The Fallen Woman Archetype: Media Representations of Lynndie England, Gender, and the (Ab)uses of U.S. Female Soldiers

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In April 2004 revelations of the torture and abuse scandal at Abu Ghraib detention center in Iraq created a strategic and media crisis for the U.S. military. Media coverage focused on Private Lynndie England and framed her personal and professional behaviors via the fallen woman and warrior hero archetypes. We argue that England’s media construction obfuscates military culpability for the events at Abu Ghraib, preserves patriarchal militarism, and subordinates women in the U.S. military. Keywords: Lynndie England, Abu Ghraib, media framing, gendered militarism, female soldiers, archetype

In April 2004, a year after the start of the U.S. and Coalition forces invasion of Iraq, 60 Minutes II and The New Yorker broke a provocative story accusing U.S. soldiers of abusing and torturing Iraqi detainees at the U.S. military prison/detention center, Abu Ghraib, in Iraq. The story became widely covered and was accompanied by graphic images of Iraqi detainees naked, in degrading, and sexually explicit positions. United States’ military personnel were featured in the photographs in what seemed to be a display of pride and power as they “softened” detainees to achieve intelligence goals. Private Lynndie England, a female processing clerk, who served in the 372nd Military Police Company was positioned at the center of the scandal. She was shown in widely published photographs smiling, gesturing, and laughing at Iraqi detainees. The most publicized image of the scandal showed England holding a “leash” around the neck of a submissive, naked Iraqi prisoner as he crawled on the prison floor.

On September 26, 2005, England was convicted of one count of conspiracy, four counts of maltreating detainees, and one count of com-
mitting an indecent act. She was sentenced to three years of confinement and served 521 days before being paroled and dishonorably discharged from the U.S. military. England’s trial and conviction followed a plea deal, which had initially been rejected on the grounds that England did not understand her actions were wrong. England was one of 11 soldiers court-martialed and convicted in the Abu Ghraib scandal. Specialist Charles Graner, the alleged leader of the abuse, and England’s boyfriend at the time, received a 10-year sentence. Other U.S. military personnel were investigated and reprimanded for their role in the scandal; however, no senior officers in the U.S. military were ever put on trial nor did they receive widespread media attention. Rather, England became the story as the Abu Ghraib scandal was given perspective via a mythic narrative of a young woman morally adrift from her military and feminine moorings.

The Abu Ghraib scandal gained prominence because of its potential for dramatization and sensationalism and its ability to feature a female protagonist in one of the most masculine of professions. Indeed, media discourse and imagery of England comprised the U.S. public’s first look at a fallen woman soldier, bringing to light Enloe’s (2000) words quoted above and reigniting the public’s debate over women’s roles in the military. Weinstein and D’Amico (1999) argue that the “military’s privileged position makes it ... a fundamental site for the construction of gender, that is, the defining of the boundaries of behavior—indeed, of life possibilities for people we call men and women” (p. 5). Moreover, research reveals that the media promote patriarchal militarism particularly during times of war (Enloe, 2000; Kellner, 2004; Kumar, 2006; Lemish, 2005; Taylor & Hardman, 2004). Given the militaristic climate in the U.S., examining the myriad ways media, via gendered narratives, support the military’s hegemonic structure and purpose becomes imperative (Enloe, 1990, 2000; Howard & Prividera, 2004; Lemish, 2005; Prividera & Howard, 2006; Taylor & Hardman, 2004).

In this research, we examine media portrayals of Lynndie England to illustrate how the media perpetuate patriarchal militarism through the subordination of women, femininity, and the female body. Our path to understanding begins with an examination of gender and U.S. military culture. We then discuss how mythic and archetypal models guide media constructions (and consumer interpretations) of military personnel. From an analysis of visual images and news transcripts on England, we demonstrate how the media represented her as incongruent with the warrior hero and defined her as a contemporary fallen white woman through her
moral, professional, and sexual failings. We illustrate how this archetypal rendering obfuscates military culpability for the events at Abu Ghraib, preserves patriarchal militarism, and subordinates white women in the U.S. military.

Gender and U.S. Military Culture

Scholars have long argued that white women and women of color have been exploited to advance militarism, military conflicts, and war (Cohn, 1987; Enloe 1990, 2000; Taylor & Hardman, 2004). The U.S. military-industrial complex itself is founded on patriarchy, hierarchy, (hyper)masculinity, violence, and the marginalization of all expressions of femininity. The types of militarized exploitation endured by women include rape, prostitution, abuse, tokenism, and confinement to their symbolic place waiting for their beloved warrior heroes. Enloe (2000) observes:

There are very few instances in any country of military wives joining in an alliance with military prostitutes and together devising a joint action along with women soldiers, all for the sake of dismantling the usually elaborate ideology of femininity constructed by military authorities to serve their own institutional interests. (p. xiii)

Irrespective of race and ethnicity, distancing these groups of women from each other obscures manipulations of gender and its exploitation under militarism and patriarchy.

In spite of women’s increased presence in the male-dominated armed forces (U.S. Department of Defense, 2006), they continue to experience violence and resistance to gender integration (Enloe, 2000; Nantais & Lee, 1999; Woodward, 2000). Weinstein and D’Amico (1999) argue that for women to acclimate into the military, their identities and bodies must be “camouflaged” to conform to a (hyper)masculinized space.

