

# **SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND THE U.S. MILITARY: THE MELODRAMATIC MYTHOS OF WAR AND RHETORIC OF HEALING HEROISM**

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Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the  
Department of Communication and Culture, Indiana University

April 2015

Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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April 1, 2014

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### **Acknowledgements**

This dissertation would not have been possible without the help of colleagues, friends, and family, a few of which deserve special recognition here. I am forever grateful to my dissertation advisor, Dr. Robert Terrill. His wisdom and advice on my research and writing throughout both this project and my tenure as a graduate student has greatly enhanced my academic career. I would also like to express my gratitude to my dissertation committee, Dr. Robert Ivie, Dr. Phaedra Pezzullo, Dr. Purnima Bose, and the late Dr. Alex Doty for the sage advice they shared throughout this project. I am indebted to my dissertation-writing group, Dr. Jennifer Heusel, Dr. Jaromir Stoll, Dave Lewis, and Maria Kennedy. The input and camaraderie I received from them while writing my dissertation bettered both the quality of my work and my enjoyment of the research process. I am also fortunate to have had the love and support of my parents, John and Debbie Wieskamp, as well as my sisters, Natalie and Ashley while completing my doctorate degree. Last but not least, I would like to thank Kathy Teige for her assistance in helping me navigate the bureaucratic waters of graduate school.

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In this project, I examine the rhetorical patterns that silence or expose wartime sexual assault in U.S. culture from World War II, the Vietnam War, and the contemporary War on Terror. Through rhetorical analysis of military rhetoric, film, journalism, and photography, I argue that institutional narratives deploy rape as a political trope by exploiting narratives of sexual abuse in ways that promote war and inhibit justice for survivors. These narratives are patterned by a “melodramatic frame,” which emphasizes feminine vulnerability and racialized villainy to construct a heroic national identity. By depicting sexual violence as a crime committed by inherently deviant individuals rather than a byproduct of institutionalized patriarchal norms, the melodramatic frame privileges individualism over collectivity. I then juxtapose this institutional discourse with resistant voices found in personal narratives, dissent, and advocacy efforts that counter the melodramatic frame. Not only do these narratives further critique melodrama by demonstrating its inadequacy in capturing the complexity of material experiences, but they also provide effective rhetorical models that invite us to see the cultural and systemic factors that exacerbate wartime sexual violence. These resistant discourses demonstrate what I call a “healing heroism,” which challenges melodramatic tendencies toward caricature and polarization. In doing so, they unsettle harmful gender and racial norms by reimagining notions of vulnerability, heroism, and villainy.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1 – The Melodramatic Mythos of War: How Rape is Deployed as a Trope of Militarized Public Discourse .....	1
Chapter 2 – Damsels in Distress: The Role of Feminized Vulnerability in U.S. War Rhetoric.....	52
Chapter 3 – Massacring Notions of Heroism: Sexual Assault at My Lai .....	97
Chapter 4 – Melodrama Marches On: Sexual Abuse within the Contemporary U.S. Military.....	154
Conclusion – Ideals of Chivalry: Just Who and What Does Traditional “Heroism” Protect? .....	219
Selected Bibliography .....	244
Curriculum Vita	

## **CHAPTER 1 – THE MELODRAMATIC MYTHOS OF WAR: HOW RAPE IS DEPLOYED AS A TROPE OF MILITARIZED PUBLIC DISCOURSE**

*During a carefully orchestrated rescue mission conducted under the cover of darkness, Marine forces distracted enemy soldiers as Navy Seals burst into an Iraqi hospital with the assistance of Army Rangers who secured grounds around the area. “There was not a firefight inside of the building,” Brigadier General Vincent Brooks told reporters, “but there were firefights outside of the building, getting in and out.”<sup>1</sup> Hustling through the hospital the Seals restrained doctors and patients alike. They swiftly found their target: Private Jessica Lynch, a white, “fresh faced,” “teenager,” from a “farming community” in West Virginia.<sup>2</sup> Lynch had been transported to the hospital just over a week prior, after the Iraq army ambushed her convoy, killing eleven members of her company and capturing five others. The U.S. combat soldiers “hustled Lynch via stretcher onto a waiting helicopter, all of which was filmed with a night-vision camera.”<sup>3</sup> Lynch was rescued from the evil hands of the enemy and delivered to safety by the heroic action of the U.S. Special Forces team. According to General Brooks, “Some brave souls put their lives on the line to make this happen.” These men were heroes.*

*While reports of the bravery of her heroes during this rescue mission appeared in the media immediately in the days after her rescue, narratives of the treachery of the enemies who captured her came fully to light roughly seven months after her rescue. News stories that Lynch had been anally raped during her time behind enemy lines began to circulate in November 6, 2003, just days before the release of her autobiography, *I Am a Soldier, Too*, co-authored by Rick Bragg. Within her autobiography, it was reported that although Lynch had no recollection of being raped, medical records revealed that*

*“she was a victim of anal sexual assault.” The autobiography continues, “The records do not tell whether her captors assaulted her almost lifeless, broken body after she was lifted from the wreckage, or if they assaulted her and then broke her bones into splinters until she was almost dead.”<sup>4</sup> In either scenario, the narrative of the sexual assault of Lynch indicates the cruel, animalistic nature of her enemy captors.*

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Popular accounts of the rescue and violation of Jessica Lynch, summarized above, evoke a dramatic structure that exploits feminine vulnerability in order to enforce a Manichean worldview. Lynch’s youth, femininity, and whiteness granted her tale wide circulation because it fits within a hegemonic narrative structure so common that it is at once pervasive and taken for granted. The violation, or potential violation, of young white women by brown, savage men remains a common theme throughout U.S. public address. This narrative form structured the relationship between natives of the Americas and its colonizing settlers, who justified violence by accusing indigenous people of kidnapping white women.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, public imaginings of the lecherous brown man fueled many slavery and Jim Crow-era lynchings and other unjust violence against African Americans.<sup>6</sup> The story of the raping enemy has existed as a common theme of U.S. war discourse since the nation’s inception. As Hahn and Ivie observe, during the Revolutionary War, colonists spoke of British soldiers as rapists.<sup>7</sup> In short, the Lynch rescue fits within a legacy of narratives that recur throughout history with a different cast of characters for each conflict.

While the continuous repetition of this basic rape myth causes it to appear a natural consequence of gender differences, a closer examination of the Lynch rescue

demonstrates that it, indeed, relies upon contorted rhetorical maneuvers. The many factual inaccuracies told in the earliest public stories about Lynch reveal the degree to which this narrative constructs the identities of both U.S. soldiers and the Iraqi people. The extraction mission was portrayed as extremely dangerous and Lynch as highly vulnerable in order to emphasize the bravery and heroism of the soldiers. One of the Iraqi doctors among the medical staff—whom Lynch reported treated her kindly—described the hyperbolic nature of the rescue, which occurred in an innocuous hospital already empty of Iraqi soldiers. According to Dr. Anmar Uday, “It was like a Hollywood film. They cried, ‘Go, go, go’, with guns and blanks and the sound of explosions. They made a show – an action movie like Sylvester Stallone or Jackie Chan, with jumping and shouting, breaking down doors.”<sup>8</sup> The combative nature of the rescue was not a fitting tactic for entry into a hospital that was not guarded by the Iraqi military. It was, indeed, a show, a display carefully designed to capture public attention.

Accounts of Lynch’s sexual assault functioned as a trope to rebuild public support for the war by demonstrating the villainy of the Iraqi people. Her alleged rape was part of the evidence that helped support the case for U.S. intervention in Iraq. According to Deepa Kumar, sensationalized rescue narratives about Lynch circulated at a time when public support for the war was low. The dramatic tales allowed the U.S. public to rally around the troops, she argues, renewing support for the war.<sup>9</sup> Narratives about the alleged rape of Lynch, in particular, served to fuel the pyre of anger toward Iraq. When asked by Diane Sawyer why she included the alleged rape in her biography, Lynch stated, “I have no memory of that... but you know if it did happen, people need to know that that’s what kind of people that they are.”<sup>10</sup> Her abstracted description of her supposed

rape exemplifies one of the ways that sexual violence may operate rhetorically in public discourse. It appears that rape evinces cultural identity. When someone commits sexual violence, the rape shows us “what kind of people” he or she is. This fits within a larger discursive pattern in which sexual violence is attached to racialized narratives used to evince the savagery of a people. Lynch’s own words and the U.S. public’s fascination with allegations of her assault demonstrate the cultural tenacity in associating sexual deviance with enemy nations.

Due to the rhetorical importance of Lynch’s alleged rape, the evidence behind these allegations warrants further consideration. According to Kumar, Lynch’s rape was never “fully established as fact.” The Iraqi doctors whom Lynch reported treated her kindly “found no such evidence” of the sexual assault. It was only much later, after Lynch had been rescued, that U.S. military doctors inspected Lynch’s body once again for signs of rape and claimed then that she had been sexually assaulted. Guidelines for Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners conclude that the best time to collect evidence for rape is within seventy-two hours, although some programs believe that evidence may be collected up to five to seven days after the assault.<sup>11</sup> Despite the fact that Lynch was rescued nine days after the ambush, two days after even the longest window for evidence collection, the majority of the U.S. media did not question the accuracy of the evidence of Lynch’s supposed rape. Lynch herself has no recollection of sexual assault, which means that the alleged assault would have had to occur close to the time of the ambush, before Lynch regained consciousness. While I do not intend to deny Lynch’s experience here, it is important to note that this evidence would not be enough to convict Lynch’s attackers of rape in a typical U.S. courtroom.

The emphasis on Jessica Lynch's alleged rape sharply contrasts the way U.S. public discourse handles the sexual assault of other service members. After just three months of a tour in Italy, Aviation Commander Darchelle Mitchell was raped, not by a dark shadowy Other, but by one of her fellow service members. The incident occurred one night when Darchelle invited this man, whom she considered a friend, over for dinner. After she retired for the evening, he broke into her bedroom and forced himself upon her. She immediately reported the incident to the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) and underwent the invasive medical procedure to collect evidence for a rape kit. The NCIS agents assured her that "we have never had this much evidence." They had pictures of the lock he had broken on her bedroom door, they had her torn clothing complete with his fingerprints, and they had his DNA documented clearly in her rape kit. Despite this ample evidence, courts found her attacker found "not guilty." The explanation given to her was: "It is no question that his genitals touched your genital area, but it is reasonable to believe that he thought he had your consent." Then, after this devastating verdict from the naval court, Mitchell was forced out of the military. Despite receiving a performance award for exemplary service during the first quarter of her station in Italy, her petition for reenlistment was denied, a move that shocked both her and her superior officers.

The white, unmarried (and, thus, potentially virginal) Jessica Lynch who was allegedly attacked by a non-white enemy was granted sympathy, support and protection from her nation, while Darchelle Mitchell, the African-American mother of two who was attacked by a fellow service member, was quietly ejected from the military, her story untold.<sup>12</sup> While Lynch's alleged rape received a flurry of media attention, the rapes of

service-members like Mitchell rarely make headlines. While a medical examination conducted more than a week after Lynch's ambush provided enough evidence for the U.S. public to condemn her captors as rapists, Mitchell's medical examination, which was conducted quickly enough after the attack to include ample DNA evidence, was not sufficient to convict her perpetrator in a court of law. Unfortunately, experiences like Darchelle Mitchell's abound within U.S. military bases and training camps. There is an epidemic level of intra-soldier rape in the U.S. and the military regularly forsakes its service members by failing to prevent, investigate, and prosecute sexual assaults. By reading rhetoric by and about the military as following a melodramatic frame, we can better understand why some cases of wartime sexual violence experience public attention while others are neglected or forgotten.

Although the narratives of Lynch and Mitchell demonstrate seemingly contradictory approaches to discussing sexual assault during wartime—one emphasizes sexual assault and the other nearly silences the crime—they are actually part of the same narrative structure. Both of these narratives present a melodramatic frame. That is, both stories use tropes of feminine vulnerability and racialized villainy to organize complex individuals and societies into simplistic categories of good and evil. The Jessica Lynch story, for example, reflects the melodramatic tendency to reduce the enemy—who is typically not white—to pure evil by associating him with sexual violence. In this narrative, Lynch operates as a damsel in distress, whose jeopardy in the hands of the shadowy villain creates a heightened sense of public emotion. The Darchelle Mitchell story, in contrast, reflects the melodramatic tendency to represent heroes, U.S. soldiers, as absolutely good and honorable. In a melodramatic narrative, there is no room for nuance.

An individual cannot be both a good soldier and a perpetrator of sexual violence. In this way, U.S. public renderings of the Lynch rescue follow the same narrative structure that inhibits widespread circulation of accounts of experiences like Mitchell's. Throughout this project, then, I argue that such discourse exacerbates polarization by exploiting emotional narratives of victimization in ways that promote war and inhibit justice for survivors of assault. Within this framework, most public discourse in the U.S. projects the crime of rape, or the potential for rape, onto Others whether sexual violation has happened or not. This frame makes acknowledgement of the sexual deviancy of anyone other than presumed enemies extremely difficult.

These melodramatic narratives are problematic in part because they conceal the systemic and institutionalized nature of military sexual violence. They are also problematic because they propagate war as the most logical response to international conflict. Because the potential rape of innocence heightens the emotional intensity of wartime narratives, this rhetorical strategy contributes to the state of fear necessary to rally a nation to war. Villains are deemed heinous and heroes are deemed honorable because of their potential to commit or thwart sexual violence, respectively. Within the melodramatic structure, threats of the sexual violation of women often justify violence against the villain. The damsel in distress relies upon a soldier, the hero, to battle the villain and rescue her from potential violation. Waging a war to protect a helpless maiden further evinces the righteous character of her knight in shining armor. Simultaneously, the victim's virtue is demonstrated by the hero's willingness to rescue her. Our heroes only wage war for goodness, to protect the helpless and innocent. Therefore, being chosen for rescue indicates a victim's virtuous character. By studying war rhetoric as

melodrama we may understand how heroes demonstrate both their own valor and the integrity of those they rescue by fighting against the enemies of their nation.

What is the merit of studying war discourse through the lens of melodrama, specifically? Why use this frame to analyze war culture when the trope of polarization has been used widely and successfully in rhetorical critiques of war? The lens of melodrama allows for an intersectional analysis of the raced and gendered dynamics of war rhetoric. That is, whereas examining polarization of war rhetoric reveals the racial dynamics of war culture, melodrama exposes the ways by which the overlapping constructs of race and gender simultaneously fuel international conflicts. Melodrama also reveals the oft-overlooked “feminine” qualities of war rhetoric. As Christine Gledhill observes, melodramatic narratives have come to be presumed as “a ‘woman’s’ cultural form.”<sup>13</sup> Although war has historically been associated with masculinity, war rhetoric is fraught with emotion, a characteristic often associated with femininity and irrationality. By revealing the melodramatic undertones behind military discourse, I trouble the problematic overlapping dynamics of gender and race upon which such rhetoric relies.

Additionally, the melodramatic frame offers a productive heuristic for rhetorical analysis for a number of reasons. As I illustrate in the pages to follow, rhetorical scholarship positions political melodrama as a reductive frame, which problematically limits the possibilities for understanding social life. With this in mind, we can use melodrama as a litmus test. When a narrative follows this frame, it is often an indication that public discourse has reduced or oversimplified a social issue and is, thus, worthy of critical analysis. While melodramatically framed narratives function primarily as reductive discourses, the genre itself is potentially liberating when read as a critique of

normative discourse. Film scholarship attests to the potential that melodrama, on an affective level, has in disrupting the status quo. When we conceive of war rhetoric as operating like a grand theatrical melodramatic production, when we understand both the highly constructed and dramatic nature of a discourse, we unsettle the certainty of war culture. While there are many ways to do this, melodrama is particularly useful for examining how race and gender intersect in public narratives about violence. This interpretive lens reveals the cultural dynamics of war and gendered violence as rhetorical constructs, rather than destined manifestations of human nature. Once the rhetoricity of both war and rape culture is revealed, we might begin to develop alternative understandings of power, gender, and violence.

Alternative models of public discourse constitute what I call a “healing heroism,” a discursive pattern built from the occupation of nursing that takes health as its root metaphor. The lens of healing heroism, as I will demonstrate throughout this project, reconciles the melodramatic tendency to polarize and create enemies by embracing complexity, thus enabling more productive ways of thinking and talking about sexual violence. By looking at the whole picture, models of healing heroism allow us to cure the social ills of patriarchy and racism rather than attacking their violent symptoms.

### **Interpretive Framework: The Melodramatic Frame as Mythic Discourse**

My analysis of melodrama in contemporary war rhetoric and political discourse begins in the past, as I analyze the melodramatic myths of World War II and the Vietnam War in order to better understand contemporary discourse. Theories of mythic criticism reveal the merits of this approach. Mythic narratives are repetitive in nature, recurring throughout history. Joseph Mali interprets Giambattista Vico’s *New Science* as arguing

“all our cultural creations” are “recreations of myths.”<sup>14</sup> He asserts that Vico undertook his great study of past mythic forms because he believed that “modern man, being the inheritor of former modes of thought, speech, and behavior, still lives by these examples.”<sup>15</sup> This is to say that although myths of progress would have us believe that we have advanced in thought from our ancestors, their founding myths still guide our thinking. Indeed, Eric Csapo charges that the ritualistic repetition of a narrative form makes it a myth as opposed to, simply, a story. In other words, a story becomes a myth once a society regularly “participates in its transmission.”<sup>16</sup> Because cultures inherit myths through narrative forms that evolve slowly over history, analysis of a pervading discourse requires historical analysis. Drawing from this, I hold that the propensity to wage war is goaded by mythic narratives that follow the melodramatic frame.

I conceive of myth *not* as a collection of antiquated narratives that perpetuate irrational illusions, but as a collection of productive and culturally constructed narratives by which a society lives. By this notion, myths are *not* stories from ancient, often presumed, “unenlightened” societies, but guiding narratives that also flourish in contemporary cultures. “In myth,” Stephen Daniel eloquently pens, “the world is made flesh.”<sup>17</sup> That is to say, we translate our world and material experiences into human terms through myth. In this way, according to Robert Ivie, myth is an inevitable and “necessary fiction.”<sup>18</sup> Vico invited us to understand myth as a “*vera narratio*,” or a narration that a society accepts as true.<sup>19</sup> As such, myths are a powerful and necessary element of social life for they produce norms and model ways of collective meaning making.<sup>20</sup> Burke envisions myth as among, “our basic psychological tools for working together.”<sup>21</sup> Myth serves a unifying function, allowing individuals of different mindsets and backgrounds to

identify with one another to a degree that allows them work together for a common cause.

22

Throughout my project I examine melodrama as a powerful myth that has been repeated in U.S. political and mediated discourse throughout the past century. As Heilman observes, melodrama dominates understandings of political and social life in the twentieth century, giving U.S. public culture a strong inclination to war inspired by its emphasis on polarization.<sup>23</sup> Echoing his sentiment, Elisabeth Anker describes melodrama as “a pervasive cultural mode that structures the presentation of political discourse and national identity in contemporary America.”<sup>24</sup> Anker continues, noting that melodrama creates coherence as it “presents images and characters through hyperbolic, binary moralistic positions and arranges them within a plotline that restages the eternal battle between good and evil.”<sup>25</sup> Due the general propensity of myths to enable understanding and bring people together, a society evokes these *vera narratio* most often in times of chaos. Because a sense of unity serves to ameliorate anxiety during social upheaval, myths abound in times of war and revolution.<sup>26</sup> The melodramatic frame is no exception; it persists as a compelling narrative structure because it comforts us during times of uncertainty. Melodrama assuages fears, reminding us that “virtue must triumph and evil must fall in order to affirm the moral order.”<sup>27</sup> During such chaotic periods as wartime, when a strong national identity is both destabilized and desired, this frame provides an organizing framework.

Another way that melodrama functions mythically is by providing a set of mythic personae, or archetypical figures, that structure political narratives. Applied specifically to war rhetoric, melodrama constructs moral order through relationships between three

reciprocally constituted archetypes: the hero, the villain, and the damsel in distress. The hero, ever the stalwart savior, defends his nation from danger. He is strong, masculine, independent, and always battles a villain. The villain, or enemy, symbolizes all that is evil. Although the racialized enemy's nationality has changed throughout U.S. history, national war narratives generally dehumanize this foreign Other as the embodiment of malevolence. To emphasize the villain's treachery, the melodramatic framework exploits threats against an innocent maiden, such as the aforementioned Jessica Lynch. Masculine heroes and villains battle for control of the feminized victim. Be she the virgin, mother, or even nation violated by terrorists, the "damsel in distress" relies upon heroes for rescue. As such, a hero demonstrates virtue by his willingness to rescue those who are weakened and suffering and, thus, coded as feminine. In the words of Osborne and Bakke, "Melodramatic heroes and villains require each other. In addition, heroes require martyrs to justify their dedication, and villains require victims to prove their villainy."<sup>28</sup> Because of this, he continues, "Growth, transformation, or complication among any of these character types would destabilize the structure of counterbalanced relationships within a melodrama." As a result, melodramatic caricatures are inflexible, unchanging, and bereft of nuance. By establishing rigid relationships between these caricatures the melodramatic frame crafts incomplete social narratives.

