some argument about what constitutes torture, but whatever it ultimately is for the different news media representatives very few

believe that the U.S. should engage in it. But although torture is *generally* viewed as unacceptable, it is *specifically* unacceptable for women. This implies a contradiction in the nearly unanimous anti-torture news media conviction. For if torture is absolutely unacceptable for women, it must be, to some degree, more acceptable for men. If men are not psychically damaged by inflicting it, but women are, and if there is no roundly accepted cultural taboo against male violence, as there is for women, then a fissure in the cultural torture prohibition comes into relief. We cannot claim with legitimacy that we condemn the use of torture if our cultural discourses apply to it degrees of acceptability. If this is where we find ourselves as a society, it is imperative to discover how we might move to a different cultural frame.

As a scholarly project, this dissertation reveals discourses and assumptions that enable the practice of torture as a masculine gendered performance. But with an act that has such profound material implications, the time is ripe to begin imagining other possibilities and discourses that alter the cultural frames that may make torture achieve a level of social acceptability.[477] With the implication of so many deep-seated traditions, conversations advocating change must be widespread. At a fundamental level, religious and cultural institutions that describe male bodies and blood as the ideal and denigrate the female "other" must begin to exercise self-reflexivity. Could narratives be introduced into our cultures that refuse to see female blood only in terms of reproductivity? Could these narratives celebrate the onset of menses much as male circumcision is celebrated? This could be aided by a change in models of sex education that included young girls *and* boys in positive discussions regarding menstruation that do not center on medicalizing this natural event, or in treating it as something shameful to be hidden. And discourses that define menstruation as a "curse" must cease.

[477] My thanks to Jamie Landau and Bethany Keeley for the brainstorming session that resulted in some of these ideas.

Other institutions that rely on strict binary gendering must also be revamped, and chief among these is perhaps the military. As women have disproved every myth that is used to keep them from accessing all areas of military service – particularly active combat – the only obstacle that remains is military tradition that continues to repeat antiquated notions of gender division to its own peril. As Carol Burke argues,

> the uncritical propagation of [military] folklore threatens both the official recruitment and acceptance of women, which have become absolutely crucial to the maintenance of the armed forces' strength, and the good order and discipline upon which the military must stake its readiness to exercise that strength in defense of the nation's security.[478]

This is not to say that integrating women into every aspect of the armed services will prevent torture, but it may serve to erase notions of essentialized gender norms. To this end, the armed services, like any other institution that receives public funding, should be required to submit to equal employment opportunity and anti-sexual harassment laws that would remove training drills that denigrate femininity in order to shore up masculinity. Disconnecting violence from masculinity may help to further disconnect it from normalizing practices of torture.

Mass media is in a good position to aid in this disconnecting process. With notions of gender infecting nearly every aspect of society, it is important for media commentators to be aware of their own assumptions. This may mean including seminars in gender theory in journalism schools in order to expose budding journalists to hidden suppositions. With regard to entertainment television programming, day six of *24* provides an example of how things could be different. What if the creative minds behind the program had elected to make Jack psychically unable to resume his former ways? What if this hero had learned from his experiences in China that torture is inhumane and ineffective? What if he had used his often demonstrated intelligence and ingenuity to find more creative and less brutal methods of getting suspects to cooperate?

[478] Carol Burke, *Camp All-American, Hanoi Jane, and the High-and-Tight: Gender, Folklore, and Changing Military Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 10.

Perhaps the program would have experienced a decline in viewership, but perhaps not. It is possible that a dramatic storyline could have been opened up that would have contributed to reframing Jack's masculinity in more thoughtful terms, and would have honestly confronted the act of torture as an immoral affront to humanity instead of a noble expression of heroism.

Regarding torture, with the secrecy surrounding so many of the defense programs that hide these practices under the guise of national security, it is the responsibility of a nation's citizenry in a democracy to demand accountability and transparency. Would it be possible to imagine the creation of citizen review boards that, much like civilian grand juries, investigate allegations of torture in order to determine whether or not prosecution of perpetrators should proceed? Such a review board would be separate from the partisanship of congressional committees, and independent of the conflicts of interest in military and executive branch attempts at justice. A review process would provide a deterrent to both interrogators and the chain of command against authorizing torture. Facing accountability from those in whose names torture is claimed to be necessary seems to be a missing, but necessary, component in the current judicial process.

Perhaps most importantly, resources must be expended in exploring effective methods of interrogations. With corporate America spending billions of dollars to find ways of getting consumers to cooperate with advertising, surely there are promising lines of research that would enable interrogators to get terrorist suspects to cooperate without applying Draconian methods. To suggest that such demonstrated corporate ingenuity would be ineffective without even trying exposes motives of those who authorize programs of torture as not so much interested in engendering cooperation as in exacting brutal revenge.

It is my hope that this dissertation will begin to fill an intellectual void with regard to the acceptance of the use of torture in the war on terrorism. By using scholarly tools of criticism to expose enabling practices, and suggesting possibilities for new conversations, rhetorical scholars can make academic and political contributions. The consequences of normalizing torture demand of us no less.

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