For soldiers and soldiering, femininity is discursively and materially constructed to justify (hyper)masculinity. In mythic narratives, the feminine “motherland” is protected by the masculine soldier (Enloe, 2000; Howard & Prvidera, 2004; Nantais & Lee, 1999; Peterson, 1998; Prvidera & Howard, 2006; Woodward, 2000). This gendered protector-male/protected-female relationship is essential to a militarized patriarchal narrative and practice: She needs him to fight for and save her and he needs
her as a reason to fight and be the savior. Jeffreys' (2007) argument follows from this ideological truism: "Without the concept of 'women' as social inferiors from whom the male soldiers must differentiate themselves by their actions, the male soldier might have no founding myth to hang onto, no rationale" (p. 18). These myths "replicate easily" and "export well" (Taylor & Hardman, 2004, p. 4). As such, they are widely perpetuated in literature, folklore, metaphors, and the media. Taylor and Hardman (2004) argue that "because the dominant paradigm needs violence to sustain it, our modern western cultures have created and perpetuated narratives that glorify war, warriors, and the leaders who make war" (p. 5). These enduring archetypal images of warriors and their mythic fight for democracy and civility rely on essentialist notions of women and men and cross racial and ethnic lines.

For centuries, women have been integral to militaristic endeavors, yet they remain marginalized as inferiors or liabilities. In spite of passage of the Women's Armed Service Integration Act in 1948, which granted women official membership into the U.S. military, they remain excluded from combat roles to "protect them" from the risks of battle. Yet, in practice, distinctions between combatants and noncombatants are blurred and definitions of combat have evolved over time to serve military ideology and political purposes at the expense of gender equity and/or equality. As observed by Goldstein (2001), female soldiers of all races and ethnicities are actually serving in combat zones even though they are in noncombat roles. Thus, women are participating "in the line of fire" without those in power incurring the political consequences of making that service into an explicit policy.

Although combat exclusions are contested in academic and civilian circles, they still sanction the "othering" of women of all races and ethnicities in military service. The result is the institutionalization of a two-class system that legitimizes the glass ceiling and furthers the chasm between the female-noncombatant and the male-warrior. Furthermore, only the warrior can reach the top of the hierarchy (Woodward, 2000) and he is usually white (Prividera & Howard, 2006). Such militarized ideological positioning also is manifest in civilian practice. For example, Lawless (2004) found that since 9/11, people are less likely to vote for female presidential candidates of any race or ethnicity as males are viewed as more competent at handling national security and military crises. Militaristic discourse and practice institutionalize (and normalize) the subordination of the feminine to the masculine.
Jeffreys (2007) argues that "women in the military are in double jeopardy" from enemy attack and the repeated use of gendered violence (i.e., rape), harassment (i.e., routine scrutiny, rumors, sabotage), and intimidation by those allegedly on their side (p. 16). Yet, violence towards women is not confined to the body; its discursive elements are even more widespread as revealed by male cadets at the Citadel: "They called you a ‘pussy’ all the time... or a fucking little girl" (Faludi, 1999, pp. 145-146). Moreover, female soldiers of all races and ethnicities experience gender stereotyping (Boldry, Wood, & Kashy, 2001; Holland, 2006; Prividera & Howard, 2006), ridicule (Enloe, 2000), ostracism (Pershing, 2003), and a lack of mentorship opportunities in the U.S. military (Moore & Webb, 2001). Thus, femininity is devalued and women are subordinate and objectified while male camaraderie is reified through women’s marginalization.

Patriarchal militarism drives U.S. political, economic, military, and civilian understandings of gender and race. Taylor and Hardman (2004) argue that "the existing ‘superpower’ and its cohort global economic and political systems are patriarchal” linking “war and gender in the current world” (p. 4). Taylor and Hardman’s (2004) argument is supported by Anderson (1999), who states that the Unites States’ capital outlay on military expenditures reifies a white patriarchal, Western militarism with profound gendered consequences. These consequences are revealed in Enloe’s (2000) observation that Western militaries “recruit and deploy women in only those ways that will not subvert the fundamentally masculinized culture of the military... these strategies never intend that women provide the majority—or even a third—of the military’s manpower” (pp. 237-238). Thus, U.S. recruitment of women is driven by need rather than a desire to promote gender equality and/or equity (Nantais & Lee, 1999). Moreover, economically disadvantaged women and women of color are disproportionately recruited and subsequently placed in low paying support positions such as secretary and clerk (Goldstein, 2001; Sadler, 1999). Thus, we are reminded that “to begin to un-gender the military, we have to recognize that we must also examine and undo other social hierarchies that intertwine with, support, and maintain the current gender divisions” (D’Amico & Weinstein, 1999, p. 260).

In summary, the institutionalized marginalization and (ab)use of women in the U.S. military is a complex multifaceted product of a white, Western, patriarchal militaristic ideology. This framework is reified in the gendered myths and archetypal models that concurrently normalize the
male (usually white) as "protector" and the military as a (hyper)masculine domain. In today's digitized age, the news media serve as the primary medium for this ideological propagation.

Media Framing and Social Archetypes

The stories told by the media are not simply facsimiles of events. Media personnel are constrained by time and space in both the gathering and presentation of news. All news stories are by necessity condensed. Such condensation is bound by ideological assumptions that mask, reveal, and frame story elements. These ideological framings inform media consumers about what and how they should think (Kumar, 2006; Kuypers, 2002, 2005) while simultaneously maintaining allegiance to political, governmental, and/or corporate elites (Kellner, 2004; Kumar, 2006; Luther & Miller, 2005; Ryan, Carragee, & Meinhofer, 2001). As summarized by Entman (1993):

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. (p. 52)

Media frames often appear monolithic, objective, and absolute because "the meaning of an event is framed as the only possible meaning and we organize our conduct, attitude and belief system accordingly" (Del Zotto, 2002, p. 142). Indeed, when the public is presented with consistent frames for news, which is normative during this era of consolidated media, those frames become thematic (Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Luther & Miller, 2005). Such consistent media frames (and their resulting themes) are (re)produced via myth and archetype.