Drawing from myth theory, I examine melodrama as a narrative *form*, or pattern of archetypes, that establishes social relationships. This understanding of myth stretches back to Aristotle, whose definition of *mythos* aligns with what we now define as plot. His understanding highlights the importance of the sequence of components within a narrative. This ancient understanding resonates with Joseph Mali's understanding of

myth, drawn from Vico, which asserts that the truth of myth consists not in its content, but of its *mode of narration*.<sup>29</sup> These ideas indicate the important work form does in myth, allowing it to construct patterns of social comprehension. This form, Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas Frenz would say, arises from the patterning of archetypes. Based on their rhetorical interpretation of Jung, Rushing and Frenz view archetypes as “tendencies toward expression that are ingrained in the [collective] psyche,” such archetypes reappear within a culture, guiding thought and behavior.<sup>30</sup> Kenneth Burke also emphasizes the patterning and relational qualities of myth. Myths, he argues, “pattern the mind as to give it a grip upon reality. For the myth embodies a sense of relationships.”<sup>31</sup> Myths have the capacity to establish meaning because they model organizational patterns for our social relations. Though a society may not believe the *content* of a mythic expression as *literally* true, it may believe the *form* and *archetypes* exhibited within the narrative to illustrate a real pattern for perceiving social relationships. While a public may not believe, for example, that the events of a particular melodramatic Hollywood film actually happened, they nonetheless find plausible the gender hierarchies, racial binaries, and moral values rendered through relationships reliant upon polarization and victimization.

This patterning can serve a useful social function. Myth, as previously mentioned, creates ways of knowing and unites societies. In his corpus of books and essays, Burke held that myth both limits and renews, asserting throughout his career that a narrative must be in motion to motivate a people to “either to serve or resist the dominant piety.”<sup>32</sup> Ivie also invites us to understand the ambiguity of myth, describing it as a “fiction in the service of nonfiction for good or ill purposes. It can take the form of a demonizing

projection or a humanizing image of complementarities.”<sup>33</sup> One way of assessing the usefulness of a myth is by thinking about the degree to which it contributes to democratic culture. In my and others’ assessments of melodrama, it offers a form of knowing that can be highly problematic in this regard. It relies on individualism and caricature in a reductive manner that, due to its proliferation in U.S. political discourse, often evades the critical engagement and robust discussion necessary for a healthy democracy.

Burkean frames of acceptance and rejection help to further explain both the motivations and limitations behind melodramatic caricature in U.S. culture. Narratives constructed through the melodramatic frame remain incomplete because melodrama operates as a frame of rejection. Burke contends that we habituate frameworks that either *accept* or *reject* experiences in order to direct thought and incite action consistent with our own particular worldviews. These frames organize and simplify reality in ways that help us avoid incoherence. The difference between frames of acceptance and rejection is a matter of degree; the frames operate on a continuum, relying more or less on acceptance or on rejection. “Frames stressing the ingredient of *rejection*” prove problematic because they “make for fanaticism, the singling-out of one factor above others in the charting of human relationships.”<sup>34</sup> Melodrama operates as a frame of rejection. It isolates the goodness and bravery of heroes over their vulnerabilities or potential faults. It isolates the weakness of victims over their strengths or potential ingenuity. It isolates the evil and cowardice of enemies over their humanity or potential for kindness. As exemplified by melodrama, frames of rejection are reductive, offering a narrower range of political action than frames of acceptance. Osborne and Bakke argue that melodramatic characters are “incredibly simple representations of humanity” that “represent moral absolutes.”<sup>35</sup>

Operating at the expense of complexity, melodrama transforms murky moral conduct into simple caricatures of good heroes, vulnerable victims, and evil villains. “The methods of caricature,” Burke argues, “do not equip us to understand the full complexities of sociality—hence they warp our programs of action.”<sup>36</sup> Melodrama directs us to refashion or simply ignore voices and experiences that contradict the framework for heroism constructed through its caricatures.

The melodramatic frame reduces in ways that allow it to fit seamlessly within Western discourses of liberal individualism. Elizabeth Anker situates melodrama as characteristic of individualistic discourse. She writes, “melodrama’s popular appeal lies in the norms it shares with liberal individualism. These norms... value individual autonomy and mastery.”<sup>37</sup> Linda Williams further exposes the limitations of the melodramatic framework. In melodrama, she writes, “virtue and truth can be achieved in private individuals and individual heroic acts rather than... in revolution and change.”<sup>38</sup> Anna Siomopoulos notes Williams’s critique and indicts melodrama even further. She suggests that the “individualistic focus in US melodrama has contributed to a public discourse that has restricted transformations of the state in the twentieth century.”<sup>39</sup> Continuing, she writes that in Hollywood melodrama, “the solution to social injustice does not require structural political and economic changes.”<sup>40</sup> In short, when discourse projects social problems onto the unchanging archetype of the malicious villain, there seems no need for large-scale social change in response to social ills. Rather, seeking out and punishing these individuals appears the most logical response. Melodramatically framed rhetoric, in other words, fits within what Lauren Berlant describes as the dominating characteristic of contemporary U.S. politics. Since 1968, she writes “the

sphere of discipline and definition for proper citizenship in the United States has become progressively more private, more sexual and familial, and more concerned with personal morality.”<sup>41</sup> Drawing from this work, throughout this project, I conceive of melodrama as a manifestation of liberal individualism that problematically obscures the cultural, systemic, and institutional factors that contribute to both war culture and rape culture.

Because it fits seamlessly within contemporary discourses of liberal individualism, melodrama often operates covertly within political discourse. Melodramatic narratives pervade contemporary understandings of socio-political life, yet we rarely recognize them as such. The gender dynamics of melodrama also aid our inability to see its imprint on political narratives. Indeed, melodrama colors perception of public life and parallels common cultural understandings of bravery during wartime politics—realms traditionally viewed as masculine. However, melodrama is a traditionally feminized frame.<sup>42</sup> As a result, we tend to overlook the melodramatic nature of politics because we recognize melodrama *only* within the realm of feminine frivolity. When most people hear the word “melodrama” they think soap operas and Hollywood films, they don’t commonly think of government politics or the military. We fail to read the melodrama of these realms, instead viewing them as inherently rational and masculine institutions.

The very act of understanding and identifying political and war rhetoric as melodrama in and of itself holds transformative potential. It reminds us that our collective understanding is neither wholly rational, nor wholly inevitable. Scholarship of film and theatre demonstrates ways to approach melodrama as such. As Christine Gledhill argues, melodramas may be read “‘against the grain’ for their covert critique of the represented

status quo.”<sup>43</sup> By reading melodrama *qua* melodrama, we may gain the critical edge to broaden the limited perspective this frame constructs. Melodramas on screen or stage hold the potential to invoke critical engagement because their visual and emotional excess “disrupts the realism of a text to allow for subversive and alternate meanings to surface and be read.”<sup>44</sup> However, the covert nature of melodrama in wartime rhetoric often disables this distance. Wartime politics often lack the “gestural, visual, and musical excess” found in melodramas of theatre and film that alert audiences to the hyperbole of such productions.<sup>45</sup> As a result, critical analysis is necessary to denaturalize wartime melodrama.

Though I argue throughout this project that there is critical value in identifying political discourse as fitting within the melodramatic genre, my discussion of the liberating potential of this critical move is not to be confused with Steven Schwarze’s approach to melodrama. Schwarze argues, quite convincingly, that the “stark, polarizing distinctions” characteristic of melodrama offers a useful rhetorical strategy for environmental activism.<sup>46</sup> In this context, in which large-scale corporations covertly degrade the environment to a degree that harms the health of people and communities, the melodramatic construction of villainy proves a highly effective rhetorical strategy. This strategy, he asserts, helps to achieve the strong affective response necessary for building the community support necessary to resist a formidable corporate opponent. While melodramatic discourse certainly seems productive for environmental activism and other contexts, I argue that the archetypes of the melodramatic frame are *not* useful in the movement to address sexual violence. Melodramatic caricatures, and the gendered dynamics of victimhood they advance, I will demonstrate, exacerbate problematic gender

hierarchies inherent in rape culture. While affective appeals such as those found in melodramatically framed narratives are undeniably useful in rallying public support, melodrama is certainly not the only rhetorical strategy to achieve an affective response. Indeed, throughout the subsequent chapters, I discuss alternative rhetorical models that demonstrate how resistance efforts may heal harmful social patterns by embracing complexity. Such efforts manage public emotion in ways more appropriate to the sensitive nature of wartime sexual violence.

The articulation of rhetorical models that counter melodrama is an important step in the process of productive criticism. Unsettling melodramatic understandings of political life is a difficult task because, as previously mentioned, U.S. culture clings to melodrama for its ability to provide comfort in times of uncertainty. In addressing how we might critically engage with rhetoric that is powerfully imbued with affect, Jenny Edbauer Rice suggests a “process of disarticulation, or unsticking of those figures that seem to be glued together, followed by a rearticulation, or a new way of linking together images and representations that is less oppressive.”<sup>47</sup> My method is analogous to a Foucauldian discourse analysis, which conducts a critical genealogy of rhetoric to highlight contradiction and imagine new possibilities. Inspired by this form of criticism, I retell historical narratives to illuminate a present rhetorical pattern. To do so, I bring together fragmented experiences of war forgotten in contemporary discourse, provide their cultural context, and juxtapose problematic myths with alternative narratives in order to expose and critique the melodramatic frame.

While it is important to attend to the problematic and oppressive effects of rhetoric, it is important to attend to the liberating potential of rhetoric as well. Many

scholars of myth maintain that social narrative need not serve solely limiting purposes. Such scholars find a standard for rhetorical judgment in a myth's capacity for humanization. As I discussed above, from Kenneth Burke and Robert Ivie we learn that myth in general is neither inherently good nor inherently bad, but ambiguous and inevitable. Burke contends that there is a revolutionary potential of myth. He asserts that myth does much more than affirm normative assumptions.<sup>48</sup> Given that myth is morally ambiguous, it is not necessary to rid the world of all guiding myths. Rather, it is most sensible to assess those myths for their flexibility and productivity and provide models for mythic discourses that serve democratic ends.

Toward that end, in the chapters to follow I juxtapose melodramatic narratives with alternative texts, which I read as modeling a healing heroism. Such narratives ameliorate the harmful dehumanizing effects of the gender hierarchy and racialized polarization contained in melodrama. Wilz asserts that discourses of rehumanization, which she asserts are essential in healing from the damaging effects of war culture, enable us to imagine individuals and groups involved in a conflict as "more than abstract caricatures."<sup>49</sup> Rhetoric of healing heroism operates in this mode. The various models of healing heroism explored through this project all embrace complexity. This entails recognizing that ideas of gender and race cannot be contained within normative categories and recognizing that simple Manichean dualism cannot account for the complex realities of social life. Rather than discursively ignoring the complications and contradictions inherent in identities and publics, as does melodrama, healing heroism affords a more complete perspective on human interaction.

By revealing war rhetoric's likeness to melodrama and tracking its course through political discourse, we may denaturalize discourses of victimization and demonization, opening the space for more humanizing narratives, like healing heroism. According to Ivie and Giner, such an approach has two functions. First, "the discovery of buried myth exposes the architecture of political authority," lessening its power. Secondly, it "serves the important purpose of performing political critique without succumbing to the "barbarism" of critical reflection, i.e., sans the negativity of factional strife and calculated malice." Elsewhere, Ivie asserts that this approach is necessary because societies "rely on [myth] to make sense of otherwise disorienting experiences," therefore, simply annihilating myth without providing new rhetorical models "produces an agonizing void."<sup>50</sup> Therefore, to avoid creating a cultural vacuum, we may use myth as a heuristic for rhetorical critique. Such an endeavor recognizes the importance of myths in society and strives not to demystify foundational narratives themselves, but to unsettle absolutism. Thus, I critique the melodramatic frame not to scrape away its archetypes in order to expose our hidden reality, but to illuminate them as calcified myths so that we may open the possibility for rhetorical intervention.

### **Melodrama: An Intersectional Bridge Between Rhetorical and Feminist**

#### **Perspectives on Violence**

My project of analyzing discourses of rape and war as a melodramatic myth serves the purpose of exposing rape as a cultural practice, rather than an individual crime. This move is inspired by the work of Rachel Hall and Renee Heberle, both of whom assert that demonstrations of the normalcy of rape yield the most productive interventions into rape culture. Heberle writes that advocacy that simply seeks to expose the prevalence

of sexual violence “may contribute to sustaining the reality of masculinist power.”<sup>51</sup> She argues that when rape is treated as a reality of women’s lives, it prevents us from addressing the cultural factors that lead to rape. Hall similarly argues that “We must stop allowing the spectacle of women’s suffering to eclipse the cultural factors at work that make rape thinkable and doable by some men.”<sup>52</sup> She calls for a new approach to eradicating rape. Stating that feminists’ goal now should be to “de-dramatize rape discourse, even as we are disturbed, and rightly so, by how ordinary rape is in our culture.”<sup>53</sup> According to both Hall and Heberle, exposing rape as a cultural practice and examining how the rhetorical construction of gender norms produce this rape culture is crucial in fighting against rape. As Hall writes, “When we imagine fear as merely psychological or imaginary, we deny the extent to which women’s fears are embodied and social experiences. We also mask the actual historical processes by which women become marked as vulnerable—processes that normalize women’s fears.”<sup>54</sup> Articulating how narratives of wartime sexual assault are inflected with melodrama demonstrates that our understandings of rape are socially constructed. Doing so opens the process for deconstructing this sense of threat and denaturalizes the power of masculinity to unsettle patriarchal norms.

Before exploring this further, it is first prudent to articulate my guiding understanding of gender. Many of the feminist scholars cited in this review, as well as myself, have been greatly influenced by the work of Judith Butler. Butler’s 1990 book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, argues there is no pre-discursive sex prior to gender, meaning that sex, gender, and sexuality are always already performative. It is important to note that though I write repeatedly about masculinity and

femininity throughout this project, I am not attributing these characteristics to a particular sex. Rather, I see these as performative ideals that melodramatic narratives and other discursive forms have constructed, reified, and attached to particular bodies. Indeed, the notion that gender is performative is central to my project of unsettling and denaturalizing patriarchal social norms of militarized culture. Drawing from Butler allows me to critique performances of masculinity throughout this project without critiquing the bodies typically attached to masculinity through discourse, thus avoiding the harmful gender normativity of essentialization.

Normative conceptions of masculinity and femininity lend themselves to rape culture. This rape culture is premised upon a gender hierarchy in which men are superior because women are vulnerable to attacks by deranged Others. This hierarchy positions men as inherently strong and active and women as inherently weak and passive. By this configuration, according to Hall, women are addressed as “rape space,” always at risk, always vulnerable to attack.<sup>55</sup> Rape, by these hegemonic renderings of U.S. culture, is an action that occurs against women who dare to traverse into unsafe spaces or who find themselves in insecure situations.

Perceptions of woman as inherently vulnerable limit understandings of both femininity and the individuals who commit rape. According Barbara Barnett, most Americans are socialized to believe that “a ‘real rape’ is one in which a victim is raped by a stranger who jumps out of the bushes with a weapon.”<sup>56</sup> Hall similarly asserts that, “In the American imaginary, the figure of woman as victim also reflects her inverse or negative image: the rapist as monster.” She continues, observing the racist intonations intertwined in this sentiment, “Within a historically racist culture such as our own, the

ideal figures of victim and rapist are often racially coded. ...the negative ideal of the rapist is most often played by a stereotypical man of color.”<sup>57</sup> Suzanne Enck-Wanzer helps us position this as a symptom of cultural narratives of gendered violence at large, noting when domestic abuse is committed by a black man, it is more likely to receive coverage by the news media.<sup>58</sup> These patterns reside upon long-held cultural assumptions that erroneously associate blackness with aggression.

Social narratives that emphasize the threat of sexual violence as inevitable has material effects on women’s lives and political culture at large. Brian Massumi theorizes how threat operates in political culture. He positions threat as a culturally constructed, abstract, concept of future possibilities. Despite their abstract nature, threats, even those that do not occur, have material effects on the threatened because they impact social interactions in the present.<sup>59</sup> Hall comments upon the effects of rape threats, specifically, arguing that they limit women’s agency. “Women’s safety pedagogy produces popular notions of female agency in which women are simultaneously assigned an a priori victim-status and expected to avoid the inevitable all on their own. The resulting paradox is that agency is possible for women only through avoidance.”<sup>60</sup> Women’s lives, in this way, are guided by fear. The way by which the threat of rape is imagined in a society also affects how rape is addressed by that society. If women are inherently vulnerable from attacks by deranged men, then the best response to this danger is punitive, rather cultural. Such measures further reinscribe gender hierarchy, positioning women as “property that must be protected.”<sup>61</sup> Rhetorical interventions to shift this cultural problem are imperative.

The sense of threat created through caricatures of the raping villain is harmful not only because it negatively impacts women’s mobility in society, but also because it

prevents society from productively addressing rape. Narratives that melodramatically project rape onto racialized villains allow U.S. society to overlook the cultural processes that exacerbate sexual violence. In her seminal text on rape culture, Susan Brownmiller articulates rape not as the crime of deranged hypersexual deviants, but as a product of patriarchal culture. She was among the first to position rape as a political act, an assertion of power that stems from gender hierarchy.<sup>62</sup> Drawing from the work of Sharon Marcus, Heberle similarly reminds us of the foundations of feminist activism against rape: “men’s bodies *become* weapons and tools of violence and women’s bodies *become* objects of violence; there is nothing intrinsic or ahistorical or natural about the differential in male/female recourse to or capacity for violence.”<sup>63</sup> Similarly, Hall explains that rape is a “product of gender socialization” and “a cultural practice in which some men repeatedly engage.”<sup>64</sup> Enck and McDaniel assert that understanding gendered violence as a systemic problem, as opposed to a private problem between individuals, forces us to understand gendered violence as an “efficient sequence of power and control between individuals because of the cultural complicity that supports hegemonic masculinity, whiteness, heteronormativity, and so forth.”<sup>65</sup> In order to address rape culture, specifically, we need to move beyond melodramatic imaginings of the evil villain so that we can understand and intervene in the patriarchal social processes that contribute to patterns of gendered violence.

The melodramatically imagined villain characteristic of rape culture also plays a prominent role in war culture. Both rely heavily on polarized notions of good and evil. Rhetorical scholarship has engaged this polarizing discourse. I draw from this literature, which views the pervasiveness of war as exacerbated through patterns of language that

construct a sense of good and evil by distinguishing “us” from the Other. Kenneth Burke inspired this scholarly trend with his analysis of “The Rhetoric of Hitler’s Battle.” This essay is indicative of his larger critical project, which examines rhetoric as involving appeals of identification. Here, Burke asserts that Hitler constructed national unification out of a fearful cultural climate through the “fictitious devil-function” of scapegoating. He established identification among Germans by emphasizing their difference, or division, from the Jewish people.<sup>66</sup> Hitler attributed all social ills to the Jewish people to the extent that they, as a group, became dehumanized, enabling the German people to commit atrocities against their former friends and neighbors without guilt. Fruitfully drawing from Burke’s theoretical premise, Robert Ivie and Oscar Giner argue that the polarizing rhetoric that leads to war has become embedded in the culture of U.S. democracy as a result of the “demophobia” of our nation’s founders. Following this mythos, we address our own fears of the distempered demos by projecting our own evils onto an external enemy and then waging war to protect our nation’s “holy democratic soul against [these] wicked foes” of civilization.<sup>67</sup> Elsewhere, Ivie and Giner track this trope of demonization throughout U.S. presidential war rhetoric. “Just as George W. Bush called upon the nation to destroy ‘evildoers’ in a global war on terrorism, Ronald Reagan rallied Americans to defeat an ‘evil empire’ in the long Cold War against the Soviet Union.” They assert that, “Each president drew rhetorically on a constitutive myth of the Devil that is deeply embedded in U.S. history.”<sup>68</sup> Through these and other analyses, Ivie reveals the terrible paradox of a nation that adopts an identity of a peaceful and democratic country, despite its obsession with war.<sup>69</sup> “[I]t is tragically ironic to conjure up a rhetorical spell against democracy’s evil enemies as an excuse for abating,

abandoning, or indefinitely suspending the actual practice of democracy.”<sup>70</sup> Our polarized drive to war, he argues, contradicts our identity as a democratic nation.