For Jung (1934/1981) and Campbell (1949), myth and archetype are foundational to personal development and social understanding. Lule (2001) defines myth as a "sacred, societal story that draws from archetypal figures and forms to offer exemplary models for human life" (p. 15). Myths are enduring yet evolving cultural stories that shape families, institutions, and nations through their presentation of cultural truisms and values. The archetype (foundational to or emerging from a myth) is the ideal form of a specific actor (e.g., mother, hero, teacher) and the one to emulate (Howard & Prividera, 2006). Myths and archetypes are ideologically bound (Howard & Prividera, 2006; Lule, 2001). What constitutes an appropriate archetypal role model or narrative conclusion is presupposed
in the ideological values embraced by the narrator and audience. A well-framed story using archetypal characters or mythic narratives is desirable for the media and their viewing public because of the ease in which these characters and narratives can be accepted, understood, and consumed (Berkowitz, 2005; Howard & Prividera, 2004; Lule, 2001; Woodward, 2000).

As observed by Lule (2001) and Woodward (2000), myths reproduced in journalistic narratives support the social order. Thus, archetypal actors may be police officers (heroes) or criminals (villains) but rarely do they challenge the social-judicial system that defines who is hero or villain. The ideological dimension of archetypal framing is revealed in how archetypes in ideological disfavor fade to the background and exist with little more than fictional significance. For example, women of any race or ethnicity are, by definition, not embraced as military actors in patriarchal social orders. Thus, the “woman warrior” archetype primarily manifests as fictional (e.g., Xena in *Xena: Warrior Princess*, Sydney Bristow in *Alias*). Furthermore, she takes on significantly gendered sexual dimensions and vulnerabilities absent in the portrayal of male warriors and she is almost always white.

The symbolic power of the U.S. military lies in the ease with which it ties the archetypal and patriarchal role of protector (warrior) to the state (motherland). Masculinity is foundational to the militarized protection myth. All military archetypes and actors are implicitly and explicitly measured by their masculinity and their worth determined accordingly. The dominant military archetype, the one to emulate, is the warrior hero (Dawson, 1994; Newsinger, 1997; Parker, 1985). This is an archetypal icon that relies on and glorifies (hyper)masculinity, whiteness, heterosexuality, moral and national superiority, and violence—all of which are sanctioned during times of war (Howard & Prividera, 2004; Prividera & Howard, 2006). Thus, not all masculine figures are entitled to be the warrior. As manifest in the United States, his signification of national identity is almost exclusively white (Howard & Prividera, in press; Prividera & Howard, 2006). Consequently, men of color can be the combatants but are denied legitimacy as a warrior representing the U.S. state. Moreover, the warrior hero is the antithesis of that which is feminine. In fact, “for the warrior hero, to falter is female” (Woodward, 2000, p. 652). For the warrior hero to fulfill his destiny, he needs antagonists, support, and guidance. Female archetypes (i.e., mother, wife, and lover) primarily support the activities of male archetypes (Howard & Prividera, 2004).
Even the archetypal antagonist is typically cast in feminine terms (i.e., weak, fragile) or simply inferior (i.e., corrupt, immoral) and therefore feminine (Peterson, 1998). In tandem, these archetypes a priori separate women, femininity, and the female body from soldiering (Holland, 2006; Howard & Prividera, 2004; Prividera & Howard, 2006).

Consequently female soldiers are faced with a double bind in their lived military experience and journalistic coverage (Howard & Prividera, 2004). Journalists and media producers are faced with rendering ideologically inconsistent roles (i.e., female-soldier) as consistent in the stories they tell. During the last two decades of white female soldiers' (e.g., Jessica Lynch, Rhonda Cornum, Melissa Rathbun-Nealy) news coverage, the inconsistency has been resolved by focusing on their femininity, vulnerability, victimization, female bodies, and/or relational dimensions to the exclusion of their military identity (Gruner, 1994; Holland, 2006; Howard & Prividera, 2004; Nantais & Lee, 1999; Prividera & Howard, 2006). In the case of Lynndie England, the inconsistency is framed via an adaptation of a Victorian archetypal model: the fallen woman.

Victorian white women embodied a strict moral code to preserve the caste and character of the family and community (Hellerstein, Hume, & Offen, 1981). Submission to white patriarchy was endemic as women's bodies and dress were used and adorned for men's pleasure and desire (Hellerstein et al. 1981). As stated by Nead (1984), "It was a double standard of morality—sexual desire was regarded in the man as normal and unavoidable, but was seen in the woman as deviant and pathological" (p. 26).