Other contemporary rhetorical scholars have similarly observed the effects of demonology in incurring war. Denise Bostdorff, for example, observes wartime polarization through the lens of religiosity in George Bush’s post-9/11 rhetoric. She contends that Bush mirrored 17<sup>th</sup> century rhetoric of covenant renewal by casting the U.S. as “a chosen people with a special mission” and using polarization in “the discussion of good and evil.”<sup>71</sup> By hearkening to the Greatest Generation as evidence of the righteousness of our nation and by blaming terrorists’ evil nature for 9/11, as opposed to reflecting on U.S. foreign policy, President Bush constructed the need for war. The power in approaches that study polarization in war discourse through the trope of devilry lies within the strong connections that chain naturalized and rationalized political language to religious discourse. Joshua Gunn, too, examines the prevalence of discourses of demonism in popular culture and political discourse. He argues that President George Bush exploited the rhetoric of exorcism in his post-9/11 rhetoric. Gunn characterizes such rhetoric as a logic that features a “spiritual battle between forces of good and some [hidden or silent] evil.”<sup>72</sup> Once the signs of evil are identified, a virtual exorcism occurs which first summons, then names the evil force, and finally symbolically battles said evil, demanding its departure. Similarly, Wilz asserts that enemy-making, created primarily through rhetoric that dehumanizes the enemy, is a key component of war mythology in the U.S. She asserts that dehumanizing tropes help to “persuade the American public to enter into foreign conflict.”<sup>73</sup> Elisabeth Anker tracks the role polarization played in the news media after September 11 through the trope of melodrama itself. She examines how

this rhetoric crafted U.S. identity as a morally powerful victim in order to justify retributive action by rendering it heroic.<sup>74</sup> In this project, then, I extend the work of Anker by tracing the unique gendered dynamic of this melodramatic discourse.

Because both rape culture and war culture rely upon rhetoric that advances polarization through notions of feminine passivity and masculine action, melodrama provides a useful analytical frame through which to simultaneously examine and critique these intersecting discourses. Therefore, the melodramatic frame advantageously connects rhetorical critiques of war to feminist literature examining sexual assault and other gendered injustices during wartime.<sup>75</sup> Perhaps the most prolific scholar to advance feminist war criticism is Cynthia Enloe, who meticulously documents the pervasive use of femininity as a trope for militarization. Through her research, she illustrates the considerable energy nations exert to shape citizens' ideas on matters of gender.<sup>76</sup> She asserts that military discourses function to militarize women "because so many military officials have presumed that they have needed to control not only women, but the very idea of 'femininity.'"<sup>77</sup> Enloe summarizes this norm quite eloquently as she observes that "If maleness, masculinity, and militarism *were* inevitably bound together, militaries would always have all the soldiers they believed they required."<sup>78</sup> Her work reveals that mothers on the home front, camp followers, prostitutes, female soldiers, rape victims, soldiers' wives, nurses and those involved in other ancillary forms of military labor are utilized both literally and figuratively as symbols to propagate militarization and war. Indeed, Cynthia Enloe argues that because "[m]asculinity is constructed out of ideas about femininity," we must "pay attention to women and ideas about femininity" to understand masculinity, especially within the military.<sup>79</sup> Her explanation mirrors

rhetorical critics Osborn and Bakke's observation that melodramatic characters are constructed in relation to each other. Masculinity, whether in the form of the hero or the evildoer, requires a feminine victim to save or violate, respectively.

The idea that the world is a dangerous place haunted by dark, violent rapists is a key component of such cultural war mechanisms. Such myths obsess over the threat of rape in ways that both propagate war and preclude women from full participation in the public sphere. "A principal argument used by all governments who exclude women from any job they categorize as a combat position is that as combatants women would be likely to be captured and that in captivity they would become victims of sexual assault."<sup>80</sup> Such sentiment is part of the mythos of the melodramatic frame that deems women incapable of protecting themselves from the evil rapists lurking in dark corners of the world. When danger is gendered via emphasis on threats of sexual assault, women are depicted as inherently vulnerable while men who shy away from protecting the "fairer" sex are emasculated.<sup>81</sup> This dynamic of militarization requires men to attack others under the guise of chivalry. Susan Faludi contributes to such observations in her book, *The Terror Dream*, which illustrates how this has occurred in the War on Terror. She observes the Bush administration and the U.S. media's rampant usage of the damsel in distress as a trope to propagate war in response to the 9/11 attacks. This imagery resurrected traditional notions of masculinity and femininity. Melodramatic undertones appeared not only in the rescue fantasies of Jessica Lynch but also in news stories in the early months of the Iraq War, such as those speculating that "security moms" would vote for strong male politicians who could ensure their safety. Further perpetuating passivity as a feminine ideal, the news media proclaimed feminism's irrelevance in the face of

terrorism, and the Bush administration reversed several policies from the Clinton era that expanded women's roles in battle.<sup>82</sup> The conservative notions of gender reiterated by melodramatic notions of feminine endangerment and sexual exploitation fuel the War on Terror's culture of fear. Despite the pervasiveness of rhetorical patterns of feminine frailty during wartime and the degree to which international politics relies upon the manipulations of masculinity and femininity, the role of the feminine in war and politics often remains hidden. Therefore, according to Enloe, "in order to understand how and why international power takes the forms it does," we need to make women's roles during wartime and political manipulation of gender more visible.<sup>83</sup>

Enloe is not alone in revealing the gendered dynamics that pervade U.S. military rhetoric. Other scholars indicate the tendency to exploit women's presumed jeopardy for imperialist military endeavors. U.S. war propaganda has historically iterated fantasies of the uncivilized, raping enemy. Several scholars note that propaganda posters from World War I, as just one example, frequently featured imagery of large, animalistic "Huns" lurking over frail and tender women.<sup>84</sup> In the current U.S. political climate, our leaders still allude to imagery of the damsel in peril to incur war. Dana Cloud observes how this occurred through ideographs of the "clash of civilizations" during the onset of the war in Afghanistan. The nation of Afghanistan was constructed as inferior through imagery that presented Afghan women as helplessly oppressed. She argues that military intervention was justified through the notion that the U.S. was serving as a necessary "paternalistic savior" of the female victims in Afghanistan. She notes the role this victimization plays in propagating imperialism: "War may require vilifying visual frames, but occupation requires a humanitarian flexing of the nationalist frame."<sup>85</sup> In other words, while racial

polarization may be necessary to incur war, victimization is necessary to sustain long-term military intervention. Stabile and Kumar similarly attest to the use of gendered victimization in U.S. military imperialism. They observe that U.S. corporate news media reported on the oppression of Afghan women only after rhetoric of their victimization served a useful narrative in selling the War on Terror.<sup>86</sup> Vron Ware, too, confirms the link between imperial military action and melodramatic narratives of feminine vulnerability. She states that “the case for new forms of imperialist aggression can be made more readily if the evil posed by the enemy is linked to their oppression of women.”<sup>87</sup> Feminine vulnerability may also operate metaphorically. Susan Jeffords contends that the 1991 U.S.-led war on Iraq was justified through such logic. Rhetoric abounded that justified war by linking the “rape of Kuwait” to Saddam Hussein. In sum, victimization and rescue play an important role in wartime rhetoric.

In contemporary times, exploitation of the threat of sexual violence recurs in discussions of the Al-Qaeda, Taliban, and Iraqi militants who have been labeled as “terrorists” in U.S. public discourse. U.S. media and politicians frequently report on the gendered violence that occurs in these nations. As one representative example, in a 2003 address to the nation regarding impending war in Iraq, President George W. Bush cites the sexual violence of Iraqi leaders to justify military intervention. Bush declares that once Iraq is freed, “there will be no more ... torture chambers and *rape rooms*.”<sup>88</sup> In order to build public support for war in Iraq, President Bush emphasized the idea that rape was a systemic problem under Hussein’s regime. This particular sentence of this speech was picked up and reported in multiple news outlets worldwide in the onset of the War in Iraq.<sup>89</sup> This method of emphasizing the evil nature of the enemy through rape was

also apparent in representations of Hussein's son, Uday, who was often described as a "notorious" rapist.<sup>90</sup> The emphasis on these rape narratives perpetuates a melodramatic cultural misconception that links the enemy inextricably to gendered violence. As a result, crimes of sexual assault that indicate otherwise often go unacknowledged.

Ironically, although the U.S. regularly justifies military action on the basis of protecting the vulnerable, substantial psychological research ties military culture and war to sexual violence. Citing research revealing that rape is endemic to processes of militarization, Eileen Zurbriggen explains the conceptual links between militarized masculinity and sexual violence, arguing that the socialization process for traditional, hegemonic masculinity underlies both.<sup>91</sup> Madeline Morris's research confirms this. She asserts:

Particular attitudes toward masculinity have been found to be related to heightened levels of rape propensity. Standards of masculinity that emphasize dominance, assertiveness, aggressiveness, independence, self-sufficiency, and willingness to take risks and that reject characteristics such as compassion, understanding, and sensitivity have been found to be correlated with rape propensity.<sup>92</sup>

A meta-analysis of psychological research also indicates that measures of patriarchal masculine ideology were related to the perpetration of sexual aggression.<sup>93</sup>

In bringing together rhetorical, feminist and film scholarship to examine how both feminine vulnerability and racialized villainy operate in melodramatic public discourse, I conduct an intersectional analysis. Kimberlé Crenshaw, drawing from essays and speeches from feminists of color, working-class feminists, and lesbians, articulated "intersectionality" as a heuristic that denotes the ways that various identity markers *interact* to shape multiple dimensions of experience.<sup>94</sup> As Crenshaw observes in her study of violence against women of color, issues of race, class, and gender impact

survivors of gendered violence in ways that cannot be fully accounted for when we examine these components of identity separately.<sup>95</sup> Such scholarship examines “interlocking oppressions” as magnifying the impact of hegemony on individuals and groups. If we apply this approach to war rhetoric, it becomes apparent that race, gender, and sexuality interact to inform processes of militarization. An intersectional approach to studying rhetoric also recognizes that these processes operate in complex ways, a position that inherently counteracts the caricatured simplicity of melodrama. In the book *Standing in the Intersection*, an exploration of the merits of intersectional analysis within communication studies, Sara McKinnon reminds us that a productive, radical intersectional scholarship *must* attend to the historicity, fluidity, and contradictions inherent in the ways subjects recognize both others and themselves. She asserts that scholars must remain vigilant in order to recognize “that which exists outside commonly recognized borders.”<sup>96</sup> To conduct such a critique, I use melodrama as a lens to examine polarized discursive patterns and then explore discourses that counter melodrama by engaging with the complexities of war and sexual violence.

### **Constructions and Contradictions of Melodrama in 20<sup>th</sup> Century U.S. War**

I explore the implicit and explicit themes of rape running through narratives about the U.S. military to track how melodramatic assumptions about sexual violence and war have developed over time. My analysis spans three U.S. wars: World War II, the Vietnam War, and the War on Terror. Because wartime rape pervades the experiences of many but is systematically minimized and sometimes silenced, it cannot be encapsulated by a singular text. Therefore, to examine this situation, I assemble my own text from the fragments available.<sup>97</sup> Because a melodramatically framed tale indicates that complexities

have been excluded, I select melodramatic narratives in various texts including military and political rhetoric, documentaries, journalism, and Hollywood film. By stitching together these disparate texts, I am able to analyze and critique the larger social discourse circulating about sexual assault during wartime and explore its influence upon understandings of war, heroism, sexual violence, power, race, and gender. Then, to recover the complexities omitted by the melodramatic frame I examine performances, dissent, and social movements, in all their various mediations, that contradict dominant discourse. These alternative examples depict ideas of heroism, victimhood, and villainy that avoid caricature and polarization to heal the harmful effects of melodramatic culture. By juxtaposing material experiences of war with the collective reality constructed by the melodramatic frame, I illuminate the contradictions of the latter in the hope of further unsettling harmful discursive norms. Additionally, I articulate how these discourses may serve as rhetorical models for critique and reinvention of public discourse regarding gender, war and sexualized violence. These alternative rhetorics, operating through the lens of healing heroism, both demonstrate how nuanced narratives may operate in public discourse to highlight the need for systemic and cultural change and challenge problematic manifestations of race and gender in war and rape culture.

To perform this critical intervention, I focus on American war rhetoric from the past century examining how narratives of rape developed from World War II and then the Vietnam War to inflect the current rhetorical patterns prevalent in the contemporary War on Terror. The cases I examine highlight the discrepancies between lived experiences and melodrama's rigid caricatures. Through this analysis I reveal that discursive archetypes of heroism, racialized villainy, and feminine victimhood that circulated in the mid-twentieth

century still saturate contemporary discourse. I have chosen these particular points in history because WWII and Vietnam provide fruitful vantage points to illuminate the present War on Terror. Pundits and government officials periodically compare the War on Terror to WWII or Vietnam depending on whether they are promoting or critiquing our military interventions in the Middle East, respectively. Public memory of these two wars thus influences current articulations of international conflict.

I begin, in chapter two, by examining how constructions of vulnerability motivate war discourse and inform gendered conceptions of heroism by analyzing rhetoric regarding the internment of military nurses on the Bataan Peninsula in the Philippines during WWII. I argue that the heroism that appeared in public discourse in this context too closely mirrors the structure of melodrama to encapsulate the nuanced and contradictory realities of war, gender, and sexual violence. I reveal the ways by the stories of these women, whom I refer to as the “Nurses of Bataan,” are reframed or excluded in ways that follow a melodramatic pattern. This occurs because the nurses’ actions countered traditional ideals of femininity. From December of 1941, when the Japanese military began bombing U.S. military outposts in the Philippines, through to February of 1945, when the women assisted the soldiers who liberated their internment camp, these nurses exhibited strength and bravery. They survived jungle conditions, supply shortages, malnutrition, and imprisonment on the Bataan Peninsula. Throughout this time, none of the women were raped or brutalized at the hands of the Japanese soldiers. Their performances during war sharply contradict caricatures of the melodramatic damsel in distress.

Because the experiences of the Nurses of Bataan challenge traditional melodramatic archetypes of heroes, villains, and victims, their story rarely appears in U.S. public memory. The Hollywood film, *So Proudly We Hail!*, offers a rare account of the Nurses of Bataan. Released in 1943, nearly two years before the nurses returned home from their internment, the film problematically minimizes the strength and bravery of the nurses. It frames their experiences into a melodramatic story in which their womanly virtue earned them love from soldiers who could protect them from evil Japanese soldiers. By emphasizing the nurses' vulnerability, the film demonstrates the characteristics of melodramatic heroism. This heroism privileges masculine, individualistic actors who rescue the weak by eliminating or conquering the enemy. Japanese soldiers, in this film, are constructed as heinous villains with an animalistic desire to rape the nurses. Such representations build a sense of threat that helps the U.S. to present its military action as virtuous and to maintain public support for war.

In the absence of alternative narratives, the conceptions of heroism and feminine vulnerability and racialized villainy portrayed through the film became the “official story” of the first female POWs. Through my analysis, I compare the melodramatic Hollywood film to archival U.S. news articles of the experience to illustrate how the melodramatic frame functions as a dominant narrative form for war rhetoric that transcends cinematic representations. Of the political and media representations of the Nurses of Bataan, most focus on heralding the heroic U.S. soldiers who rescued them or on their potential violation by Japanese soldiers.<sup>98</sup> While such narratives spread readily, when the nurses shared the toils of their healing labor and survival experiences, they

often were accused of exaggerating. During the war, U.S. public discourse indeed followed a logic that paralleled the structure of a Hollywood melodrama.

As theories of mythic criticism contend, when dominant social myths are challenged, they must be replaced by alternative narratives that can fill the void and allow for social change. Therefore, after I critique melodramatic heroism in this chapter, I pose “healing heroism” as a substitute form of public valor through analysis of the performances and personal testimony of the Nurses of Bataan. The alternative heroism performed by these women starkly contrasts melodramatic narratives. A healing heroism avoids imposing a gender hierarchy by embracing the potential for heroism in actions deemed feminine (and thus devalued) and by acknowledging that both women and men may perform in ways not traditionally associated with their gender. In addition, it embraces collective action and denies simplified binaries of good and evil.

Healing heroism offers a more productive, more realistic tool for social life than does melodrama. This model helps us imagine what might happen when we engage in rhetorics that use health as a root metaphor for heroism and the role that might play in initiating social change. Frames of melodrama and healing heroism both recognize that social problems exist, but each addresses these problems in different ways. A healing heroism involves action and critique, as does melodramatic heroism, but it also nurtures those involved. Melodramatic heroism, which involves eliminating an enemy is so focused on antagonism and attack of the enemy, that there is no space for humanization, no room for healing. A healing heroism counters this melodramatic response to social problems and instead seeks to fix or heal the social systems that are broken in nondestructive ways. Our actions and policy decisions are different when we approach

social conflicts as collective ailments that need to be healed instead of absolute, individualistic evil that needs to be eliminated. The concept of healing heroism established here, based upon the act of nursing, may be applied to other wartime circumstances and used as a model to begin to rhetorically heal the social ills of war culture.

In my third chapter I explore the too frequent minimization of the sexual assault in rhetoric about the My Lai Massacre in Vietnam. To do so, I analyze representations of the massacre in documentaries, political discourse, and journalism both during the late 1960s and in more recent public memory of the war. The My Lai Massacre serves as an origin point that further unravels the melodramatic notion of heroism. This case illuminates the tendency to conceal U.S. soldiers' sexual abuse of civilians in "enemy" nations in public memory. This tendency toward minimization helps to maintain a virtuous sense of national identity and to affirm the righteousness of masculine heroism. The soldiers who participated in the massacre, especially those who engaged in acts of sexual violence, behaved in ways that challenge traditional notions of heroism. Put differently, they defied their supposed chivalrous contract to protect rather than violate. On March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1968, these soldiers entered the hamlet of My Lai, killed an estimated 500 residents—most of whom were women, old men, or small children—destroyed the infrastructure of the village, and raped or sexually assaulted more than 20 women and girls. Their actions were akin to U.S. public imaginings of Japanese soldiers' treatment of the Nurses of Bataan, except that this violence actually occurred. Full recognition of this complex brutality unsettles our categories of heroes and villains. My Lai reveals that our

supposed “villains” may be unjustly victimized by heroes, and that our “heroes” may perform in ways we more readily associate with villains.

Due to concerted military efforts to conceal this tragically failed operation, tales of the atrocities at My Lai remained untold until March of the following year, when discharged army specialist Ron Ridenhour wrote a letter to President Nixon and several members of Congress, launching an investigation. However, the incident received little public attention until November of 1969, when *Life* and *Time* magazines released a series of photographs taken by Sgt. Ron Haeberle that documented the massacre.<sup>99</sup> Despite the influx of media attention for the weeks to follow, the tragedy is frequently minimized in U.S. public discourse. Too often, representations of the massacre either blame the brutality on the individual commanding officer of the unit or portray the massacre as an anomaly of U.S. conduct in Vietnam. To counter this, I draw from research and testimony that reveals, instead, that a problematic military culture contributed to the violence. It appears that prevailing melodramatic frameworks of heroism inhibit the circulation of stories like the My Lai Massacre. Of note is that narratives of the atrocity that have percolated into the public realm minimize the rape and sexual mutilation that occurred. I argue that this abbreviation of sexual violence in public memory allows us to maintain notions of the ideal soldier, even while bearing witness to the massacre.

Drawing from the tenets of healing heroism established in my second chapter, I then analyze the Vietnam Veterans Against the War’s Winter Soldier Investigation, a public hearing designed to counter the narratives that maintain the military’s heroism by framing the massacre as an unusual phenomenon. In this chapter, healing heroism serves as a lens to explore how we might heal and rehumanize soldiers who have been turned

into “killing machines” by military indoctrination. These hearings feature Vietnam Veterans, men who have been trained to privilege harmful militarized ideals of hyper masculinity, publically reflecting on their wartime experiences. These veterans expose the chaos associated with the Vietnam War, attributing the erratic violence to the military’s ultimate powerlessness in the jungles of Vietnam. Because the hearings demonstrate that atrocities abounded during the war, they divulge the impotence, rather than power, of the U.S. military. Participating soldiers questioned polarized narratives about the war, revealing to their audience that on the battlefield the boundaries between good and evil are nearly impossible to maintain.

The public hearing provided an important example of how rhetoric of dissent may help rehumanize those soldiers inundated by a violent wartime culture. During the hearing, participants defied norms of militarized masculinity through emotive personal narratives. Due to the challenge these testimonies posed to the military ideology they had been trained to uphold, the hearings were a difficult experience for the soldiers. It offered both the mental challenge of thinking independently after years of military indoctrination and an emotional challenge of expose long hidden vulnerabilities. Yet, as did the Nurses of Bataan, the Winter Soldiers found the strength to challenge military norms through the collective nature of the gathering—knowing that they were not alone in their experiences encouraged many veterans to participate. Many commented that the emotionally complex collective narrative of wartime told through the hearing was therapeutic for those involved. Though soldiers trained for the battlefield, through enacting the rhetorical characteristics of healing heroism, these men began to nurses themselves and one another, initiating personal and social healing.