The Victorian fallen woman, who is, of course, white, is defined by her failure to meet the moral and material expectations of the time (Auerbach, 1980; Hellerstein et al. 1981). Women engaging in sexual acts outside of the marital institution were not only a threat to the marriage and morality of the family, but also to other women, the character of the upper class, and the integrity of the national identity (Auerbach, 1980). Those who did not live up to the social expectations (e.g., style of dress) of their caste were also marked for their indiscretions (Hellerstein et al. 1981). For example, working class and poor women were portrayed as a fearsome threat to social order for their material failure to comply with appropriate Victorian standards of womanhood. Furthermore, the relationship of the Victorian woman to the nation precluded women of color from even experiencing national membership (see Shome, 2001). Thus, the fallen woman archetype is acutely gendered, classed, and raced.
Archetypes transform over time as they adapt to world circumstances, political shifts, and social events (Berkowitz, 2005; Rushing, 1995). However, contemporary ideological thinking continues to normalize whiteness and the middle class (Cloud, 2004; Prvidera & Howard, 2006; Shome, 2001). Poverty and want preclude the performance of “appropriate” gender roles used to preserve social order (Harkins, 2004) as people of color and those of the working class continue to be associated with questionable sexual mores, ethics, and character (Newitz & Wray, 1997). Consequently, today’s fallen woman continues to be raced and classed. Even so, the contemporary woman can now fall by deviating from the social expectations of her gender, class, race, and/or office. For example, the profession of female soldier, regardless of color, is itself a falling for women who leave the archetypal feminine roles of caregiver and wife to embrace masculine roles of service and sacrifice (Gruner, 1994; Howard & Prvidera, 2004; Prvidera & Howard, 2006). By stepping into the masculine role of warrior, she has, ipso facto, failed at being a woman. This dilemma is compounded in the case of England, whose behaviors, gender, race, class, and military identity demand a novel approach for constructing her and the narrative.

Method

Berkowitz (2005) argues that examining myths and archetypes “embedded in news requires a longitudinal examination of media content, because recurring patterns begin to stand out through readings of similar occurrences. Seeing these patterns across multiple media organizations further helps detect their widespread adoption” (p. 610). Adapting Berkowitz’s (2005) approach, this study retrieved and examined data on England from a variety of media sources.

First, using the LexisNexis database, we retrieved transcripts of all news stories on England from three major networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) between May 4, 2004, and October 31, 2005. This covers the time when the abuse and torture at Abu Ghraib was first reported in U.S. media until the time of England’s sentencing and incarceration. We selected these sources because of their accessibility to the public. In most areas, the three major networks can be viewed without cable or satellite programming. In addition, all data is available on the World Wide Web. A total of 173 news stories were generated. Specifically, ABC produced 44 stories, CBS produced 70 stories, and NBC produced 59 stories. Story types included
personal profiles, interviews, commentaries, newscasts, news articles, and special reports. Second, we examined the widely published photographs of prison abuse at Abu Ghraib, which were repeatedly referenced in our data. Third, we explored the (May 12, 2004) transcript from 60 Minutes II and Seymour Hersh's (May 10, 2004) article in The New Yorker—the two outlets that initially broke the story. Fourth, we reviewed the 53 page Taguba Report (2004) written by Major General Antonio Taguba, which detailed the conditions in the Abu Ghraib prison. Finally, we viewed Rory Kennedy's (2007) documentary on Abu Ghraib with interviews from U.S. soldiers, Iraqi detainees, and government officials. Our data collection procedures are consistent with Altheide's (1996) description of "progressive theoretical sampling." This refers to the process of obtaining additional sources as an "emerging understanding" is gained on a topic (Altheide, 1996, p. 33).

We examined how archetypal renderings revealed the symbolic connections among news content, ideology, the military, and England. We focused on the application of archetypal models in news narratives, including the warrior hero and fallen woman archetypes. Consistent with Altheide's (1996) discussion of qualitative media analysis, our research was "systematic ... but not rigid" (p. 16). We examined each news transcript closely with a focus on the language used to describe and characterize England and with specific attention to any intersections of gender, patriarchy, class, race, militarism, soldiering, and war. As stated by Altheide (1996), "themes are the recurring typical theses" that appear throughout the texts (p. 31). As we reviewed the data, various patterns of discourse and imagery emerged but all shared one common theme: morality. The focus on England and her morality led the media to reappropriate the Victorian fallen woman archetype and cast England as iconic in the news coverage of Abu Ghraib.

The Impossibility of the Female Soldier: Archetypal Renderings of England

Our analysis begins by illustrating the intensely gendered nature of England's media coverage, the objectification of her femininity, and a falsely attributed agency. We then discuss the media construction of England through the warrior hero and fallen woman archetypes. Our analysis moves to England's partial redemption as a citizen (and mother)
through her displacement from her military post. Finally, we address how the narrative of England absolves the military by obfuscating its role in the events at Abu Ghraib. Ultimately, we argue that media constructions of Lynndie England reinforce patriarchy by presenting an ideologically coherent narrative that subordinates white women in the U.S. military.

**England’s Objectification**

That England was not the main perpetrator of the abuse and torture that occurred at Abu Ghraib went undisputed, although media coverage placed her at its center. Through the recurrent use of photographs and images, and in the media discourse that identified her as the most “visible,” “famous,” and “recognizable figure in those notorious pictures,” England took center stage. As the focus of the camera’s gaze, she became the “face” of the scandal and the “international symbol” of abuse and torture at Abu Ghraib. England’s objectification was distinctly feminine as media consistently described her as “small,” “petite,” and “pixie-like.” Moreover, media coverage almost universally infantilized her as the “poster girl,” “young girl,” and “poster child” of the Abu Ghraib scandal. Her femininity and incongruence with the warrior hero archetype made her objectification easy and ideologically desirable. In short, her female body and identity drew the media eye to her. If media reported fact alone, Graner, who is said to have orchestrated the abuse rather than England, would have been centralized as “the story.” Instead, media place Graner’s story secondary to England’s.