Finally, in chapter four, I reveal that the rhetorical patterns of WWII and the Vietnam War continue to influence contemporary culture through an analysis of rhetoric about the current epidemic of soldier on soldier rape within the U.S. military. I argue that melodramatic caricatures prevent public engagement with the institutional and cultural norms that contribute to rape culture. In doing so, I continue to unsettle traditional foundations of heroism through exploration of rhetoric that contradicts melodramatic assumptions. I examine rhetorical maneuvers to address the epidemic of sexual assault in the War on Terror. As a brief introduction to this epidemic: the DoD estimates that 26,000 individuals were sexually assaulted while serving in the military in 2012. Of those cases of sexual abuse, the Pentagon estimates that fifty-three percent involved attacks on men, primarily by other men.<sup>100</sup> It is estimated that 4.4% of women enlisted in the military and 0.9% of men enlisted in the military will be sexually assaulted each year.<sup>101</sup> Given that the average woman serves in the military for five years, this means that by conservative estimates, 23% of female service members are likely to be assaulted. A separate study conducted by the Veterans Affairs Medical Center, alarmingly, indicated that 79 percent of women in the military had been subject to crimes ranging from sexual harassment to gang rape.<sup>102</sup> Of those victims, “37 percent ... are raped multiple times, [and] 14 percent are gang raped.”<sup>103</sup> Through examples from the first Gulf War, Enloe details the extent to which the military attempts to cover up its internal sexual violence. She demonstrates that instances in which female soldiers were sexually assaulted by Iraqis received far more media attention than instances in which female soldiers were sexually assaulted by their fellow soldiers.<sup>104</sup>

Soldier-on-soldier rape in the U.S. military, in particular, offers a rich site for analysis because internal military violence is widespread and has been historically silenced, but is currently at a tipping point in which it is receiving increased public attention. Very recently, grassroots public advocacy efforts have begun to make progress in exposing the severity of internal military sexual assault to the U.S. public. For my last case study, then, I examine how political, military, and media rhetoric have attempted to maneuver these advocacy efforts, unsurprisingly, in narratives that continue to follow the melodramatic frame. Similar to Vietnam War Era rhetoric, which perpetuates notions of heroism established during WWII through denial of sexualized violence, the military minimizes its sexual assault problem by framing rape as an isolated crime perpetrated by inherently deviant individuals. The military then positions itself as heroic in its efforts to seek out and punish these perpetrators. This rhetoric problematically circumvents system-wide critique of the patriarchal tenants of the U.S. military.

After critiquing hegemonic rhetoric about rape in the military, I then analyze rhetoric of the movement against military sexual violence. Advocacy against military rape frequently features survivor testimony. This testimony, which appears in documentaries, Congressional speeches, public activism, and new media outreach, has the potential to challenge the military culture. I assess the movement's various applications of personal testimony for their departure from melodrama. The testimonies, to varying degrees, model productive discourse. These examples critique the military system, rather than blaming the problem on deviant scapegoats.

As the Winter Soldiers illuminate how the healing heroism demonstrated by the Nurses of Bataan may be applied to help soldiers dehumanized by their participation in

war culture begin processes of recovery, contemporary veteran survivors reveal how a healing heroism may ameliorate the emotional wounds of those objectified by sexual violence. In addition, this contemporary example reveals how these tenets offer a rhetorical antidote to the constraints patriarchal culture places upon public discourse. To do so, the most productive of the efforts led by survivor avoid the patterns of individualization, victimization and caricature of the melodramatic frame and eschew its racial and gender hierarchy. An interactive online documentary, “Survivor Stories,” created by Protect Our Defenders (POD) models the most socially therapeutic of these strategies. By including both men and women, the “Survivor Stories” avoid confining vulnerability to a specific gender and avoid rendering femininity inherently disempowered. In this way, the interactive documentary simultaneously challenges traditional norms of both femininity and masculinity. The crux of the healing function of this discourse occurs through the sharing of stories. Personal narrative in this context becomes a source of empowerment. In allowing survivors to regain agency, these narratives help to heal the objectifying and disempowering effects of sexual abuse. In the context of an online documentary, POD models a nuanced and productive discourse for addressing assault. Other rhetorical texts in the movement to address military sexual violence that have been mediated through more traditional forms of communication are less empowering. The documentary *The Invisible War*, for example, tends to melodramatically sensationalize feminine suffering. This indicates that perhaps new media outlets provide a space in which non-melodramatic discourses may be more easily proliferated.

Although some believe that the feminist and civil rights protests of the Vietnam War Era have radically shifted our understandings of race and gender, the consistency of the rhetorical patterns apparent through this rhetorical history reveal otherwise. In order to demonstrate this, I bind my historical analysis more strictly by topic than chronology. That is, while these chapters focus on a particular case study from one war, I do not confine my chapters to one particular moment in history. In each, I note similar discursive treatments of sexual violence from other eras. This serves the function of collapsing post-feminist and post-racial fallacies that there has been complete progress in gender and racial equality. I bolster my analysis in the chapter on WWII, for example, with analyses of similar occurrences in the Vietnam War and the War on Terror. By pulling these fragments together, I position the melodramatic frame as longstanding rhetorical pattern in U.S. culture.

In bringing together these rhetorical fragments from three major U.S. wartime eras, I illuminate both the gender biases inherent in U.S. notions of heroism as well as its tendency to project rape onto racialized enemies. I demonstrate the continuity of such narratives, revealing the repetition of the melodramatic mythos throughout history. Although the melodramatic frame has appeared in U.S. public discourse since the nation's inception, I examine World War II and the Vietnam War as important "origin points" for better understanding contemporary rhetoric on war and sexual violence. My analysis of WWII discourse establishes how heroism has come to be understood in contemporary U.S. culture in ways that abide by the gender and racial biases of the melodramatic frame. My research on the Vietnam War demonstrates how melodramatic heroism maintains itself in U.S. discourse, even as the material experiences of U.S.

soldiers challenge its idealistic foundations. The sexual violence in which some U.S. soldiers engage and the military's continued complacency with this violence, I argue, signals the flaws of masculinist social power. That men and women in the military sexually abuse one another at epidemic levels reveals *not* that the military attracts sexual deviants, but that there is a need for critical analysis and major transformation in military and U.S. culture regarding gender, race, war, and violence.

Together my analyses of discourses of war and sexual violence demonstrate the degree to which harmful conceptions of gender, race, and individualism inform binary understandings of good and evil within public discourse. The rhetorical situations I have chosen are not regularly discussed in U.S. public address. However, when they are mentioned, they are typically narrated through the melodramatic frame, illustrating melodrama's tendency to "obliterate the actual by tugging it relentlessly toward the ideal."<sup>105</sup> Often, in these situations, the lived experiences that contradict melodrama point towards new relationships and alternative forms of heroism that have been lost through the cracks of cultural amnesia. While hegemonic accounts of these experiences reaffirm existing hierarchies of race and gender, alternative narratives may potentially unsettle the melodramatic frame and open possibilities for richer, more complete public narratives. This project, in short, exposes both the failure of the melodramatic frame and reveals recuperative discourse.

These recuperative models, which I characterize as a rhetoric of healing heroism, offer more complex and productive understandings of heroism, victimhood, villainy, and violence. An exploration of such texts is essential in countering melodrama's relentless tendency to caricature and polarize. To help heal and rehumanize the cultures and

individuals affected by violence, rhetorical scholars must uncover ways to address complexity and contradiction in public discourse. Through the conclusion of this project, then, I weave together these examples of healing rhetoric from multiple eras to critique both critique melodramatic tendencies in contemporary culture and demonstrate more progressive and democratic models for public engagement.

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<sup>1</sup> Thom Shanker & John M. Broder, "A Nation at War: Liberated; The Rescue of Private Lynch" *The New York Times*, April 3, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Tom Infield, "U.S. Rescues Fresh-Faced Female Prisoner of War" *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 2, 2003; and "Iraq War: The Daring Op that Saved Private Lynch... Flown to Safety" *Birmingham Evening Mail*, April 3, 2003; and Doug Bellgren, "American POW is Rescued in Raid on Hospital; 11 Bodies Found" *The Associated Press State and Local Wire*, April 2, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Brenda M. Boyle, "Rescuing Masculinity: Captivity, Rescue and Gender in American War Narratives" *The Journal of American Culture* 34 (2011): 151.

<sup>4</sup> Rick Bragg *I Am a Soldier, Too: The Jessica Lynch Story* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 96.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973).

<sup>6</sup> Hazel Carby, "On the Threshold," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985): 270; and Jacqueline Dowd Hall, "The Mind That Burns Each Body" in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 332.

<sup>7</sup> Dan F. Hahn and Robert L. Ivie, "'Sex' as Rhetorical Invitation to War" *Et cetera* 45 (1988): 17.

<sup>8</sup> John Kampfner, "The Truth about Jessica" *Guardian* May 15, 2003. Retrieved February 7, 2014 from: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2003/may/15/iraq.usa2>

<sup>9</sup> Deepa Kumar, "War Propaganda and the (Ab)uses of Women: Media Constructions of the Jessica Lynch Story" *Feminist Media Studies* 4 (2004): 297.

<sup>10</sup> Diane Sawyer, "Private Jessica Lynch: An American Story," *Primetime* (2003).

<sup>11</sup> Linda Ledray, "Expanding Evidence Collection Time: Is it Time to Move Beyond the 72-Hour Rule? How Do We Decide?" *Journal Of Forensic Nursing* 6 (2010): 47-50.

<sup>12</sup> This seemingly dichotomous treatment female service members who have survived sexual violence, fits within the traditional race-based rape script in U.S. discourse. As Rachel Hall observes, such narratives articulate "the black man as rapist, the vulnerable white woman as victim, and the black woman as sexually inviolable continue to exert their influence today." Thus, it's likely that Darchelle's race contributed to the jury's decision that the sex may have been consensual. "'It Can Happen to You': Rape Prevention in the Age of Risk Management," *Hypatia* 19 (2004): 5.

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- <sup>13</sup> Christine Gledhill, "Speculations on the Relationship between Soap Opera and Melodrama," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 14 (1992): 106.
- <sup>14</sup> Joseph Mali, *The Rehabilitation of Myth: Vico's New Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 9.
- <sup>15</sup> Mali, *Rehabilitation of Myth*, 11.
- <sup>16</sup> Eric Csapo, *Theories of Mythology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 134.
- <sup>17</sup> Stephen H. Daniel, *Myth and Modern Philosophy* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1990), 4.
- <sup>18</sup> Robert L. Ivie, "Breaking the Spell of War: Peace Journalism's Democratic Prospect," *Javnost* 15 (2009): 13.
- <sup>19</sup> Giambattista Vico, *New Science*, trans. David Marsh (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 157.
- <sup>20</sup> Mali, *Rehabilitation of Myth*, 199.
- <sup>21</sup> Kenneth Burke, "Revolutionary Symbolism in America," in *American Writer's Congress*, ed. Henry Hart, ed. (New York: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1935), 87.
- <sup>22</sup> William G. Doty, *Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2000); and C. G. Jung, *The Essential Jung*, ed. Anthony Storr (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).
- <sup>23</sup> Robert Bechtold Heilman, *Tragedy and Melodrama: Versions of Experience* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968), 101, 106.
- <sup>24</sup> Elisabeth Anker, "Villains, Victims and Heroes: Melodrama, Media, and September 11," *Journal of Communication* 55 (2005): 23.
- <sup>25</sup> Anker, "Villains, Victims and Heroes," 23.
- <sup>26</sup> Michael Osborn, "Archetypal Metaphor in Rhetoric: The Light-Dark Family," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 33 (1967): 120; and Joseph Mali, *Mythistory: The Making of Modern Historiography* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 5.
- <sup>27</sup> Jeffrey D. Mason, *Melodrama and the Myth of America* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 18.
- <sup>28</sup> Michael Osborn and John Bakke, "The Melodramas of Memphis: Contending Narratives During the Sanitation Strike of 1968" *Southern Communication Journal* 63 (1998): 223.
- <sup>29</sup> Mali, *Rehabilitation of Myth*, 203.
- <sup>30</sup> Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas S. Frentz, "Integrating Ideology and Archetype in Rhetorical Criticism," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 77 (1991): 389.
- <sup>31</sup> Kenneth Burke, "Discussion and Proceedings," in *American Writer's Congress* ed. Henry Hart (New York: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1935), 170.
- <sup>32</sup> Laurence Coupe, *Kenneth Burke on Myth: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 20.
- <sup>33</sup> Ivie, "Breaking the Spell," 13.
- <sup>34</sup> Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Toward History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 29.
- <sup>35</sup> Osborn & Bakke, 222
- <sup>36</sup> Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 93.

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- <sup>37</sup> Elisabeth Anker, "The Venomous Eye: Moralism, Vengeance and the Legitimation of Violence," *Conference Papers -- American Political Science Association* (2006 Annual Meeting 2006): 1-27.
- <sup>38</sup> Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 35.
- <sup>39</sup> Anna Siomopoulos, "Political Theory and Melodrama Studies," *Camera Obscura* 21 (2006): 180.
- <sup>40</sup> Siomopoulos, "Political Theory and Melodrama Studies," 181.
- <sup>41</sup> Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, NC : Duke University Press, 1997), 177.
- <sup>42</sup> However, melodrama is actually a neutral frame. As Linda Williams argues, "melodrama is neither an inherently masculine nor an inherently feminine form, even though the interplay of feminine pathos and masculine action are central to it," *Playing the Race*, 299.
- <sup>43</sup> Christine Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation," in *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: BFI Publishing, 1987), 6.
- <sup>44</sup> Philippa Gates, "The Man's Film: Woo and the Pleasures of Male Melodrama," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 35 (2001): 61.
- <sup>45</sup> Gledhill, "Melodramatic Field," 30.
- <sup>46</sup> Steven Schwarze, "Environmental Melodrama," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 92 (2006): 239.
- <sup>47</sup> Jenny Edbauer Rice, "The New 'New': Making a Case for Critical Affect Studies," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 94 (2008): 210.
- <sup>48</sup> Coupe, *Kenneth Burke on Myth*, 9.
- <sup>49</sup> Wilz, "Rehumanization through Reflective Oscillation," 583.
- <sup>50</sup> Ivie, "Breaking the Spell," 11 & 12.
- <sup>51</sup> Renee Heberle, "Deconstructive Strategies and the Movement Against Sexual Violence" *Hypatia* 11 (1996): 68.
- <sup>52</sup> Hall, "It Can Happen," 13.
- <sup>53</sup> Hall, "It Can Happen," 11.
- <sup>54</sup> Hall, "It Can Happen, 10.
- <sup>55</sup> Hall, "It Can Happen," 13.
- <sup>56</sup> Barbara Barnett, "Framing Rape: An examination of Public Relations Strategies in the Duke University Lacrosse Case" *Communication, Culture & Critique* 1 (2008): 181.
- <sup>57</sup> Hall, "It Can Happen," 13.
- <sup>58</sup> Suzanne Marie Enck-Wanzer, "All's Fair in Love and Sport: Black Masculinity and Domestic Violence in the News" *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 6 (2009): 1-18.
- <sup>59</sup> Brian Massumi, "The Future Birth of the Affective Fact: The Political Ontology of Threat" in *The Affect Theory Reader* edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Segworth, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 52-70.
- <sup>60</sup> Hall, "It Can Happen," 6.
- <sup>61</sup> Hall, "It Can Happen," 2.

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<sup>62</sup> Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1975), especially 17 & 211.

<sup>63</sup> Heberle, 70-71

<sup>64</sup> Hall, "It Can Happen," 13.

<sup>65</sup> Suzanne Marie Enck & Blake A. McDaniel, "Playing With Fire: Cycles of Domestic Violence in Eminem and Rihanna's 'Love the Way You Lie'" *Communication, Culture & Critique* 5 (2012): 635.

<sup>66</sup> Kenneth Burke, "The Rhetoric of Hitler's Battle" in *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 218.

<sup>67</sup> Robert L. Ivie and Oscar Giner, "Hunting the Devil: Democracy's Rhetorical Impulse to War" *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 37 (2007): 580-598.

<sup>68</sup> Robert L. Ivie and Oscar Giner, "Genealogy of Myth in Presidential Rhetoric," in *Sourcebook for Political Communication Research: Methods, Measures, and Analytical Techniques*, ed. Erik P. Bucy and R. Lance Holbert (New York: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>69</sup> See also: Robert L. Ivie, *Democracy and America's War on Terror* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005); Robert L. Ivie, "Fighting Terror By Rite of Redemption and Reconciliation," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 10 (2007): 221-248; and Robert L. Ivie, "Savagery in Democracy's Empire," *Third World Quarterly* 26 (2005): 59-69.

<sup>70</sup> Robert L. Ivie, "Evil Enemy Versus Agonistic Other: Rhetorical Constructions of Terrorism," *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 25 (2003): 182.

<sup>71</sup> Denise M. Bostdorff, "George W. Bush's Post-September 11 Rhetoric of Covenant Renewal: Upholding the Faith of the Greatest Generation" *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89 (2003): 297.

<sup>72</sup> Joshua Gunn, "The Rhetoric of Exorcism: George W. Bush and the Return of Political Demonology" *Western Journal of Communication* 68 (2004): 1-23.

<sup>73</sup> Wilz, "Rehumanization through Reflective Oscillation," 589.

<sup>74</sup> Anker, "Villains, Victims and Heroes," 22.

<sup>75</sup> See, for example, Micaela di Leonardo, "Morals, Mothers, Militarism," *Feminist Studies* 11 (1985): 599-617; Janis Edwards and Amanda Leigh Brozana, "Gendering Anti-War Rhetoric: Cindy Sheehan's Symbolic Motherhood," *Journal of the Northwest Communication Association* 37 (2008): 78-102; Zillah Eisenstein, *Sexual Decoys: Gender, Race and War in Imperial Democracy* (London: Zed Books, 2007); Marsha Gordon, "Onward Kitchen Soldiers: Mobilizing the Domestic During World War I" *Canadian Review of American Studies* 29 (1999): 61-88; Krista Hunt and Kim Rygiel, eds., *(En)Gendering the War on Terror: War Stories and Camouflaged Politics* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006); Deepa Kumar, "War Propaganda and the (Ab)uses of Women: Media Constructions of the Jessica Lynch Story" *Feminist Media Studies* 4 (2004): 297-313; Jennifer K. Lobasz, "The Woman in Peril and the Ruined Woman: Representations of Female Soldiers in the Iraq War" *Journal of Women, Politics and Policy* 29 (2008): 305-34; Tina Managhan, "(M)others, Biopolitics, and the Gulf War," in *Women and Children First: Feminism, Rhetoric, and Public Policy* ed. Sharon M. Meagher and Patrice DiQuinzio (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 205-25; Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's 'Dirty War,'* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press,

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1997); and Yesil, “‘Who Said this is a Man’s War?’: Propaganda, Advertising Discourse and the Representation of War Worker Women During the Second World War,” *Media History* 10 (2004): 103–17.

<sup>76</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 237.

<sup>77</sup> Enloe, *Maneuvers*, 36.

<sup>78</sup> Enloe, *Maneuvers*, 245.

<sup>79</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 19 & 37.

<sup>80</sup> Enloe, *Morning After*, 188.

<sup>81</sup> Enloe, *Morning After*, 15.

<sup>82</sup> *The Terror Dream* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2001), 27.

<sup>83</sup> Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 198.

<sup>84</sup> See Kathleen Kennedy, *Disloyal Mothers and Scurrilous Citizens: Women and Subversion During World War I* (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1999), 10; & Nicholas Jackson O’Shaughnessy, *Politics and Propaganda: Weapons of Mass Seduction* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 59.

<sup>85</sup> Dana L. Cloud, “‘To Veil the Threat of Terror’: Afghan Women and the <Clash of Civilizations> in the Imagery of the U.S. War on Terrorism,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90 (2004): 293.

<sup>86</sup> Carol A. Stabile and Deepa Kumar, “Unveiling Imperialism: Media, Gender, and the War on Afghanistan” *Media, Culture and Society* 27 (2005): 766.

<sup>87</sup> Vron Ware, “Info-War and the Politics of Feminist Curiosity: Exploring New Frameworks for Feminist Intercultural Studies,” *Cultural Studies* 20 (2006): 528.

<sup>88</sup> President George W. Bush, “Leave Iraq within 48 Hours,” Address to the Nation, March 17, 2003. Transcript from *CNN* retrieved February 7, 2014 from: <http://www.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/meast/03/17/sprj.irq.bush.transcript/>

<sup>89</sup> This quote was referenced in several newspapers around the world, including but not limited to: Adam Brodsky “Baby Steps to a Better World” *The New York Post* May 9, 2003, p. 35; “Countdown to War: Bush Gives Saddam 48 Hours” *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, March 18, 2003; Thomas M. DeFrank and Kenneth R. Bazinet “Get Out or Else, Saddam Bush: 48 hours until U.S. attacks” *Daily News (New York)* March 18, 2003, p.3; Ian Macleod “Bush to Saddam: ‘Leave Iraq within 48 hours’: Citing danger to America, he prepares nation for war,” *The Vancouver Sun* March 18, 2003, p1A; Dana Milbank and Mike Allen, “President Tells Hussein to Leave Iraq Within 48 Hours or Face Invasion: Ultimatum Is Delivered After U.N. Effort Fails” *Washington Post*, March 18, 2003, p. A01; and Fraser Nelson, “Bush Orders Saddam to Flee,” *The Scotsman* March 18, 2003, p. 1.

<sup>90</sup> See, for example: Christopher Dickey and Donatella Lorch, “Iraq’s Most Wanted,” *Newsweek*, (March 31, 2003) 48; Stephen Henderson, “Saddam’s Sons: Cruel, Impulsive and Unceasingly Violent” *Knight Ridder Washington Bureau*, July 23, 2003; Peter Jennings, “Special Report: War With Iraq Introduction” *ABC News Transcripts* March 21, 2003; George Pascoe-Watsan, “Where Are the Dirty Dozen?” *The Sun* April 11,

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2003; David Rose “Baghdad’s Cruel Princes” *Vanity Fair* May 2003, 176; and Barbara Walters, “Son of Saddam Disturbing Accusations Against Uday Hussein” *20/20 ABC News Transcripts*, February 14, 2003.