Prior to her objectification by the media, however, the military objectified England. Both the military and her male peers used her for her female body rather than her officially assigned military role of clerk. In photos taken by members of her military unit, England was a prop, strategically placed to maximize the degradation of the inmates. In the process of oppressing others, England was simultaneously objectified. Interviewer Brian Maass asked England why she would be present in front of naked detainees to which she replied:

> For Psyop reasons, to show to other inmates, if you will or whatever, because I’m a female, and in the Muslim culture, it’s very embarrassing or humiliating to be naked in front of another female, especially if it’s an American. (*CBS Evening News, May 12, 2004*)
England’s presence functions similarly to the presence of the male detainees who also were used as props for their mutual degradation and humiliation. Both England and the detainees were transformed from agents to objects with England executing her sworn duty as a feminine object used to shame the enemy. Indeed, anything feminine that could violate the enemy was welcomed into the discursive and material space at Abu Ghraib. For example, Iraqi detainees were forced to wear “female panties” on their heads to facilitate humiliation (Kennedy, 2007). They were also branded with feminine figures on their bodies and forced to imitate feminine sexual roles (Kennedy, 2007). What remains unexplored in media coverage is that such exploitation of England and the feminine were contrived and ordered by England’s male military superiors. In effect, U.S. soldiers mocked femininity and, as a consequence, female soldiers, through the use of feminine artifacts to oppress the enemy.

The degree of England’s exploitation increased significantly when photographs of her with Graner having intimate relations in front of the detainees were discussed. Here, England’s sexual exploitation functions to subvert her status while simultaneously elevating Graner’s. The photos are complex artifacts of real and symbolic violence against women and the detainees; they also are and were constructed, coordinated, and controlled by men serving to propagate gendered and violent militarism. Moreover, the media assumed England’s consent irrespective of the levels at which that consent was manufactured.

**England’s Agency?**

Even though she denied it, media narratives attempted to bestow complete agency to England. For example, in an interview, Stone Philips stated, “England said the pictures of her [with the detainees] were taken by Graner or at his insistence, that he pressured her to be a prop” (Dateline NBC, October 2, 2005). England explains: “And he wanted me in the picture, and I was like, ‘no way.’ And . . . Graner kept being persistent, ‘Oh, come on, just take the picture, take the picture.’” But Phillips’ assessment of England’s actions implies that she was a willing accomplice in the photographs and discounts her claims to the contrary: “You don’t look like someone who’s being forced to pose for this shot” (Dateline NBC, October 2, 2005).

Additionally, the degree of England’s legitimacy as “agent” and therefore her responsibility for her legal violations must be problematized on at least two levels. First, the question of what was legal at Abu Ghraib was
uncertain because of the suspension of the Geneva Conventions. In addition, England and other personnel received insufficient training and experienced a doctrinally unsound command structure for administering detainees, both of which compromised the distinction between appropriate and inappropriate treatment of detainees (Kennedy, 2007; Taguba, 2004). Moreover, media reported that abuses at Abu Ghraib were openly sanctioned by military officials (Kennedy, 2007; Taguba, 2004). Neither the possibility that the indicted soldiers were ordered to commit the abuses nor the possibility that a flawed organizational culture emerged from the arrangement were used to contextualize England's actions.

Second, England had a sexual and romantic relationship with Graner that also undermined her agency. Media reports claimed that Graner, her superior in rank and age, had “been accused of violence before. His ex-wife [said] he threatened to kill her [and had] obtained three protection orders against him since 1997” (Dateline NBC, October 2, 2005). As a higher ranking and potentially abusive partner, Graner clearly compromised England’s degree of autonomy (Jeffreys, 2007). Yet, this information was virtually absent in media reports. When Graner’s role in sanctioning or commanding England’s actions was discussed, her agency remained questionable. For example, media reported that England participated in the abuse and torture because she was “trying to please her soldier-boyfriend” (The Early Show, September 28, 2005). England stated, “I was so in love with him that I trusted his decisions and I did whatever he wanted” (Dateline NBC, October 2, 2005). Her trust in her superior and boyfriend is cast as her agency and this “agency” is exploited by the media and the military.

The government response to Abu Ghraib also shifted culpability from the military establishment to individual actors. In aired footage of the resulting congressional hearings, Senator Pat Roberts asked Lieutenant General Lance Smith, “An order to soften up a detainee would not be a lawful order, is that correct?” “Sir, sir, that’s correct.” Senator Roberts followed, “What legal basis then would a soldier have for following that order?” Lieutenant Gen. Smith replied, “Sir, none” (Today, May 12, 2004). Despite the repeated arguments that orders came from England’s superiors, the footage implies that because the action was unlawful it was a personal failing of England to have followed it.

England was the antithesis of the warrior hero. Media portrayed her as lacking emotional strength, resolve, and moral righteousness. As stated by a soldier at Abu Ghraib:
We have to follow our own orders. We have to go with our morals and we have to do what is right at all times and follow the basic principles of the rules and regulations. And on top of that, we have to know our Army core values. Sometimes you can be placed in a situation where your leadership is your own leadership. (*The Early Show*, May 12, 2004)

For a true warrior hero, if an order is wrong, it is the soldier's responsibility to say "no." Once England's centrality and "so called" agency were established, her immorality and sexual indiscretions are rendered comprehensible to the public because she failed to say "no" and do "what is right at all times." As such, she becomes a model not for the warrior hero, but a contemporary fallen woman.