<sup>91</sup> Eileen L. Zurbriggen, “Rape, War, and the Socialization of Masculinity: Why Our Refusal To Give Up War Ensures that Rape Cannot Be Eradicated,” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 34 (2010): 538–549.

<sup>92</sup> Madeline Morris, “In War and Peace: Rape, War, and Military Culture” in *War’s Dirty Secret: Rape Prostitution and Other Crimes Against Women*, ed. Anne Llewellyn Barstow (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2000), 181.

<sup>93</sup> Sarah K. Murnen, Carrie Wright, and Gretchen Kaluzny, “If ‘Boys Will Be Boys,’ Then Girls Will Be Victims? A Meta-Analytic Review of the Research that Relates Masculine Ideology to Sexual Aggression,” *Sex Roles* 46 (2002): 359–375.

<sup>94</sup> For a thoughtful overview of intersectional analysis as applied to rhetorical scholarship, see: Karma R. Chávez and Cindy L. Griffin, ed. *Standing in the Intersection: Feminist Voices, Feminist Practices in Communication Studies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012).

<sup>95</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color” *Stanford Law Review* 43 (1991): 1244.

<sup>96</sup> Sara L. McKinnon, “Essentialism, Intersectionality, and Recognition: A feminist Rhetorical Approach to the Audience” in *Standing in the Intersection: Feminist Voices, Feminist Practices in Communication Studies* ed. Karma R. Chávez and Cindy L. Griffin (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012): 204.

<sup>97</sup> In doing so, I draw from Ivie and Giner’s assertion in “Genealogy of Myth,” that a genealogy critique is a performance, a “critical interpretation of reigning mythic constructions” that requires assembling the various pieces of cultural memory. This dynamic understanding of the rhetorical critic also aligns with McGee’s understanding of this role. He asserts that, due to the fragmentation of U.S. culture, the primary focus of the rhetorical critic should be in constructing a text. In other words, he argues that the role of the rhetorical critic should be in the “performance of discourse” rather than the “archeology of discourse.” See, Michael Calvin McGee, “Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture,” *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 54 (1990): 274-89.

<sup>98</sup> Colonel Raymond K. Bluhm Jr. ed. *World War II: A Chronology of War* (New York: Universe Publishing, 2008), *So Proudly We Hail*, 1993.

<sup>99</sup> Claude Cookman, “An American Atrocity: The My Lai Massacre Concretized in a Victim’s Face” *Journal of American History* 94 (2007): 154.

<sup>100</sup> James Dao, “In Debate Over Military Sexual Assault, Men Are Overlooked Victims” *The New York Times* June 23, 2013. Retrieved June 23, 2013 from: [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/24/us/in-debate-over-military-sexual-assault-men-are-overlooked-victims.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/24/us/in-debate-over-military-sexual-assault-men-are-overlooked-victims.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

<sup>101</sup> Lindsay M. Rock, Rachel N. Lipari, Paul J. Cook and Andrew D. Hale, “2010 Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active Duty Members: Overview Report on Sexual Assault” *Defense Manpower Data Center Report* No. 2010-025 (March 2011), iv. It is important to note that Rock et. al’s research was contracted by the military. Based upon my rhetorical and cultural research, I estimate that the percentage of men who do

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*not* report their sexual abuse are much higher than the percentage of women who do not report due to the greater cultural stigma. Indeed, one study revealed that while one in five women in the Air Force would report being sexually assaulted, only one in fifteen men in the Air Force would do the same.

<sup>102</sup> “Rape and the Military” *Contemporary Sexuality* 37 (2003), 8–9. This study was conducted by the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Iowa City based off of interviews with 558 women who served in the armed forces from the Vietnam War through the Persian Gulf War.

<sup>103</sup> Kanya D’Almeida, “Rape in the Ranks, the U.S. Army’s Dirty Secret” *Inter Press Service*, Feb 15, 2011 Retrieved February 7, 2014 from:

<http://www.ipsnews.net/2011/02/rape-in-the-ranks-the-us-armys-dirty-secret/>.

<sup>104</sup> Enloe, *Morning After*, 190.

<sup>105</sup> Heilman, *Tragedy and Melodrama*, 115.

## **CHAPTER 2 – DAMSELS IN DISTRESS: THE ROLE OF FEMINIZED VULNERABILITY IN U.S. WAR RHETORIC**

In 1998, Tom Brokaw described the men and women who grew up during the Great Depression and World War II as the “Greatest Generation.” He argues that these individuals fought in the war not for fame or homage but, simply, because it was the right thing to do. Their self-sacrifices wartime toils were characterized as a “rendezvous with destiny,” according to Brokaw.<sup>1</sup> In this sense, waging war appeared inevitable. This, in part, occurred due to the ease with which an enemy could be defined. Both Japan’s bombing of Pearl Harbor and Germany’s holocaust in Europe provided obvious evidence of evil villains. Sending scores of young men to fight in what would be the deadliest war in human history and flattening the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki with atomic bombs appeared justified in the face of such unadulterated evil. The delineation between hero and villain, good and evil has historically been looked upon as ineluctable during World War II. However, I argue that this binary sense of right and wrong is also part of a larger discursive pattern characteristic of U.S. wartime rhetoric, namely, the melodramatic frame.

As I discuss in my first chapter, melodramatically framed narratives dominate U.S. political rhetoric, creating moral certitude by establishing a polarized notion of good and evil through three reciprocally constituted caricatures. These narratives emphasize a masculine hero who battles an evil enemy in order to rescue a feminized victim. By studying polarized narratives as *melodrama*, then, we may explore the problematic gender and racial dynamics of U.S. militarization. A gender hierarchy is, indeed, inherent within melodrama. Through this structure, notions of feminine vulnerability motivate polarization. Within the strict confines of the melodramatic frame, heroes are always

strong, individualistic, and, most importantly, *masculine*. This heroic identity is constructed in opposition to animalistic, irrationally violent, and racialized villains. Heroes and villains fight over the fate of passive, delicate, damsels in distress. The victim embodies vulnerability and is, as Linda Williams reminds us, coded as feminine if not female.<sup>5</sup> Relatedly, Teresa de Lauretis argues that violence is gendered. Representations of violence place men as the subjects of violence, the actors of violence, contrasting them with women, who rhetorically serve as the objects of violence. This is especially true in regards to rape, which de Lauretis argues is a “violence done to a feminine other (whether its physical object be a woman, a man, or an inanimate object).”<sup>2</sup> Through this frame, then, a body is rendered feminine by being subjected to violence. Femininity, in this sense, is inherently defenseless.

Rhetorical emphasis on masculine heroism and threatening villains problematically obscures from public discourse the experiences of women who transgress this caricature. This is especially evident in public narratives about women during wartime that prove too complex for the binary framework of melodrama. Such is the case in the limited rhetoric about the Nurses of Bataan—a group of sixty-six army nurses who labored vigorously under duress to heal wounded soldiers and civilians and then survived jungle conditions, bombings, supply shortages, and a nearly three-year internment on the Bataan Peninsula during WWII. Despite their bravery, because their experiences do not fit the melodramatic frame, the story of the Nurses of Bataan has become lost over the years and is currently “unknown to most” Americans.<sup>3</sup> No mainstream news accounts of the highly melodramatic rescue of Private Jessica Lynch made connections to her POW predecessors. In some cases, framing of the Lynch story would lead readers to believe she

was the *only* female prisoner of war from the U.S. Lynch's rescue was described in the *New York Times* as "the first American prisoner of war extracted from enemy hands since World War II and the *first time a woman has ever been rescued*."<sup>4</sup> This statement essentially erases the labor, survival, and rescue of the *first* U.S. women held as prisoners of war on foreign soil.<sup>5</sup> Given the cultural tendency to legitimize the War on Terror through comparisons to WWII, omission of the nurses' story from contemporary public discourse warrants further exploration.

Through this chapter I argue that the obscurity of the story of the Nurses of Bataan illustrates a gendering of heroism characteristic of melodramatic discourse. In one representative example, an over-sized book sponsored by the U.S. Armed Services, the entirety of the WWII is chronologically recounted. The 544-page book devotes a scant five paragraphs to the nurses; two paragraphs to describe their jeopardy and three to honor the servicemen who liberated them.<sup>6</sup> When history does document these women, it is not as heroes who banded together to survive, but as victims dependent upon men to rescue them from inevitable peril in the enemies' hands. Such renderings are necessary to justify military violence.

Hegemonic narratives of the Nurses of Bataan during WWII reveal the pervasiveness of the melodramatic frame and demonstrate how it operates to censure alternative performances of gender and heroism in ways that help propagate war. Perhaps the most visible account of the incident is the 1943 film, *So Proudly We Hail!*. Rather than exploring the heroism of the nurses, the film reframes their experiences into a melodramatic tale, complete with a romantic love story and a harrowing rescue. *So Proudly*'s melodramatic frame casts the nurses' greatest concern as coupling with

protective U.S. soldiers, which consequently diminishes these women's bravery. Femininity, in this film, is seen as inherently vulnerable. Caricatures of feminine vulnerability are exploited in ways that emphasize the need for traditional masculine heroism. *So Proudly* presents limited constructions of women in the context of war. These limited representations were not confined to the realm of Hollywood film. The same norms of essential feminine vulnerability and active masculine heroism re-appear through news media and political accounts of the nurses, indicating that applications of the melodramatic frame are widespread in U.S. culture.

The film is also characteristic of melodrama in its representation of villainy, which prevents more complex understandings of the enemy. *So Proudly We Hail!* casts Japanese soldiers as dark shadowy figures ready and waiting to violate imperiled nurses. Such narratives create a sense of threat, a rhetorical construct necessary to maintain public support for military action. This construction of the enemy, which objectifies the Japanese people as uncivilized, evil beings, remained a persistent aspect in political and news rhetoric during WWII. Jeffrey Mason reminds us of the masculine agency and feminine weakness upon which this caricature revolves. The "most heinous criminals," he explains, "are those *men* who ... actually threaten or abuse *women or children*—those most vulnerable creatures in the sentimental imagination—and so displace the precious concepts of chastity and innocence with corruption."<sup>7</sup> The implications such narratives of polarization have in fueling a violent and hateful *war culture* has been explored in depth by numerous rhetorical analyses. In this project, I also focus on the consequence these narratives have upon *rape culture*. By presenting sexual deviance as characteristic of racialized enemies, *So Proudly* exemplifies discursive patterns that perpetuate widespread

cultural misconceptions associating rape with the Other. This constraining representation presents sexual violence as characteristic of certain non-white identities rather than characteristic of war. Analysis of the film indicates that, although the greatest generation's battle against axis powers was characterized as fated, melodramatically framed discourse most certainly contributing to this sense of destiny.

Although public narratives of the Nurses of Bataan and their captors are narrowly bounded, I argue that the nurses' own narratives and experiences during wartime constructively broaden melodramatic narratives. Their personal stories provide an unexplored origin point that rhetorical scholars may mine for resources to expand public understandings of heroism, victimhood, and villainy in three ways. First, their experiences help un-do the gendering of heroism by revealing the bravery of women who perform both feminine and masculine characteristics as well as the potential for heroism within the feminine itself. They perform a traditionally feminine task, that of nursing, but in ways that defy strict gender norms. As such, they invite critique of normative constructs of gender, while simultaneously providing a way to recognize the importance of feminine-associated characteristics and performances in socio-political life. Secondly, the nurses' experiences counter tendencies to privilege individualism by providing a model for collective heroism. As a sisterhood, they sustained themselves in dire circumstances; their collectivity gave them strength and safety. For them, collective identity was key to their survival.

Wartime efforts of the Nurses of Bataan point toward an alternative conceptualization of heroism that defies polarizing narratives. By retelling the nurses' stories, I develop a model that allows us re-imagine conflict through a form of heroism

that includes the recuperative effects of nursing. This model uses healing as a guiding metaphor for heroism, which invites action that focuses on health and healing rather than destruction. The task of nursing during conflict denies the moral binary implicit in the act of rescuing victims from dangerous racialized villains. In this way, an oft-ignored story of the past reveals ways to broaden contemporary heroic narratives.

To explore and revise U.S. constructions of heroism, victimhood, and villainy, this chapter develops in two parts. First, I conduct a critical read of *So Proudly We Hail!*, illustrating its melodramatic inflections. Then, I compare the film's representations of femininity to news media accounts of the nurses published during WWII. I reveal that melodramatic framing appeared not *only* in Hollywood film, but *also* in seemingly objective journalistic and political accounts of the nurses. In doing so, I bolster the arguments of Heilman and others who conceive of melodrama as a dominant framework within sociopolitical culture in the U.S.<sup>8</sup> Reading the melodrama of wartime politics exposes the hyperbole of such rhetoric to disrupt narrow renderings of the hero and broaden cultural definitions of heroism. Thus, through this section, I reveal that the same melodramatic logic that governs many Hollywood films also inflects contemporary political rhetoric. I argue that the narrow idea of heroism portrayed through this melodramatic logic is problematic because it constrains feminine agency in public narratives and perpetuates an understanding of social interaction that intensifies polarization. I also begin to explore the ways by which these two side effects of melodrama reflect rape culture. Then, I offer a corrective to these melodramatic narratives by retelling the tale of the Nurses of Bataan, illustrating how their experiences provide a model for reimagining heroism and broadening limited constructs of

femininity. Through this approach, I explore rhetorical resources that might broaden this problematic figure and help us envision a heroism of healing.

### **Melodramatic Framing of the Nurses of Bataan**

On December 8, 1941, the day after the attacks on Pearl Harbor, Japan began bombing various U.S. military outposts in the Philippines where a collective of white U.S. nurses were stationed.<sup>9</sup> By December 26, Japan drove Allied forces to their last defensive lines, pushing the Army nurses on Luzon Island to the Bataan Peninsula.<sup>10</sup> There, in the heart of the jungle, the Nurses of Bataan continued to provide medical care in two makeshift hospitals constructed from bamboo poles and palm fronds. They worked triage around the clock, as hospitals were inundated with scores of Allied troops, civilians, and Japanese prisoners wounded during conflict. Nurses dealt with supply shortages and were constantly subject to aerial attacks, from which bamboo walls provided little protection. At the beginning of April, 1942, three battalions of infantry and the medical corps relocated to the Island of Corregidor. On Corregidor, the nurses continued to work in a hospital established below ground, in the Malinta Tunnel.<sup>11</sup> The nurses' stay there, however, was short-lived. Their commanding general finally surrendered to Japan and the nurses were taken to a prison camp near Manila where they were interned from May of 1942 through February of 1945.

While these nurses endured prison life on Bataan, civilians nestled safely within U.S. borders knew very little about their situation in part because communication was logistically difficult, but also because the few representations of the nurses that reached the U.S. public were constrained by the melodramatic frame. Offering one the few glimpses into the nurses' lives to reach the public, *So Proudly We Hail!* was directed by

Mark Sandrich and released in September of 1943. Despite its heavy melodramatic tone, Sandrich's portrayal of these women was packaged as authentic. *So Proudly* was written in consultation with a small group of nurses evacuated from Corregidor via rescue plane.<sup>12</sup> The film, "subjected to careful examination by the War Department" and guided by "two Army technical advisers," was advertised as a "*true picture* of the handicaps under which the Nurses Corps worked."<sup>13</sup> *The New York Times* described the film as "so stamped with conviction, so exacting in its re-creation of terror and heroism," that it accurately portrayed the "Grim Realities of Bataan."<sup>14</sup> This perceived authenticity was exploited for propagandistic purposes. Red Cross staff set up recruitment booths in the lobbies of theatres where *So Proudly* was screened.<sup>15</sup> Despite its professed and generally accepted authenticity, the film masks the suffering and stench of war and focuses instead on patriotic idealism and individualistic heroism. This was consistent with other movies depicting the plight of men and women serving in Bataan during WWII.<sup>16</sup> *So Proudly* paints this narrative through a melodramatic framework by heightening polarization. Through this frame, the film portrays the nurses as dependent upon valiant U.S. soldiers to protect them from the sinister, lascivious Japanese military.

*So Proudly We Hail!* begins with an airplane dramatically landing in Hawaii, carrying a small group of nurses safely back from the Philippines. The women reflect on their experiences via flashback narrative, beginning with their initial deployment for Hawaii. After their ship departs, Japan bombs Pearl Harbor, forcing the nurses and soldiers aboard to join a convoy headed toward the Philippines.<sup>17</sup> On its way, the fleet encounters the wreckage of a ship bombed by Axis forces and rescues two survivors – Lieutenant John Summers, played by George Reeves, and Lieutenant Olivia D'Arcy,

played by Veronica Lake. Upon the convoy's arrival in the Philippines, dominant storylines include the burgeoning romance between Lt. Summers and head nurse Lieutenant Janet "Davy" Davidson, played by Claudette Colbert; Lt. D'Arcy's plot to avenge the death of her fiancé, who had been killed by Japanese soldiers; and the nurses' jeopardy and potential sexual assault by the enemy. Consistent with experiences of the "real" Nurses of Bataan, the filmic nurses relocate from a traditional military camp to a makeshift hospital in the jungles of the Bataan Peninsula to the Malinta Tunnel on the Island of Corregidor. The film concludes with the rescue of Lt. Davidson and a handful of other nurses by aircraft. Rather than the advertised *true picture* of the women's experiences healing both Allied and Axis soldiers during war, *So Proudly* contributes misconceived imagery of the nurses as passive, emotional and *proper* women under traditional gender conventions. By doing so, the film reiterates traditional relationships between melodramatic caricatures. Nurses are damsels in distress, vulnerable to violation by the enemy, and in need of rescue; the enemy jeopardizes victims by threatening sexual violation and, thus, deserves to be eliminated by the hero; and, in turn, the masculine, individualistic hero must eliminate the enemy in order to rescue those in danger.

The melodramatic frame buttresses a gender hierarchy in which vulnerable women always depend upon men for protection. Following this frame, *So Proudly* reinforces traditional gender roles first by emphasizing the nurses' reliance upon masculine heroism. A notable exception *should* be head nurse, Lt. Davidson, who initially appears to defy caricatures of victimhood through her leadership role and plucky persona. However, the melodramatic frame ultimately disciplines her character. During the film, she transforms from a self-sufficient and independent woman to a wife

incapacitated without her husband. Her voyage to the Philippines is characterized by her prudent resistance to Lt. Summers's unrelenting romantic advances. Her determination to maintain her purity evinces her virtue. Only when the head nurse becomes endangered does she finally succumb to her suitor. While stepping onto the ship's deck one night for fresh air, she happens upon Lt. Summers. He approaches her, leaning against the hull of ship where she sits, penning her in. Despite her repeated dismissals of his affections, the soldier professes his love to Lt. Davidson. She tries to slip away, but he physically blocks her escape and asserts that if they had met under different circumstances, he would have pursued her relentlessly. With flowers and his charm, he says to her, "before you knew it, you'd be mine." The nurse maintains her independence, stating firmly that the warfront leaves "no time for anything personal." Despite her protests, he grabs her and physically prevents her from leaving until she gives him a kiss, "just one," a request to which Lt. Davidson reluctantly acquiesces. Their necking is interrupted when the nurse observes that the ship's engines have halted. In a panic, the duo realizes that Davy has forgotten her life preserver. John gallantly insists that she take his; melodramatically positioning the soldier as savior of the woman in peril. With unknown threat impending, Davy finally confesses her love for John. Her submission fits within the melodramatic frame of mythic gender relations: "Good or evil, wise or foolish, women cede to men, Amazons are defeated by warriors, and the proper order is returned to the world."<sup>18</sup> John's ability to tame the shrew, so to speak, confirms his masculinity and heroism.

The scene described above reiterates patriarchal constructions of female sexuality, specifically women's lack of sexual agency and the tendency to connect a woman's worth to her purity. Rachel Hall explains that within this construct, white women are

“repeatedly positioned as objects and never as agents of their sexuality.”<sup>19</sup> This feminine passivity, characteristic of melodrama, is evident throughout John and Davy’s courtship process. In these interactions, agency is given to the male, rather than the female. John makes repeated advances, which Davy may either reject or accept. Through this structure, *So Proudly* positions him as the actor of their relationship and her as an object of desire to be acted upon. As de Lauretis observes, sexuality typically exists within the masculine realm. “Even when [sexuality] is located, as it very often is, *in* the woman’s body,” she writes, “sexuality is an attribute or property of the male.”<sup>20</sup> This denial of feminine agency contributes to a gender hierarchy within which men, as active agents, reside at the top. The ease with which Davy slips from protesting John’s advances to confessing her love for the man minimizes her initial refusals. Her resistance to John’s pursuit is depicted as a performance designed merely to maintain a guise of purity. Her initial “noes” and rejection are not portrayed as meaningful boundaries. The positioning of a women’s rejection of sexual advances as simply an indication of her virtuous chastity (and not actual rejection of her pursuer) contributes to a culture in which a man may doggedly pursue a woman, even without her consent.