**From Warrior to Fallen Woman**

The media constructed England's distinctly female fall on numerous levels, the most prominent being her failure to adhere to the code of ethics expected of military personnel. England's failings then expanded into the personal-civilian realm with the concurrent highlighting of her sexual indiscretions, character, and rural working-class upbringing. England's soldier identity, as a result, is reconstituted: She becomes a civilian rather than a soldier via the fallen woman archetype. Media framed England's behavior as immoral, embarrassing, deviant, and shameful, hardly soldier material. The *CBS Evening News* stated:

> Private Lynndie England is hoping to prove any blame for the abuse scandal belongs up the chain of command. That she was only following orders when the Reservist taunted Iraqi detainees in shocking snapshots that embarrassed the Pentagon and enraged the Muslim world. (August 3, 2004)

Framing England as an "embarrassment" defines her activities as more than illegal. True to the fallen woman archetype, her embarrassing activities tarnish the Army and the nation. England's construction is iconic: "Who is that now-infamous young woman smiling in those horrifying prison photographs? Her name is Lynndie England, and those images have stunned this nation and her quiet West Virginia hometown" (*NBC Nightly News*, May 7, 2004). England not only violated rules of military conduct and embarrassed a nation, but she conducted a grossly immoral act as well.
Brian Maass asked England if she felt “joy” in harming detainees. England stated:

Not really. I mean, it’s another human being. Look, I mean if you think about it, we just humiliated—got them naked, made them run up and down, you know, get them exhausted, compared to them dragging our guys, burned alive, through the streets and hanging them off bridges? And that’s OK? I mean, think about that. Would you rather be burned alive or get naked? (The Early Show, May 13, 2004)

England’s unapologetic defense becomes self-indicting support for her status as barbaric and morally corrupt. Rather than call attention to the impossible choices soldiers are forced to make and live with, England is cast as a morally confused and corrupt woman, unable to decipher right from wrong. This immoral image was also advanced in portrayals of her sexuality.

A classically Victorian dimension of England’s fall was her sexual involvement with Graner. England engaged in premarital sex and became pregnant by Graner, both of which called into question her morals and judgment (but not his). Additionally, NBC Nightly News reported that, “[I]n military court, soldiers from England’s own unit testified by telephone that England had posed topless, made lewd comments about prisoners who were forced to stage sex acts, and regularly snuck out at night to sleep with her boyfriend” (NBC Nightly News, August 4, 2004). England’s sexual conduct is framed as immoral by Victorian principles. Indeed, she “snuck out at night” like a rebellious teenage girl and not a principled adult. She is neither a good soldier nor a decent, chaste woman.

Media further established England as deviant because she allowed her sexual acts to be photographed. Some coverage of the photos directly related to the use of England’s sex, and sexual acts with Graner, as a way to “soften” detainees. These reports were more sensational than substantial as the details of England and Graner’s relationship became public. For example, “The government revealed it had more than 200 photos, some of them graphic pictures of England, having sex with another soldier, the alleged father of her child” (World News Tonight, August 3, 2004). Significantly, Graner’s role in these acts remains largely invisible. Moreover, the “alleged father” phrasing implies promiscuity on England’s part. The possibility that England was coerced or manipulated by Graner
remains relatively unexplored as do any claims that she was subjected to symbolic or emotional duress. Rather, her questionable moral character and sexual integrity are further indicted as her past relational history came to light: Indeed, “She was married and divorced before turning 21” (NBC Nightly News, May 7, 2004).

In line with the fallen woman archetype, England’s relational status as a divorcée and as a sexual partner to Graner were part of a broader based manipulation of her character. As the fallen woman, England was not simply to be removed from the military caste but to be (re)placed into the white working-class Appalachian culture from which she originated. Such a move made seemingly unimaginable forms of misconduct ideologically comprehensible to viewers. England was described as being from a “one stoplight” town in West Virginia where she “grew up in a trailer home and bagged groceries at the IGA” (NBC Nightly News, May 7, 2004). Moreover, she “grew up dirt poor in a trailer behind a sheep farm” (Good Morning America, May 4, 2004) without “a lot of means” (The Osgood File, May 10, 2004). References to England’s Appalachian identity function to indict her upbringing, character, and sexual mores. Furthermore, they displace her from the white Victorian mainstream and characterize her as a “white other” (see Harkins, 2004; Newitz & Wray, 1997). In short, these were the acts of an “uncivilized hillbilly,” not a cultured woman or a trained soldier (see Mason, 2005). Consequently, the audience is encouraged to scorn England and dismiss her as deviant and inept.

England’s identity as a fallen woman included her “inability” to discern right from wrong, and media consistently framed her as a simpleton. One report during her trial stated, “England’s attorney is expected to portray her as a naïve, sympathetic figure with a history of mental health issues and learning disabilities” (The Early Show, May 3, 2005). Another broadcast noted that “England did not speak until she was almost eight years old, some thought she was autistic” (World News Tonight, May 2, 2005). The evidence supporting these contentions were strong enough that the judge overseeing her case threw out her plea because he was not convinced “she knew her actions were wrong” (World News Tonight, May 4, 2005). As a result, England’s fallen status resonates with many viewers’ stereotypes. England emerged from a culture of poverty, ignorance, laziness, and want—these are the antitheses of the soldier’s skill and work ethic. They also stand in opposition to the Victorian woman’s code of honor and ability to understand and uphold a strict moral code. England is
framed as inferior, sexually deviant, and immoral—antithetical to the model woman.

Consequently, England’s failings as a woman have national significance. For example, Diane Sawyer asked England’s family attorney, “What is her [England’s] and your answer to that, that these pictures have endangered American soldiers?” (Good Morning America, May 13, 2004). The scope of England’s fall as a woman became enormous. Not only did England lose her morality, character, integrity, and femininity, but her actions were a threat to the military, its mission, and the nation.

England’s Redemption?

As media narratives of England came to an end, she experienced a “bounded redemption”: She was transformed from soldier to civilian, and fallen woman to mother. England’s redemption began with numerous appearances from friends and family who attempted to restore her character and virtue. With respect to the photographs of England, her mother stated, “She’s not herself in them. I can see that” (CBS Evening News, May 6, 2004). Her mother continues, “My daughter—you know, she has more values than that. She was brought up better than that, to respect her elders . . . . She’s a good girl” (CBS Evening News, May 6, 2004). England’s family provided their own photographs of “Lynndie” to demonstrate her humanity and goodness. The images are of England prior to her enlistment, each of which take her away from her military identity and place her into a civilian context denoting a “better time.” The implication is that something went wrong with England for her to behave in such a manner—allowing the public to question her military involvement to begin with.

As England pled guilty to the criminal charges, she reinforced the idea she did not belong in the military: “I could have said no,” she told the judge, Colonel James Pohl, ‘I knew it was wrong’” (The Osgood File, May 3, 2005). Following his discussion with legal analyst Andrew Cohen regarding why it was best for England to plead guilty, Charles Osgood observed, “The evidence against her is right there in those damning photos” (The Osgood File, May 3, 2005). During the sentencing, England “apologized for the notorious abuse photos and claimed she was only trying to please her boyfriend” (CBS Morning News, September 28, 2005). England’s own words expose her as a troubled girl led astray by temptation—a temptation produced within a context she did not belong. England further reveals the female-soldier double bind in how she questions her military involvement:
Ms. Barak: What if you could make one wish, just wish, what would that be?

Private England: To go back in time and not join the military. (*Today, June 21, 2004*)

As Cohen notes, "The only move left for her now is to beg for mercy" (*The Osgood File, May 3, 2005*). In short, England herself completes her divorce from the military to seek bounded redemption. Abu Ghraib receives a rhetorical transformation from a site of military crimes to a human interest story, a story of a female soldier out of place in a war zone.

England's maternity serves as an even more powerful vehicle for her bounded redemption by the media. Although reports of England's pregnancy were initially framed within the context of her sexual and moral failings, the maternal narrative softened her image during the trial. During England's trial, her status as an impending mother became a primary rather than secondary aspect of the story. England is more mother than soldier in the passage: "Seven months pregnant and with her future on the line, Lynndie England . . . endured a second straight day of potentially damaging testimony" (*NBC Nightly News, August 4, 2004*). More commonly, though, the media juxtaposed England's military role at Abu Ghraib with her civilian role as mother. For example, "England arrived at military court this morning, seven months pregnant and dressed in combat fatigues. Nothing like the young woman in these pictures, where she is seen humiliating Iraqi Prisoners" (*World News Tonight, August 3, 2004*). The exploitative dimension of the maternal focus is also realized in a characterization made by Stone Phillips: "A gentle, gentle nurturing mother, with a son she adores—a {image}uring image, but not the one burned into the minds of millions. To the world this is Lynndie England: leash girl, poster girl for prisoner abuse" (*Dateline NBC, October 2, 2005*).

By juxtaposing England's civilian and maternal roles against the Abu Ghraib photographs, Phillips attempts to extract England from the military and open up the possibility for redemption through the fulfillment of her maternal role.

England's redemption is bounded, however, and only her civilian (i.e., fallen woman status) identity can be redeemed. The media provide no opportunity for England's redemption as a soldier. She is displaced from the institution and the public narrative can conclude comfortably as England returns to her ideological place as mother. Even so, she is not a "noble mother" but a mother marked by her class, heritage, indiscretions,
and audacity to participate in and fail at, the most masculine of professions.

The Military’s Absolution

There is no doubt that the extensive national and international media coverage of Abu Ghraib was unwelcome to the U.S. military, whose stated mission in Iraq was to protect U.S. security interests and establish peace and democracy. The rhetoric of maintaining peace and democracy became particularly important at this time, given that the alleged weapons of mass destruction were not found. This absence called into question the legitimacy of the military intervention. The Abu Ghraib scandal is the antithesis of “peace and democracy” and damaged U.S. political and military credibility. It also created an incentive for the public and news media to ask profound questions regarding the legitimacy and ethics of U.S. military presence and practices in Iraq.

In early coverage of the scandal, other soldiers were included as part of the events and the very idea that their behavior was anomalous is questioned: “The prison scandal started when the photographs of abuse were first brought to the Army’s attention in January. But was the mistreatment the act of a few bad apples as the Defense Department has repeatedly said, or was it an organized military intelligence tactic?” (60 Minutes II, May 12, 2004). However, media coverage of Abu Ghraib in the U.S. quickly turned from examinations of systemic prisoner abuse to an intense discussion about England. The media indictment of individual actions is reflected in the observation of one person from England’s hometown: “It’s just a small group of people over there doing this, so—it’s bad for our soldiers” (NBC Nightly News, May 7, 2004). These sentiments were echoed by President Bush who stated these were the acts of a few “bad apples” and not representative of the U.S. military practice or policy. The media employed this narrative to redeem the military in the face of the scandal.

Consequently, England’s actions were presented as occurring without organizational endorsement. Her behavior was documented in photos that tell the story of a wayward girl from the hills of West Virginia rather than the product of a lax or flawed military hierarchy. By the end of media coverage, England is not just the face of the scandal, she is the scandal: “Guilty or innocent, she’ll always be known as the girl with the leash” (NBC Nightly News, June 24, 2004). The intense media coverage of England effectively shifted attention and culpability away from the mili-
tary. England’s fallen status and displacement from the military ranks were used to sanction her (ab)use by the military and consequently validated the manipulation of femininity for military ends. Thus, the military was purified (see Burke, 1941) through the England narrative.