Within melodrama, a masculine hero exists alone at the top of the gender hierarchy. The melodramatic hero is an *independent* man who exudes virtue by voluntarily protecting vulnerable ladies. *So Proudly* reinforces this notion of masculine, independent heroism. Once the couple evacuate to the Malinta Tunnel with their respective battalions to escape incessant Japanese bombings, John demonstrates his heroic virtue by independently volunteering to help the nurses. As U.S. forces arrive in the tunnel, it quickly becomes apparent that their supplies will not last. Despite being

injured during the retreat from Bataan, Lt. Summers gallantly offers to embark upon a search for provisions. Wounds could not prevent this heroic leader from bravely protecting those in need. Although, as de Lauretis observes, a body is rendered feminine upon being subjected to violence, Lt. Summers's injuries do not render him so. Because he continues his heroic pursuits, despite injury, he denies vulnerability and, hence, femininity. "We sort of made up a little party," he explains to Lt. Davidson, "and we're going down around Mindanao to see if we can find some quinine." By this description, it seems as if Lt. Summers decided to undertake this mission of his own free will. In the military, however, lieutenants act upon orders received through the chain of command. *So Proudly's* plotline fits within a melodramatic framework in which independent leadership and impenetrability are key requirements of melodramatic heroism; being invulnerable and risking his life of his own accord demonstrates a hero's righteousness.

Imagery of passive suffering feminine victims consistently drive melodramatic narratives. Anker confirms this as she explains, "at the heart of melodrama is the principle that by virtue of suffering, one becomes good."<sup>21</sup> Continuing, she writes "through unwarranted suffering and heroic redemption, the victim signifies a more robust state of virtue than at the outset of the story." This characteristic reveals itself in *So Proudly* as the heroine spirals into an increasingly disempowered condition. Before Lt. Summers's seemingly self-led quinine mission, Lt. Davidson weds her heroic soldier. Their marriage ensures Davy's safety, tames the Amazon's pluck and independence, and sanctifies heteronormative ideals of family. After they exchange vows, Davy whispers into her husband's ear, "I'm not afraid any longer," as if marriage to a hero held the numinous power to protect her from the "Japs." When John departs the next morning,

Davy, the dutiful wife, hands him his breakfast and promises to remain there until her knight in shining armor returns. However, she reluctantly breaks this promise after her commanding officers order her, along with several other nurses, to evacuate the island by aircraft and tells her that John is missing. Unlike her individualistic heroic husband, Davy obediently follows her orders. Upon the rescue plane's arrival in Honolulu, Lt. Davidson, no longer the source of strength and leadership among the nurses, suffers so much distress over the thought of losing her husband that she cannot move or speak. Thus, through Davy's suffering at this presumed loss, she now becomes a good, moral woman.

Representations of feminine passivity affirm the heteronormative masculinity of the hero and reveal his righteousness. As Susan Faludi observes, imagery of damsels in distress prevail during war so that heroes can rescue the virtuous woman, which then salvages his nation's masculinity.<sup>22</sup> The rescue at the film's denouement serves this very function. *So Proudly* concludes once Davy has been delivered to safety. She and a small group of nurses are rescued by heroic men on a dangerous mission to return them to the United States. Once there, Davy's catatonic spell breaks as a soldier on the Hawaiian base reads a letter from her husband that confirms he is alive and includes the deed to his farm, where she may safely await his return. Though Davy initially strayed from traditional gender expectations, finding herself in the masculine space of war, she is properly domesticated once the film concludes. The audience is invited to imagine her dwelling in a pastoral setting, appropriate for idyllic family life. Her emotional suffering finally ends once a private, domestic space has been provided for by her hero. Although he was thousands of miles away, Lt. Summers still served as her savior. Davy's rescue

and domestication ultimately restore moral order by demonstrating Summers's heroic masculinity.

While *So Proudly* establishes heroic masculinity, it simultaneously constructs an extremely limited conception of feminine citizenship, a position that is then used to evince national virtue. Davy's salvation by pastoral domesticity invokes the sentiment that Lauren Berlant identifies as the "modern love plot" which is constantly reinvented throughout 20<sup>th</sup> century discourse. In this structure, womanhood revolves around the belief that love can "rescue you from your life and give you a new one," to build your world.<sup>23</sup> This fixation on the property and reproduction associated with domestic life, asserts Berlant, relegates citizenship to the private sphere and helps maintain complacency with the status quo. Maintenance of a citizenry's faith that they will be protected and provided for is integral in establishing national identity. According to Gayatri Spivak, the "protection of women by men" often serves as a signifier that a particular society is civilized, moral and good society.<sup>24</sup> Narratives of heroic rescues that place the feminine safely in the domestic sphere reaffirm faith in a nation's righteousness. Davy's safe return to pastoral private life serves as an allegory that affirms U.S. national virtue.

The melodramatic frame also requires a threatening villain for the hero to confront and eliminate. Thus, in melodrama, a soldier must battle an enemy in order to earn hero status. Following this pattern, *So Proudly* depicts Japanese soldiers as heinous criminals. Such imagery builds upon and expands the trope of the "savage enemy" that, Robert Ivie argues, has been literalized within the American mythos of war.<sup>25</sup> Such narratives reinforce an ongoing trend in war rhetoric noted by Gordon Stables that "aligns

American masculinity as benign” while depicting “other societies, and their warriors, as violent and irrational.”<sup>26</sup> Melodramatic caricatures of the savage villain dehumanize the enemy and help justify the nation’s drive to war.

Such framing also has important consequences in the establishment of U.S. national identity. Bruce Cumings notes that, throughout its history, the U.S. has justified war by denying its own aggression. “Revisionist historians,” he states, “have tried to show that one American war after another began with some inveighing or maneuvering of the enemy.”<sup>27</sup> He argues that the U.S. maintains this strategy of “passive defense” to establish moral legitimacy. Thus, along with the damsel in peril, imagery of a threatening Other plays an integral role in U.S. war rhetoric. That is, melodramatic constructions of the savage enemy reveal the virtue of U.S. heroes. By constructing an impending sense of evil and threat, the U.S. may wage war not as an aggressive and imperialistic act, but as an act of self-defense, thus, maintaining the front of righteous virtue.

A melodramatic frame establishes threat by inviting us to imagine what might happen to the vulnerable without a hero’s protection. By depicting perilous encounters between dark villains and white, defenseless women, melodrama establishes an impending sense of danger. A primary way by which this is done in warring nations throughout the world has been to depict the enemy as a lascivious rapist. Mary Ann Tetreault argues that there is a “politicization of rape, whereby nations manipulate the strategic environments of public opinion by encouraging retaliation against those who have violated a nation’s women.”<sup>28</sup> Brownmiller has similarly observed, “women remain a ‘pawn in the subtle wars of international propaganda.’”<sup>29</sup> In Deepa Kumar’s words, “Women, incapable of protecting themselves, serve as the grounds on which to persuade

men to exert their masculinity and vanquish the enemy.”<sup>30</sup> Rape and femininity have commonly been used as a political trope to justify war.

Racialized representations of sexual predators have deep roots in U.S. political culture. Ida B. Wells, in her late nineteenth century pamphlets against lynching, observes that Southern whites frequently launched lynch mobs on the grounds of rape allegations (which were often found to be untrue). In her words, the south shielded itself “behind the plausible screen of defending the honor of its women.”<sup>31</sup> This smokescreen was successful in hushing the “press and pulpit” from speaking out against lynching laws. Hazel Carby demonstrates that the sense of men’s entitlement to women’s bodies, as seen through Lt. Summers’s pursuit and taming of Lt. Davidson, also fuels this sentiment. She writes that, “White men used their ownership of the body of the white female as a terrain on which to lynch the black male.”<sup>32</sup> Carby also demonstrates the dehumanizing effect these public imaginings have upon the Other. “The cry of rape,” she writes, “which pleaded the necessity of revenge for assaulted white womanhood... attempted to place black males ‘beyond the pale of human sympathy.’”<sup>33</sup> Hints of sexual violation, indeed, have consistently served to dehumanize racialized others in the interest of justifying violence throughout U.S. history.

This racist rhetorical history is closely paralleled in wartime rape narratives. Consistent with this rhetorical pattern, a plethora of WWII era propaganda relied upon imagery of virginal white women at risk of violation by Japanese soldiers. Propaganda posters frequently featuring women at risk of violation by Japanese soldiers emphasized racial difference, depicting the villain often as a gorilla, or with large lips and darkened skinned reminiscent of stereotyped representations of African American men. These

narratives imply a racial contest over the ownership of female bodies. According to Susan Moeller, liberty bond posters often “depicted the Japanese as leering monkeys raping and pillaging Western women and civilization.”<sup>34</sup> Nicholas O’Shaughnessy also demonstrates that the enemy in propaganda is often portrayed as the violator of “pure” women. He states, “It has often been integral to the social construction of the enemy that he is seen as a sexual violator too, and the theme of sexual violation, especially in atrocity propaganda is particularly strong. The enemy is implicitly and sometimes explicitly a rapist.”<sup>35</sup> These examples of propaganda reveal problematic representations of race in attempts to build and maintain national support for WWII.

*So Proudly* contributes to this racist and gendered propaganda by melodramatically positioning the Japanese enemy as a savage, raping threat. This is done primarily through the narrative arc of the belligerent and morose Lieutenant Olivia D’Arcy. Playing the role of the “bad” woman, her character contrasts Lt. Davidson’s character, the “good” woman, by revealing the “bad” woman’s precarious fate. From the moment Olivia joins the convoy, her sullen, mysterious nature sparks conflict between her and her fellow nurses. To address tensions between D’Arcy and the nursing crew, Davy initiates a heart-to-heart with the estranged nurse that reveals the source of her belligerence. Olivia confesses that she intends to “kill Japs,” every “bloodstained one.” Such words, she admits, do not “sound nice coming from a nurse,” because nurses *should* be “angels of mercy” who are “kind and tender.” She exposes her motivation for breaking norms for a “good” nurse in an emotional outpouring: “Today is my wedding day! You see that?” she says, holding up a locket to reveal a photograph of a soldier secured inside.

Clutching the tiny memory of her fiancé with both hands and staring intently at Davy, she continues:

He and I were to be married today in St. Louis. And why weren't we? Because he's dead. He died that first morning. They killed him! I saw him. He was running across the field to his plane and they killed him. Sixty bullets! Sixty! By the time I got to him he was dead. His face was gone! I couldn't even see him anymore! Just blood! Blood all over!

Her suffering heightens the enemies' wickedness, indicated, in part, by their excessive shooting of the soldier – with sixty bullets – until the woman who loved him can no longer recognize him. Through the enemy's brutality, her fiancé becomes faceless, losing perhaps some degree of the individuality prized within U.S. ideology. Japanese soldiers also have destroyed Olivia's hopes for marriage, thus rendering her a ruined, or "bad," woman. Iris Marion Young distinguishes between cultural categories of the "good" woman and the "bad" woman in her essay on "The Logic of Masculinist Protection," in which she articulates the manner by which women are differently valued under patriarchal rationales. A "good" woman, under this frame, "stands under the male protection of a father or husband, submits to his judgment about what is necessary for her protection, and remains loyal to him. A "bad" woman is one unlucky enough not to have a man willing to protect her."<sup>36</sup> This yields problems because, as Young continues, "the woman without a male protector is fair game for any man to dominate." Once her suitor has been killed, it is more readily possible for Lt. D'Arcy to be violated by Japanese soldiers.

The impending threat of sexual violation created by the melodramatic frame affords women a limited range of agency. This consequence of melodrama emerges in *So Proudly* when U.S. forces must evacuate to the Bataan peninsula. Laden with melodrama,

this scene constructs the enemy as so malicious and the nurses as so helpless that, without a protecting hero, they inevitably face violation and death. Before their evacuation truck departs, one nurse, realizing that she forgot the black silk nightgown in which she sleeps during her deployment to “keep up her morale,” rushes back to retrieve it. Her expression of independent agency and sexual expression, however, is promptly disciplined. Due to this frivolous delay in their departure, a small Japanese patrol unit advancing toward the camp fatally shoots the U.S. soldiers attempting to escort the women to safety. The nightgown that was initially a source of empowerment for the nurse is recoded as mere frivolity. Robbed of their heroes as a result of feminine excess, the virginal white nurses must hide in a wooden storage shed as Japanese soldiers draw near. Scared, nurse whispers, “If someone comes, we better kill ourselves.” She proceeds to describe the brutal mass raping that occurred in Nanking when Japanese soldiers invaded China in animalistic terms: “I’ve seen them fight over a woman like dogs!” During WWII, the “Rape of Nanking” was a commonly understood referent in U.S. culture. According to Brownmiller, news of Japanese soldiers pillaging and raping the Chinese city of Nanking was so persistent that “rape” became the worldwide metaphor for that city’s invasion. Consequently, mass sexual assault came to be fastidiously associated with the Japanese military.<sup>37</sup> Such sensationalized representations of rape, according to Rachel Hall, are a common and problematic feature of U.S. political discourse. She writes: “The sentimental treatment of the rape victim belongs to a particular narrative of rape as a fate worse than death.”<sup>38</sup> In her critique of rape culture, she argues that such notions are used to encourage women’s dependence upon men. Presumptions that women are “rape space,” in constant need of protection so as not to be violated by villainous Others, coupled with

notions that rape is the most horrible violence that can happen to a women, she argues, severely curtails women's agency. These doxa contribute to a culture in which women live in fear, and create unrealistic imagery of rape and rapists that inhibits justice for those who experience alternative encounters of sexual violence, such as date rape, acquaintance rape, and incest.

Due to the denial of feminine agency, Olivia takes the only action deemed possible for a damsel in distress. If rape is a fate worse than death, then as a consequence of the absence of heroic soldiers, her suicide seems to offer the only possible action to save the group from violation. Already a ruined woman without a husband, Olivia sees herself as the obvious choice for this sacrifice. Escaping the storage shed, the 1940s Hollywood "it-girl" lets down her long blonde hair and steps quietly toward the enemy, clenching a grenade to her chest.<sup>39</sup> As the darkened silhouettes of Japanese soldiers rush hungrily toward the female figure, the grenade explodes, killing Olivia and the villains around her. Meanwhile, fallen U.S. soldiers lie dead on the ground, their rifles untouched by the nurses. Such melodramatic framing presents self-sacrifice as a woman's only possible recourse against sexual violation in the absence of heroic men.

Melodrama perpetuates a limited and harmful concept of heroism that relies upon gender stereotypes and polarization. By exploiting notions of feminine vulnerability, especially through emphasis upon women's risk of sexual violence, melodrama constructs wartime enemies as savage and creates an *urgent* sense of threat that exacerbates a culture of fear. In response to this threat, melodrama presents reliance upon individual, heroic men as the solution. Because these men act of their own volition to rescue women from potential sexual violation, their actions are presented as righteous

and unquestionable. By drawing from traditional gender roles—that women are inherently too weak to protect themselves against external threats and require help from men—melodramatic relationships appear true during wartime.<sup>40</sup>

Although it may seem easy to dismiss the relevance of these patterns by confining them to Hollywood melodrama, a similar narrative framework organizes the rhetoric of international politics. According to Enloe, during dangerous times, such as war,

Masculine men and feminine women are expected to react in opposite but complementary ways. A “real man” will become the protector... He will ... step forward to defend the weak, women and children. In the same “dangerous world” women will turn gratefully and expectantly to their fathers and husbands, real or surrogate.<sup>41</sup>

The gendering of danger Enloe observes appears not only in *So Proudly We Hail!*, but also in political discourse. As previously mentioned, imagery of Japanese soldiers as rapists pervaded U.S. public imagination both in the form of persistent reporting of the Rape of Nanking, and in WWII propaganda posters. This imagery is also obvious in media accounts of the off-screen nurses. When all of the Nurses of Bataan finally returned home after their internment, the story of their “heroic” rescue by gallant male soldiers from the “savage” hands of Axis forces received a flurry of media attention. Following the melodramatic frame, national rhetoric narrating these rescues portrayed the nurses as hyper-feminine, helpless, “rape space.”

U.S. public discourse emphasized narratives that re-feminized the nurses, in order to frame them as “good women” despite their traversal into the masculine realm of war. As biographer Elizabeth Norman writes: “The press, and to some extent the government as well, *seemed bent on feminizing the nurses.*”<sup>42</sup> One such article describes the nurses’ return to proper womanhood upon their return from war. “Back from the horrors of war

in the Philippines, eight American army nurses who suffered bomb, shot, shell, malaria, and semi-starvation beside the battling men of Bataan and Corregidor, *went feminine again* today in a shopping spree through San Francisco stores.”<sup>43</sup> In a similar vein, a *New York Times* article describes the successful evacuation of several nurses from the Philippines, its byline reads: “Nine Who Reach Australia Dine ‘Memorably’ and Have First *Hair-Do* Since December.”<sup>44</sup> Often, this refeminization was done via emphasis of the nurses’ maternal instincts and emphasis upon their romantic interests. Several articles collected in a scrapbook by the mother of one of the nurses interned in the Philippines demonstrate this. In a small scale publication called “Interesting People in the American Scene” there is a brief bio of the Superintendent of the Army Nurse corps: “Colonel Julia Flike, who would rather be called just plain ‘Mrs.’ Holds the highest rank of any woman who ever served in the U.S. Army.” Her professed preference to identify as “Mrs.” over her rank demonstrates her acceptance of masculine protection and traditional notions of womanhood, thus rendering her a “good” woman, despite her stint in the “masculine” realm of war. The article continues, stating that she is “responsible for the care of your son, brother, husband, or sweetheart... You can be sure it’s the best, because the industrious, *maternal* colonel looks out for a buck private as conscientiously as for a fellow officer.”<sup>45</sup> Another representative article describes the plight of Ruth Straub, who stayed on duty in the Philippines for an extra year because she could not leave the man she was in love with, whom she described as the “Sweetest Boy in the World.”<sup>46</sup> While the romantic encounters in *So Proudly We Hail* may be dismissed as plotlines reserved for dramatic film, such articles reveal that the nurses’ romances were readily emphasized *outside* of Hollywood as well.

The persistence of the melodramatic frame prevents recognition of the agency and alternative heroism demonstrated by the Nurses of Bataan. As Elizabeth Norman observes, during WWII media reports of the female POWs were rife with journalistic errors and exaggerations.<sup>47</sup> The opening paragraph of one *New York Times* article describes their perilous escape. Of the nurses' reaction to the dangerous evacuation, the article states: "Being women, they were scared."<sup>48</sup> Such framing reveals melodramatic undertones that associate the feminine with passivity and vulnerability. Aspects of their travails that contradicted the melodramatic frame were elided. According to Norman, public discourse became fixated on the feminine fragility of the nurses. She writes:

wartime America, 1940s America, had trouble thinking of the women as anything but "women" – somewhat vain, sometimes frivolous, *always vulnerable*. If they said anything to challenge this stereotype, anything insightful, shrewd or sagacious, it simply went unreported.<sup>49</sup>

Besides their insights, the degree of horror of their stories, too, was silenced. When the nurses revealed the extent of their suffering and difficult labor, they were accused of exaggerating. Such reactions indicate the melodramatic frame's tenacity.

Perhaps the most pernicious narratives were those that mirrored the melodramatic frame's emphasis on the feminine potential for violation. Among the WWII propaganda posters exists one created by General Motors Corporation that directly references the Nurses of Bataan. The poster features bold red lettering that states "Work! To Set 'Em Free!" set against an illustration of the "Nurses From Corregidor," the island where they were stationed when military forces in the Philippines surrendered to Japan. Placed behind barbed wire, indicating their imprisonment, the women don pristine white (the color of purity) nursing uniforms; they are all depicted as slender, and young, and vulnerable. A Japanese soldier, characteristically rendered ape-like, stands in the corner

of the poster. With his large hands, he grips a bayonet, which is positioned suggestively in the poster so that it takes on a phallic resemblance. The poster concludes with the line, in smaller letter, “Work! To Keep ‘Em Firing!,” suggesting that the only way to prevent the women from being violently raped is to assist military action against the nation of Japan. As another example, it was told that Rosemary Hogan – a nurse wounded by shrapnel fire in Bataan – was raped, impregnated, and had her arms and tongue severed by the “Japs.” In response to these rumors, Hogan retorted in frustration: “I suppose it was just too much for the people of the States to believe that any of us—the sixty-eight nurses from Bataan—could have escaped... beastly treatment.”<sup>50</sup> Repeatedly, friends, the media, and soldiers pelted them with inquisitions as to whether they had been sexually violated. The melodramatic image of the vulnerable white woman at risk of assault by brown villains but heroically rescued by U.S. soldiers, indeed, recurs throughout journalistic, government, and interpersonal discourse.