However, there is substantial evidence to disrupt this ideologically coherent media construction. The Taguba (2004) report documents that although the abuse was in violation of Army detainee rules of engagement and the Geneva Conventions, it was neither isolated nor performed in the absence of government agency approval. Although the report did not go unnoticed by the media, the information was not used to contextualize England’s actions or explore systemic problems in the U.S. military. Overcrowding, understaffing, poor quality of life, ambiguous command channels, and insufficient training all contributed to an environment where violations could (and did) occur (Taguba, 2004).

Moreover, the military relies heavily on reservists (Jeffreys, 2007). Reservists are part-time and more cost effective to train and maintain than military regulars and are therefore heavily recruited (Jeffreys, 2007). Yet, England’s reservist identity and the military’s reliance on such personnel received minimal news attention. Systemic problems exist in recruitment, training, and deployment, yet, such widespread organizational problems did not receive the intense long-term coverage experienced by England. Omitting these details and institutional problems protects the image of the military. Furthermore, it obscures the necessity to make changes to improve organizational processes, training, and living conditions that would benefit soldiers and protect detainees.

In sum, the media provide an elegantly simple narrative for what is in reality a complex and multifaceted sequence of events. At the story’s close, the public is comforted that the institution praised for protecting them and their freedoms maintains its character and dignity. The anomaly in Abu Ghraib was the product of a poorly disciplined, deviant, and uneducated “girl” who did not belong in the military in the first place.

Archetypes and Evasive Maneuvers: Gendered Representations in Military Action

Research continues to reveal that media representations of the military and war perpetuate the marginalization of female soldiers (Gruner, 1994; Holland 2006; Howard & Prividera, 2004; Nantais & Lee, 1999; Prividera
and the promotion of a U.S. national hegemonic identity (Cloud, 2004; Stabile & Kumar, 2005; Tadiar, 2006). Our research contributes to this important discussion by extending extant work on gender and war (Enloe, 1990, 2000; Taylor & Hardman, 2004), women’s marginal military status (Gruner, 1994; Holland, 2006; Nantais & Lee, 1999), and the construction of social and military archetypes (Howard & Prividera, 2004; Prividera & Howard, 2006; Woodward, 2000).

Military (in)action and the Lynndie England media narrative reproduce an ideology that (ab)uses women and femininity in military service by making them tools of (self)oppression. The U.S. public is led to question women, femininity, and the female body and their place in the military and in war through the centering of England in the Abu Ghraib scandal. Consequently, the larger issues of institutional failures, organizational gender bias, military responsibility, oppression, and imperialism went unexamined as women’s marginal military status was validated.

Ultimately, the majority of those exposed to the Abu Ghraib story will never know the full extent of England’s or the military’s culpability. Instead, the public consumes a story whereby England becomes representative of female soldiers and the military (and media) are freed from responding to a biased portrayal they helped to create. Even so, from a news standpoint, it is unimportant that the consumer know all the facts so long as the mythic narrative is complete. Measuring England against the “warrior hero” and then framing her actions via the “fallen woman” archetype produces a familiar and ideologically consistent narrative ready for viewer consumption. In short, the whole truth is not necessary as archetypes embody their own a priori truths that are coherent, comforting, and go unquestioned by those viewing from within the patriarchal framework.

The framing of England’s behavior as an individual failing obfuscates military responsibility and the media’s own role in the story’s creation. Furthermore, the self-contained narrative embodied in the archetypal construction of England makes possible, even desirable, her scapegoating (see Burke, 1941) as it restores faith in and purifies the military institution and the nation. Thus, England’s bounded redemption and the redemption of the military occur through their mutual disassociation and England’s concurrent identification with her own motherhood. Even so, England’s framing could not be applied uniformly across all women.

England’s archetypal rendering marginalizes her gender and class while simultaneously validating her raced status. By definition, the Victorian
fallen woman is white. The archetype's modern interpretation retains its whiteness in the construction and evaluation of England's activities. The same is true of the warrior hero, which favors a white male to symbolize the strength of the military, nation, culture, and their associated values. Thus, the choice of archetypes strategically identifies who can be part of the national spectacle and who must remain "off stage" and beyond view. For example, had Lynndie England been a woman of color, she could not have fallen (as she was already at the margins), and therefore may have received no redemption at all let alone the bounded redemption she did receive as a white civilian mother.

As illustrated here, social ideologies employ archetypal models in a more complex fashion than the basic man-military/woman-civilian framework suggests. England (and women in general) are not simply defined out of a military presence. Instead, they experience elaborate social constructions created by an opportunistic ideology that endeavors to displace and devalue them according to their contexts. England's coverage is exemplary in its ideological rendering of gender, class, behavior, and race through the application of archetypal models to frame her actions and personae. Thus, England's construction is a powerful rhetorical text that sanctions gendered, classed, and raced military and social practice.

Through England's military and media exploitation, the second-class status of female soldiers is validated. In the Abu Ghraib narrative, the military escapes stigmatization; however, women do not. The consequences of this are not lost on Colonel Janis Karpinski (Ret.) who observed that "they wanted to put a different face on—on the war, a different face of a female serving in the combat zone. I think largely to end any idea of women serving in combat positions in the future" (Today, March 18, 2006). As (hyper)masculine standards and priorities in the post-9/11 world are increasingly brought to bear on military personnel, we are reminded of the thousands of military women—women who serve this nation daily—devalued and marginalized by archetypal renderings.

References


**Notes**

Women's presence in the U.S. military has steadily increased over the past three decades, from 3% in 1972 to 14.6% of total active duty personnel in 2005. Women comprise 14% of the Army, 6% of Marines, 14% of the Navy, and 20% of the Air Force (U.S. Department of Defense, 2006). According to Sadler (1999), women of color have also increased in the U.S. military from 16% of female active duty personnel in 1972 to 43% in 1997.