Narratives of impending violation were, indeed, prolific at the time. The news articles professing Japanese soldiers’ proclivity for violation were so pervasive that one of the nurses who escaped by evacuation plane felt the need to console the family of the nurses still in the Philippines. Sue Downing Gallagher wrote to the mother of fellow Bataan nurse, Marcia Gates: “But my dear Mrs. Gates – please don’t pay too much attention to these ‘horror’ stories the newspapers dish up – I know from experience how grossly they exaggerate. I have every faith that your daughter and the rest of the girls left behind are being treated with the greatest respect by their captors.” Even the less frequent news articles that reported on the fact that these women had *not* been sexually abused, did so with incredulity. A *New York Times* article describes the nurses’ living conditions in

the Japanese internment camp. The article quotes an “amazing report” made by “Miss” Dorothy Davis, the Chief Nurse of the Japanese prison camp in Manila. It was considered amazing that there was “Not a single nurse casualty so far... And no atrocities whatsoever.” The “atrocities” in this sense refer to sexual abuse. Davis’s quote continues to say that while the nurses were in the fortress at Corregidor, “Jap Guards came through at all times and might frighten a girl a bit by peering at her as she wakened from sleep, but nothing came of it.” Though the article recognizes that no women were attacked, imagery of Japanese guards “peering” at the nurses in their beds does little to dispel myths connecting the soldiers of Japan with sexual deviance and destructive violence. While Hollywood melodramas may be dismissed as fiction, similar plot structures nonetheless appeared in public address during WWII.

### **A Heroism of Healing**

To balance the inclination to polarize and simplify matters through the melodramatic frame, I re-tell the story of the Nurses of Bataan in a way that embraces the moral complexities of their experiences. Rather than packaging characters into simplified caricatures of hero, villain, and victim, I uncover contradictions inherent within these personas. My retelling demonstrates that notions of feminine vulnerability perpetuated by the melodramatic frame fail to capture the complexity of the experiences of war. This analysis reveals the complex relationship the Nurses of Bataan had with those on both sides of the warfront. My retelling invites us to question the polarized relationship between “good” heroes and “evil” villains by demonstrating the fallibility of masculine WWII heroes, as well as the humanity of Japanese soldiers.

Moving beyond notions of good and evil, performances of nursing on the warfront invite us to holistically reimagine heroism to include healing and nurturing characteristics. Through the nurses' collective commitment to treating the injured – friend and foe alike – a healing heroism may be envisioned. The alternative form of wartime heroism exhibited by the Nurses of Bataan addresses social problems as ailments to be healed, rather than evil to be attacked and eliminated. As such, their story unearths a root metaphor that accounts for health over destruction, leaving room for humanization and healing in the face of conflict.

Unlike caricatures of helpless damsels in distress melodramatically imagined by Hollywood and public discourse, the Nurses of Bataan adjusted bravely to chaotic conditions in the Philippines after Pearl Harbor. Despite having no combat training whatsoever, they treated a barrage of traumatized patients in jungle hospitals under extreme duress. Because their experiences contradict the melodramatic frame, they invite us to imagine a healing heroism. By practicing healing heroism, the Nurses of Bataan maintained dignity and strength both during their deployment and during their years in the Japanese prison camp. Healing heroism recognizes human fallibility, emphasizes collectivism over individualism, and focuses upon healing action over antagonistic action to avoid polarization. This metaphor signifies a less frequently circulated, but nonetheless resistant discursive model that appears in counter-public narratives of war throughout U.S. history.

Melodramatic relationships between victims and villains are an inadequate frame for portraying the complexity of the nurses' relationships to Japanese patients. Although the nurses certainly feared Japanese soldiers, many treated injured Japanese prisoners

because their oath required them to heal both ally and enemy. It is because of the nurses' commitment to this oath that Lieutenant Eunice Hatchitt – one of the few nurses evacuated from Corregidor by rescue plane, who served as a technical consultant for *So Proudly We Hail!* – was appalled by the film's end product. In response to Lt. Olivia D'Arcy's aims of killing Japanese patients, Lt. Hatchitt decried, "The nurses had treated their Japanese prisoners with care and compassion, not the racist rage that drove the Darcey [sic] character to avenge her lover in an erotic suicide."<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the nurses treated Japanese prisoners with the same quality care given U.S. soldiers. When one of the jungle hospitals on Bataan surrendered, General Matsui immediately investigated the prison ward to check on wounded Japanese soldiers. Impressed by the care given to his men, he allowed the U.S. hospital staff to continue serving in their medical capacities.

Their treatment of Japanese patients demonstrates the potential for compassion and flexibility in healing heroism. Caring for Japanese soldiers enabled the nurses to recognize the humanity of their opponents. These women found that "many of the enemy were just boys, and when they spoke—a few knew English—they sounded just like the young American [soldiers]... they too longed for the day they could go home."<sup>52</sup> One nurse, Lt. Helen Cassiani, recalls an exchange with a Japanese soldier who communicated to her with gestures, photographs, and pictures:

I figured he was telling he had survived two campaigns and that he hoped to see his family again. Next, he took a pencil and paper and drew an outline of Japan, Hawaii, and the United States. He sketched a boat with smoke curls carrying his family to Hawaii. Then he drew a second boat going to San Francisco. Finally, he drew a train with smoke and made "choo-choo" sounds to Chicago. Then he smiled and looked at me.

Up to that moment I felt pretty well put upon because of what had happened to me. But this is my enemy? His fears, hopes, and family are not basically different than mine. *In a way, we were both victims of our own government situations. That poor sucker was also out in the field.*<sup>53</sup>

Such rapprochement, albeit reportedly rare, nonetheless complicates melodramatic caricatures of the villain, a mindset necessary for a heroism of healing. It does so by faulting the structure of war itself, rather than a particular nation. Though on opposing sides, it was their government's drive for war that was to blame for the violence and hardship they endured. This chaos was not the fault of the individuals working "out in the field." Despite being on opposing sides of the war, Lt. Cassiani and the Japanese soldier found common ground in their fears, their families, and in their wartime labor for their respective governments.

Melodramatic relationships between victims and heroes also fail to adequately portray the complexity of the nurses' relationships to U.S. soldiers. While caring for the wounded, the nurses faced incessant Japanese bombings and supply shortages. Such close encounters with the dangers of war indicate the fallibility of masculine heroism. While melodrama provides comfort through reassurance that "good" shall triumph over "evil," the nurses' material experiences demonstrate that soldiers cannot always offer protection. The supply shortage that adversely impacted the nurses was exacerbated by General Douglas MacArthur. Originally planning to defend the entire chain of the Philippines, MacArthur spread provisions throughout Luzon Island rather than sufficiently stocking supply depots on the Bataan Peninsula.<sup>54</sup> Even before the retreat to Bataan, when evacuation inevitably loomed, supplies remained in bunkers in locations that would be inaccessible to U.S. forces. Consequently, the nurses battled malnutrition and sought to heal such ailments as malaria, dysentery, and dengue fever without sufficient medical supplies. MacArthur based his decision upon a strategy that privileged action *against* the enemy over nurturing action characteristic of a healing heroism. The consequences his

actions had upon the well-being of the nurses and their patients indicates that violence against an enemy may not always serve the interests of those the hero professes to protect.

The Nurses of Bataan also reveal the capacity for strength and agency of those coded feminine and, thus, presumed weak. On March 11, 1942, General MacArthur, his family, and key staff were evacuated to Australia and General Jonathan “Skinny” Wainwright became the new commanding officer in the Philippines. Meanwhile, the nurses continued to exhibit bravery and initiative in the Philippine Islands that were deemed too dangerous for the esteemed General MacArthur. Lieutenant Marcia Gates wrote a letter home to her family during this time period to assure them that she was safe. She told them that she was “enjoying [her] work.” Of her experiences she writes: “I wanted an adventure and I got it.”<sup>55</sup> The adventurous nature of the nurses was not emphasized in U.S. news articles bent on depicting them as fearful. On April 8, 1942, less than a month after taking command, General Wainwright ordered the medical corps and three battalions of the forsaken infantry to retreat south once again, to the Philippine Island of Corregidor. In the film, *So Proudly We Hail!*, head nurse Lt. Davidson beseeches the commanding medical officer to evacuate the nurses early to the fortress of Corregidor. However, in the Philippines, the Nurses of Bataan exhibited the opposite reaction. In a 1985 documentary, head nurse Josie Nesbit tearfully remembers the evacuation orders. Upon hearing from her commanding officer that Filipina nurses were to stay on Bataan, she replied, “Well then I’m not going either, because they call me Mama Josie and I’m not going to leave them here.”<sup>56</sup> Due to Nesbit’s caring instinct and steadfast determination, Filipina nurses joined their colleagues on Corregidor. Many

other nurses were appalled by the order to relocate without their patients and pleaded to remain behind to care for them.<sup>57</sup> Eventually, they acquiesced with reluctance and embarked upon the six-hour, chaotic evacuation. Evacuees encountered roads clouded with dust and jammed with wounded and bewildered soldiers, abandoned artillery, and lifeless bodies. By the time they escaped to the docks their hospital had been burned to the ground.<sup>58</sup> Nurse Sally Blaine describes the atmosphere on her boat to Corregidor, “We didn’t talk. ... This may strike you as funny but during all that time we didn’t cry, scream or carry on.”<sup>59</sup> On another boat, Anna Williams filed her nails as they escaped across the water. After being rebuked by a fellow nurse, she recalled thinking, “There wasn’t anything else to do and I wasn’t going to sit there and moan.”<sup>60</sup> For her, this action typically associated with feminine frivolity provided a resource for strength and calmness amidst chaos. Their quiet bravery countered the melodramatic evacuation scene in *So Proudly We Hail!* and *The New York Times*’ representation of them as naturally fearful women. The actual Nurses of Bataan were not eager to abandon their patients even for their own safety and while some traditionally feminine behaviors, like nail filing, provided comfort, there were no disastrous delays in departure to retrieve such things as forgotten silk nightgowns.

At first, when the nurses arrived in the Malinta Tunnel on Corregidor, it appeared that their situation had improved. Their stay in the tunnel marked “the first time in three months they had a ceiling over their heads, a decent meal every day, no snakes, ants or iguanas in their beds.”<sup>61</sup> As recounted by nurses Willa Hook and Juanita Redmond, “Corregidor seemed like heaven that night.”<sup>62</sup> The heavenly nature of the tunnel held short tenure, however, as its sanitation quickly declined, exposing nurses to conditions far

too unfeminine for melodramatic representations. “Everything possible was done to improve the sanitation, but the stench of human bodies, of septic wounds, of gas gangrene, was overwhelming.”<sup>63</sup> Corregidor’s putrid air contributed to respiratory diseases, fungus infections, and skin boils. Those lingering at the tunnel’s entrance to breathe fresh air risked the dangers of the aerial bombings; those within frequently felt the concussions of those bombs as they reverberated throughout the tunnels. With food and medical supplies dwindling, General Wainwright finally surrendered Corregidor, marking the beginning of the nurses’ nearly three-year survival in Japanese internment camps.

The nurses’ imprisonment also reveals that melodramatic imagery of the raping, savage villain was far too simple to capture the complexity of Japanese soldiers. The Japanese military certainly conducted horrific war crimes, including the Rape of Nanking and the bombing of Pearl Harbor. However, not all Japanese soldiers fit this caricature. The Japanese soldiers to whom the forces on Corregidor surrendered met nurse POWs with gazes of curiosity, rather than desire. Like U.S. culture, Japanese culture positioned war as men’s business, a test of masculinity. The captured Army nurses were, thus, something of a novelty. The Japanese seemed “baffled by the presence of women in uniform.”<sup>64</sup> In her oral history of the event, Lieutenant Dorothy Still Danner, NC, USN, recounts that the Japanese “began to slap around and beat up the men. But they ignored us – the nurses.”<sup>65</sup> Throughout their entire internment, not a single nurse was raped or beaten and although many fell seriously ill, none were killed in battle and none starved to death, contesting imagery of women as vulnerable and inevitable “rape space.”

In confinement, the nurses formed “a *band of sisters*... whose mission was simply to survive.”<sup>66</sup> They began to rely on one another for protection, surviving by utilizing a collective strength unrecognizable by a melodramatic frame. Upon arriving at Santo Tomás University, a campus-turned-prison near Manila, the nurses were held incommunicado for six weeks.<sup>67</sup> Isolated from their patients and colleagues, the women worked on healing their own illnesses: malaria, dysentery, and dengue fever, among other ailments. On the warfront they had been too involved with their work to socialize, but isolated within prison quarters, the nurses began confiding in one another and developing a collective identity. Eventually, there arose a need for expanded medical capacity within the camp. In response, prison guards turned the nurses’ quarters into a medical facility, allowing the Nurses of Bataan to join the other medical staff. Once they could mingle with other internees, head nurses insisted that U.S. servicewomen maintain “the nurse corps’ traditions of dedication to the sick and *camaraderie* among women.”<sup>68</sup> To establish group cohesiveness they conducted themselves in their “most professional capacity—that of nurses.” This cohesiveness was observed and noted by Norman:

I was dealing not with individuals but with a *collective persona*. The women often answered questions by using the pronoun “we” rather than “I.” ... They learned ... the notion of strength in numbers – as military women. In the ranks nothing is more important than “unit cohesiveness.” ... Their *collective* sense of mission, both as nurses and as army and naval officers, allowed them to survive.<sup>69</sup>

In short, their collectivity provided their strength throughout their internment. They were not simply waiting in massive agony for a hero to march in and rescue them, they were heroes to one another.

The nurses’ strength afforded them considerable agency even while confined by Japanese military officers, thus countering melodramatic notions of feminine passivity.

Many took advantage of classes taught by university-accredited professors.<sup>70</sup> Nurses and their fellow internees could learn Spanish, Tagalog, public speaking, and mathematics, among other subjects. Some nurses partook in sports, organizing a team to play in the women's baseball league. Many also joined the underground Philippine resistance movement to help troops in prison camps in Luzon and Manila – where their colleagues and patients experienced harsh conditions. Nurses risked their lives to smuggle food, clothing, medicine, money, and information to those suffering in military prisons. Their brave acts of resistance, however, rarely appeared in melodramatic public discourse.

In January of 1944, when control of the camps passed from the Japanese Bureau of External Affairs to the War Prisoners Department of the Imperial Japanese Army, conditions rapidly worsened. Soldiers with bayonets patrolled the campus and food rations were progressively reduced with each allied advancement. Adults in the camp subsisted on 1,400 calories per day, then 1,180 calories per day, then 1,000 calories per day and, ultimately, 960 daily calories. Hospitals received an influx of individuals suffering from malnutrition and related ailments. When rations reached 960 calories per day, Josie Nesbit, acting on behalf of the collective of nurses, successfully petitioned the camp central committee to allot the nurses a little extra meat each week to sustain some strength for nursing the ill. Eventually, though, little health difference appeared between the nurses and those they treated. The women had so little energy that even standard treatments exhausted them. In between treating patients, a nurse would need to sit and rest her weary swollen legs. Yet, unlike Lt. Davidson in *So Proudly We Hail!*, who became incapacitated simply from being separated from her husband, the nurses remained active despite their physical and emotional ailments, never ceasing their labor.

Even as U.S. soldiers arrived in Manila to rescue the nurses from imprisonment, the nurses still defied melodramatic caricatures of victimhood. On February 3, 1945 the captives of Santo Tomás received orders to stay within their bunks as intense explosions echoed throughout the city. After the prison camp lost power, the nurses waited quietly in the darkness amidst waves of gasoline fumes. By the end of the night the internees were liberated as U.S. soldiers broke through the gates of the campus. The emaciated nurses, though faint from hunger, refused to just passively stand by. Many soldiers were injured in the altercations that occurred during the liberation process, so nurses worked through the night healing the wounded flooding into the camp. In the following days, nurses worked six-hour shifts, attempting sleep or eating furiously when off duty. Their diligent work continued until a hundred new replacements arrived from the United States, allowing the beleaguered nurses finally to head home after years of imprisonment.<sup>71</sup>

Unfortunately, however, the experiences of the Nurses of Bataan have been largely forgotten over the course of history. This forgetting and the WWII Era reframing of their experiences obstruct broader perspectives of heroism, which in turn glorifies war. I have recounted the tale of the Nurses of Bataan, in part, because their actions allow revisions to the melodramatic notions of heroism that pervade war discourse in the twenty-first century. The melodramatic frame only enables us to view the Nurses of Bataan as suffering victims. Throughout my retelling I demonstrate, instead, that the nurses were *heroes* modeling a form of bravery that often remains unrecognized publicly. Unfortunately, healing heroism, the heroism of humbly nurturing “heroes” and “villains” alike, is systematically rejected in favor of melodramatic war narratives lauding a type of individualistic action that quashes, eliminates, or nukes the enemy.

## Conclusion

On April first of 1942, less than a month after his departure from the Philippines and just slightly over a week before the Bataan Death March during which an estimated 10,000 allied soldiers died, General Douglas MacArthur received the Congressional Medal of Honor. While U.S. troops in the Philippines were still struggling to survive, the already heavily decorated general received the medal for his ability to stay calm while taking action against the enemy:

For conspicuous leadership in preparing the Philippine Islands to resist conquest, for gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty in *action against invading Japanese forces*, and for the heroic conduct of *defensive and offensive* operations on the Bataan Peninsula. ... His utter disregard of personal danger under heavy fire and aerial bombardment, his *calm judgment in each crisis*, inspired his troops, galvanized the spirit of resistance of the Filipino people, and confirmed the faith of the American people.<sup>72</sup>

This excerpt reveals Manichean dualism's prominent role in constructing narratives of heroism. Indeed, the Medal of Honor writes enemy combat into its very guidelines. Only an individual who has "distinguished himself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty ... while engaged in military operations involving *conflict* with an *opposing foreign force*" may receive this award.<sup>73</sup>

The honoring of MacArthur for his leadership in the Philippines reveals the privileging of combat over compassion in melodramatic constructions of heroism. Although he was honored for his combat by his country, military personnel toiling in the Philippines without resources harbored a different opinion of MacArthur. Most felt betrayed because "[f]or all practical purposes, they had been abandoned by their country."<sup>74</sup> Long before he departed from the Philippines, the general was deemed "Dugout Doug" by the "starving troops on Bataan who knew that their leader had visited

the Bataan front only once and had seemed to prefer the safety of Corregidor where they knew he was ‘eating well.’”<sup>75</sup> His official classification as a hero amongst heroes starkly contrasts the treatment of the leader of the Nurses of Bataan.

Though given the chance to escape to Australia with General MacArthur, Captain Maude “Davy” Davison chose to remain in the Philippines in the spirit of egalitarian collectivism. Consequently, she endured three years of internment, which caused her weight to drop nearly in half, from 158 to 80 pounds.<sup>76</sup> Despite her decline in health throughout the war she bravely served as Chief Nurse and was a constant source of strength for the other nurses. After years of imprisonment, she returned to the United States at the age of 60. By then, her health conditions prevented her from assuming another post in the Army.

After the conclusion of the war, Captain Davison’s physician comrades at arms petitioned the Army to honor her but, as a result of the melodramatic framework for heroism, their aims were met with resistance. Colonel Wibb Cooper, a surgeon on Corregidor who commanded the wartime medical units in the Philippines, recommended she be honored with a Distinguished Service Medal (DSM). The DSM, awarded for valor and sacrifice, is the third highest decoration in the Army. Despite support from many highly decorated officials, including General MacArthur himself, she was awarded a much lesser medal, in part a result from remarks written by General Wainwright: “In my opinion the post of Chief Nurse, although very important, is not one of great responsibility within the meaning of the qualification of the Distinguished Service Medal.”<sup>77</sup> Because the feminine-associated position of nursing was not deemed one of great responsibility in the patriarchal culture of the military, she instead received the

Legion of Merit Award (LMA), given to individuals for outstanding performance of duties. The LMA is “a sort of junior Distinguished Service Medal for noncombatants whose qualifications are ‘extraordinary fidelity and essential service,’ but whose duties do not carry the ‘great responsibility’ required of those eligible for the DSM.”<sup>78</sup> It was created during World War II specifically to award those “members of the armed forces of the United States and of friendly foreign powers, not including action against the enemy.” Anna Bernatitus, one of the nurses who escaped from Bataan and Corregidor, was the “first person in the naval service to receive the new Legion of Merit award.”<sup>79</sup> Further comments from the board solidified sentiments that nurses do not deserve the DSM: The chief nurse position “normally is lacking in duty requiring the exercise of *independent* initiative and responsibility.”<sup>80</sup>

Juxtaposing the public honors awarded General MacArthur and Captain Davison allows us to see the degree to which melodrama informs notions of heroism. Because Captain Davison’s wartime service defied characteristics of melodramatic heroism, public accolades were not readily given. When given the chance to evacuate, she chose to remain with the collective of nurses in the Philippines rather than to escape and lead from afar, a heroic act not appreciated by a frame privileging individualism. With a team of nurses, she treated Japanese prisoners, a move that counters the polarized melodramatic notion that the enemy is so wholly evil that he must be eliminated to ensure the safety of the vulnerable. General MacArthur led combat against an enemy, a requisite for the Medal of Honor. The hierarchy of their respective honors demonstrates that forms of heroism countering the melodramatic frame are disciplined rather than rewarded in U.S. political discourse.

Despite the advancement in women's rights that has occurred since WWII and despite the increased inclusion of women in the military U.S. public discourse still firmly connects femininity to vulnerability. Manifestations of melodramatic heroism reveal themselves particularly in the hype surrounding the alleged rape and subsequent rescue of Private Jessica Lynch described in the introduction. Her rescue received a flurry of media attention similar to that received by the Nurses of Bataan. Private Lynch, argues Faludi, "may have been in uniform, but this wasn't a story about a soldier's return to her brothers in arms. It was a tale of a maiden in need of rescue."<sup>81</sup> Significant is the fact although others in her unit were abducted – four men and one African American woman – white, petite Private Lynch was singled out in the rescue narrative. Like the Nurses of Bataan, Lynch was melodramatically portrayed as feminine and helpless in order to signify the virtue and heroism of the soldiers who rescued her. As Jennifer Lobasz observes, the media's "focus on the young, childless, and possibly raped Lynch carries echoes of the myth of the virginal white woman who needs to be protected, especially from men of color."<sup>82</sup> This explicit connection between race and sexual violence is part of a consistent pattern in U.S. political culture. These narratives use imagery of female violation to signify the evil nature of raced villains. This duality results in a system of logic in which U.S. soldiers are characteristically good, and the enemies they battle are characteristically violent and sexually deviant.

Narratives that place the blame of rape onto the inherently evil nature of a raced enemy mask an important reality of wartime sexual violence. Rape, as I further demonstrate in the chapters to follow, is frequently used as a "tool for domination in war."<sup>83</sup> Therefore, rape is not indicative of the evils of particular nations or individuals.

Rather, I argue that it is indicative of flaws within war and militarized culture itself.

Although U.S. propaganda, Hollywood films, and news reports on the Rape of Nanking connected Japanese soldiers with sexual violence in the minds of the American public, their own soldiers were also guilty of such war crimes. Although many soldiers, sailors, and marines do serve their country nobly and honorably, others, as evinced by letters sent by anonymous servicemen to *The New York Times*, were anything but chivalrous. A U.S. military serviceman writes:

Why is it that in your Sept. 17 issue of TIME you seem to refer to the publications by Domei in regard to the rapes, robberies, and assaults committed here by Americans, as mere statements without logic? Believe me, they are true, for I am in a position to know.<sup>84</sup>

This letter refers to an article in *Time* critiquing allegations made by the “Japs’ Domei News Agency” that U.S. soldiers had committed robberies, shot a “mentally deranged man ... for failing to obey US orders,” and sexually assaulted Japanese women.<sup>85</sup> U.S. soldiers, too, were guilty of raping women from the nations they battled during WWII. Mary Louise Roberts’s historical analysis illustrates that the Allied invasion of Normandy was marked by a “wave of rape accusations against American soldiers.”<sup>86</sup> The rampant sexual violence, she observes, led to fear and panic throughout the French region. Additionally, Susan Brownmiller writes that “Allied rape, for the rapists, was often joyous—a sporadic, hearty spilling over and *acting out of anti-female sentiment* disguised with the glorious, vengeful struggle, an exuberant manifestation of the heroic fighting man who is fighting the good fight.”<sup>87</sup> Her analysis reveals that rape is not characteristic of specific races or particular nations, but of gender hierarchies and wartime culture imbued with anti-female sentiment.

To further this rearticulation of wartime rape in the chapters to follow, I demonstrate how the melodramatic frame has continued to influence U.S. war rhetoric through to contemporary times. In the following chapters, I explore material experiences of sexual violence that contradict melodramatic associations of heroic masculinity. These experiences suggest a link between militarized masculinity and sexual violence. Its prevalence, however, is too often minimized in public discourse in lieu of tales that follow the melodramatic frame.

Although such melodramatic narratives dominate U.S. war rhetoric, alternative discourses do exist. Therefore, I also explore rhetoric that exemplifies tenets of the healing heroism performed by the Nurses of Bataan. Captain Maude Davison's form of heroism, though it received fewer public honors, provides a model that associates heroism with health, rather than destruction. Whereas Captain Davison demonstrated a healing heroism that focused on recovery and recuperation, General Douglas MacArthur, the quintessential wartime hero, demonstrated a melodramatic heroism that focused on fighting and conquering the enemy. Both forms of valor aim to solve severe social problems, but their underlying metaphors invite very different types of action. When "nursing," rather than "soldiering," serves as a model for heroic action, space opens for acts that encourage humanization and healing. With this in mind, in the chapters that follow I focus on those discourses which loosen the strict authority of masculine agency to first challenge and then heal the violent patriarchal norms that lend themselves to both war culture and rape culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House, 1998, 2004), 12.

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<sup>2</sup> Teresa De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 42.

<sup>3</sup> Alice R. Clarke, RN, "A Glance Back in Time: Thirty-Seven Months as Prisoners of War," *Nursing Forum* 35 (2000): 21.

<sup>4</sup> Thom Shanker & John M. Broder, "A Nation at War: Liberated; The Rescue of Private Lynch" *New York Times*, April 3, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/03/world/nation-war-liberated-rescue-private-lynch-iraqi-s-tip-was-bugle-call.html> (accessed May 21, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> The failure of the *New York Times*, among other news sources, to mention the previous female POWs from WWII is especially remarkable given the tendency of post-9/11 political rhetoric to frequently evoke the "greatest generation" to garner support for the War on Terror. David Hoogland Noon, "Operation Enduring Analogy: World War II, the War On Terror, and the Uses Of Historical Memory," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 7 (2004): 339–66.

<sup>6</sup> Colonel Raymond K. Bluhm Jr. ed., *World War II: A Chronology of War* (New York: Universe Publishing, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey D. Mason, *Melodrama and the Myth of America* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 14.

<sup>8</sup> Heilman, *Tragedy and Melodrama*, 101, 106. See also: Anker, "Villains, Victims and Heroes," 23; and Mason, *Melodrama*, 18.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth M. Norman, *We Band of Angels: The Untold Story of American Nurses Trapped on Bataan by the Japanese* (New York: Random House, 1999), 7.

<sup>10</sup> The only exception was a group of eleven Navy nurses, who were left behind in Manila and subsequently imprisoned. The nurses were interned in a prison camp for foreign nationals where they performed medical duties for their fellow civilian prisoners according to Norman, *We Band of Angels*, 25–28.

<sup>11</sup> The Malinta Tunnel, located on the Island of Corregidor off the south of the Bataan Peninsula, was an underground fortress that served units in the Philippines during World War II.

<sup>12</sup> Despite much adversity, the United States evacuated a scattering of nurses. The rescue plane flew out "directly in the range of artillery," almost skimmed the water, and made a forced landing due to impassable fog before leaving for Australia. A second plane also attempted to depart that day but, after failing to gain altitude, crashed into a coral reef, leaving the nurses on board stranded on the island. Annalee Jacoby, "Bataan Nurses: Nurses Under Fire in the Philippines: April 1942," *Reporting World War II: American Journalism 1938-1946* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 2001), 131.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas F. Brady, "What's News in Hollywood?" *New York Times*, December 6, 1942, X3 (emphasis added).

<sup>14</sup> Theodore Strauss, "Heroines Without Mascara" *New York Times*, September 12, 1943, p. X3.

<sup>15</sup> Kathi Jackson, *They Called Them Angels: American Military Nurses of World War II* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 3.

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- <sup>16</sup> John Bodnar, "Bad Dreams about the Good War: Bataan," in *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials*, ed. Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 155.
- <sup>17</sup> Already, the film recounts a story inconsistent with what actually happened at the time. The Japanese assaulted the Philippines with bombs just days after Pearl Harbor, making reroute to the islands completely illogical. Further, the nurses interned in the Philippines had been serving at U.S. colonial outposts on the Philippines long before the explosions in Hawaii.
- <sup>18</sup> Patrick J. Geary, *Women at the Beginning: Origin Myths from the Amazons to the Virgin Mary* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 76.
- <sup>19</sup> Rachel Hall, "'It Can Happen to You': Rape Prevention in the Age of Risk Management," *Hypatia* 19 (2004), 334.
- <sup>20</sup> Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987): 37.
- <sup>21</sup> Elisabeth Anker, "Villains, Victims and Heroes: Melodrama, Media, and September 11," *Journal of Communication* 55 (2005): 25.
- <sup>22</sup> Susan Faludi, *The Terror Dream* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2001).
- <sup>23</sup> Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 170.
- <sup>24</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" from *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 298.
- <sup>25</sup> Robert L. Ivie, "Savagery in Democracy's Empire," *Third World Quarterly* 26 (2005): 59–69.
- <sup>26</sup> Gordon Stables, "Justifying Kosovo: Representations of Gendered Violence and U.S. Military Intervention," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 20 (2003): 94.
- <sup>27</sup> Bruce Cumings, "The American Way of Going to War: Mexico (1846) to Iraq (2003)," *Orbis* 51 (2007): 196.
- <sup>28</sup> Stables, "Justifying Kosovo," 96.
- <sup>29</sup> Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1975), 181.
- <sup>30</sup> Deepa Kumar, "War Propaganda and the (Ab)uses of Women: Media Constructions of the Jessica Lynch Story" *Feminist Media Studies* 4 (2004): 297–98
- <sup>31</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (Salt Lake City, UT: Project Gutenberg EBook, 2005). Retrieved February 8, 2014 from: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/14975/14975-h/14975-h.htm>
- <sup>32</sup> Hazel Carby, "On the Threshold," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985): 270.
- <sup>33</sup> Carby, "On the Threshold," 269.
- <sup>34</sup> Susan D. Moeller, "Pictures of the Enemy: Fifty Years of Images of Japan in the American Press" *Journal of American Culture* 19 (1996): 31.
- <sup>35</sup> Nicholas Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *Politics and Propaganda: Weapons of Mass Seduction* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004), 59.

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- <sup>36</sup> Iris Marion Young, "The Logic of Masculinist Protection: Reflections on the Current Security State," in *Women and Citizenship* ed. Marilyn Friedman (NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 25 (emphasis added).
- <sup>37</sup> Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, 57.
- <sup>38</sup> Hall, "It Can Happen," 14.
- <sup>39</sup> Although the film capitalizes on the fetishization of Lake's hair in this scene, her coveted Peek-a-Boo style does not appear. Once she lets down her hair, it is simply parted down the middle. Because so many women wanted to emulate her style during WWII, government officials actually asked her to change her hairstyle out of fear that it "might cause workplace accidents among women on assembly lines." Larry McShane, "Veronica Lake's Reputed Remains Resurface," *Associated Press*, October 13, 2004.
- <sup>40</sup> For more on the notion of the female body as "rape space" see Hall, "It Can Happen," 13.
- <sup>41</sup> Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 12-13.
- <sup>42</sup> Norman, *We Band of Angels*, 223 (emphasis added).
- <sup>43</sup> "8 Nurses Who Suffered Beside Men of Bataan Tell of Ordeal," found in the Scrapbook of Marcia Gates, *Scrapbooks, 1941-1945 Wisconsin Historical Society*, 41. <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/search.asp?id=1681>
- <sup>44</sup> Frank Hewlett, "Philippine Nurses Gay After Ordeal," *The New York Times*, May 26, 1941, p. 18.
- <sup>45</sup> "Interesting People in the American Scene," found in Gates, *Scrapbooks*, 33.
- <sup>46</sup> "Interesting People in the American Scene," found in Gates, *Scrapbooks*, 33.
- <sup>47</sup> Norman, *We Band of Angels*, 54
- <sup>48</sup> Hewlett, "Philippine Nurses Gay," 18.
- <sup>49</sup> Norman, *We Band of Angels*, 223 (emphasis added).
- <sup>50</sup> Norman, *We Band of Angels*, 227.
- <sup>51</sup> Norman, *We Band of Angels*, 127.
- <sup>52</sup> Norman, *We Band of Angels*, 59.
- <sup>53</sup> Norman, *We Band of Angels*, 136 (emphasis added).
- <sup>54</sup> Jackson, *They Called Them Angels*, 28.
- <sup>55</sup> Letter from Marcia Gates, March 6, 1942 found in Gates, *Scrapbooks*, 16.
- <sup>56</sup> United States Department of Defense, *We All Came Home: Army & Navy Nurse POWs*, videocassette, (Capital Heights, MD: National Audiovisual Center, 1985).
- <sup>57</sup> Betsy Kuhn, *Angels of Mercy: The Army Nurses of World War II* (New York: Aladdin, 1999), 20.
- <sup>58</sup> The marines, sailors, and soldiers remaining on the Bataan peninsula – some of whom had been the nurses' patients – suffered a more perilous journey. On April 10th, they were forced on the six-day Bataan Death March. "It was the largest surrender in American history," as 12,000 U.S. and 63,000 Filipino officers and enlisted personnel surrendered. Of the Allied prisoners of war that began the 60-mile march in sweltering heat, an estimated 10,000 died or were killed by Japanese soldiers. Bluhm, *World War II*, 97.
- <sup>59</sup> Norman, *We Band of Angels*, 90.
- <sup>60</sup> Norman, *We Band of Angels*, 91.

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- <sup>61</sup> Norman, *We Band of Angels*, 98.
- <sup>62</sup> Jacoby, "Bataan Nurses," 131.
- <sup>63</sup> Clarke, "Thirty-Seven Months," 21.
- <sup>64</sup> Norman, *We Band of Angels*, 28.
- <sup>65</sup> LT Dorothy Still Danner, NC, USN, "Oral Histories - U.S. Navy Nurse Prisoner of War in the Philippines, 1942-1945" *Naval Historical Center Website*: <http://www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq87-3f.htm> (accessed February 8, 2014).
- <sup>66</sup> Norman, *We Band of Angels*, 153.
- <sup>67</sup> Bess Furman, "Nurse Tells Fate of Bataan Victims: Dorothy Davis Gives First Full Report on Treatment of War Prisoners in Manila Camp," *New York Times*, December 21, 1943, 30.
- <sup>68</sup> Norman, *We Band of Angels*, 156.
- <sup>69</sup> Norman, *We Band of Angels*, xiv.
- <sup>70</sup> Bess Furman, "Nurse Tells Fate."
- <sup>71</sup> "Bataan Nurses Start for Home," *New York Times*, February 14, 1945, 6.
- <sup>72</sup> "Douglas McArthur," Congressional Medal of Honor Society, <http://www.cmohs.org/recipient-detail/2856/macarthur-douglas.php> (accessed August 29, 2011).
- <sup>73</sup> The Medal of Honor may also be awarded in the name of Congress to a person who "engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States,... [or] serv[ed] with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent party." Of note is that under any of these circumstances, Congress only awards the medal to those who exhibit bravery while combating an enemy. Government Printing Office, "Code of Federal Regulations Title 32, Volume 2: Section 578.4 Medal of Honor" Department of The Army, [http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/cfr\\_2002/julqtr/32cfr578.4.htm](http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/cfr_2002/julqtr/32cfr578.4.htm) (accessed January 30, 2012, emphasis added).
- <sup>74</sup> Norman, *We Band of Angels*, 73 & 76.
- <sup>75</sup> Jackson, *They Called Them Angels*, 27.
- <sup>76</sup> "Maude Jackson Dies: Heroic Army Nurse on Bataan Was Interned Three Years" *New York Times*, June 14, 1956, 33.
- <sup>77</sup> Norman, *We Band of Angels*, 237.
- <sup>78</sup> "Army & Navy - Medals: Not Only Gallantry" *Time Magazine*, November 23, 1942, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,773960,00.html#ixzz0Xv3CjRUG> (accessed November 30, 2009).
- <sup>79</sup> Washing Bureau of The Chicago Sun, "Bataan Nurse First to Get New Award." Gates, *Scrapbooks*, 38.
- <sup>80</sup> Norman, *We Band of Angels*, 237.
- <sup>81</sup> Faludi, *The Terror Dream*, 169.
- <sup>82</sup> Jennifer K. Lobasz, "The Woman in Peril and the Ruined Woman: Representations of Female Soldiers in the Iraq War," *Journal of Women, Politics and Policy* 29 (2008): 316. For more on Lynch as a woman in need of rescue, see also: Kumar, "War Propaganda," 297.
- <sup>83</sup> Laura L. O'Toole, Jessica Schiffman, and Margie Edwards, *Gender Violence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), xii.

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<sup>84</sup> (Serviceman's Name Withheld) c/o Postmaster San Francisco, "Letters," *Time*, November 12, 1945.

<sup>85</sup> "The Press: Just Being Helpful," *Time*, September 17, 1945. See also "The Press: No More False Statements" *Time*, September 24, 1945.

<sup>86</sup> Mary Louis Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013): 10 & 73-77.

<sup>87</sup> Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, 65.

### **CHAPTER 3 – MELODRAMA AND SEXUAL ASSAULT IN THE MY LAI MASSACRE**

The Vietnam War provided a moral dilemma, both for those on the home front and for service members engaging in warfare in Vietnam. Unlike WWII, for which the horror of Pearl Harbor provided ample fodder to propagandize the enemy's evil for purposes of justifying military action, the necessity of the Vietnam War was less easily evinced. Additionally, the era's technological advances in television reporting thrust the material violence of war into living rooms on the home front. According to Robert Hariman and John Lucaites, U.S. residents witnessed a daily onslaught of fragmented images of bombing, firefights, and village searches, causing war to appear purposeless and morally uncertain.<sup>1</sup> "This continual stream of images reflecting a war without clear battle lines dovetailed perfectly with the government's lack of either a plausible rationale or coherent strategy."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, witnessing the material reality of war minimally filtered made polarization more difficult. The warfront was also imbued with moral uncertainty, as it is typically more difficult to identify guerrilla fighters than soldiers of a national military. In Vietnam, officers told soldiers that Ho Chi Minh supporters would kill them without hesitation, but were unable to provide clear guidance on how to discern which Vietnamese people were supporters. In the chaos, many U.S. soldiers abandoned attempts to distinguish between U.S.-friendly (or at least tolerant) Vietnamese citizens and Vietcong guerilla fighters relying, instead, on racist logic to simply characterize all Vietnamese people as enemies.

As discussed in chapter two, melodrama comforts us in times of chaos. It also, as Linda Williams observes, serves as the primary method by which mainstream U.S. culture grapples with moral dilemmas.<sup>3</sup> According to Williams, melodrama influences

U.S. political discourse by shaping national identity through narratives of polarization. Juxtaposed with the racialized Other, the U.S. presents itself as virtuous. Polarized caricatures of good and evil result in a totalizing sense of morality that stems from identity, nationality, or race, rather than actions. This simplified construction of morality positions the U.S. as inherently righteous in moral conflict. In the context of Vietnam, melodramatic narratives allowed U.S. civilians and soldiers alike to make sense of battle against an enemy that was difficult to define. In the absence of a clearly constructed enemy, there was an increased necessity for melodramatically imbued rhetoric to establish a sense of virtue and moral certainty. The rhetorical significance of this cannot be over stated. The establishment of national virtue has historically been a key factor in building public support for war in the United States.<sup>4</sup> As a consequence of this rhetoric, connections between masculinity, violence, war and sexual assault manifest as inevitable. Thus, by reading narratives about the Vietnam War through the lens of melodrama, we may untangle these linkages by further demonstrating the rhetorical work involved in maintaining the guise of pure heroism and pure villainy.

The desire to render a virtuous national identity through absolutist narratives of heroes and villains has implications regarding public address on sexual violence. As I reveal in the previous chapter, despite the fact that none of the Nurses of Bataan were assaulted, U.S. discourse still featured stories that either assumed or fabricated sexual violation against the nurses, stories that fit absolutist constructs of villainy. The reverse occurs in journalism and public memory about the soldiers of the Vietnam War. I demonstrate in this chapter that U.S. soldiers' rape of Vietnamese civilians has been minimized in public rhetoric. Although the sexual assault of Vietnamese women by U.S.

troops was a common form of violence in Vietnam, most of these crimes were never prosecuted and often fail to appear in historical accounts of the war. The most likely point for critical discussion of sexual violence during the Vietnam War might have been the highly publicized My Lai Massacre. In this case, a company of U.S. soldiers decimated an entire Vietnamese village with the aim of eliminating Vietcong presumably in the area. When they came upon the village, rather than encountering North Vietnamese guerrilla fighters, they encountered a village of women, children, and elderly residents. Over a period of four hours, U.S. soldiers murdered an entire village of innocent civilians and sexually assaulted over twenty women and young girls.

Media accounts and official investigation of the massacre reveal a tendency for the U.S. public to ignore sexual abuse perpetrated by its own soldiers in ways consistent with a melodramatic construct of heroic identity. While the killings were widely addressed in subsequent hearings and public statements, sexual violence received far less attention: it was never prosecuted and has been increasingly abbreviated in public discourse. Because sexual deviance is discursively associated with the “enemy,” to associate heroic soldiers with rape would be to deny their moral virtue. Following suit, the sexual violence of My Lai has been largely forgotten. Gina Marie Weaver confirms the omission of rape from public memory about this tragedy: “when Americans mention My Lai as shorthand for the atrocities committed in Vietnam, they are referencing the mass murder of civilians—not the extensive raping that also occurred.”<sup>5</sup> Public discussion of the sexual violence that occurred during the massacre has lessened over the course of history, allowing the U.S. public to look more favorably upon its military action than it might otherwise.

Analysis of the narratives regarding the sexual violence at My Lai—or, perhaps better put, the lack of narratives about these sex crimes—lends understanding to wartime conduct at large. I examine the massacre as emblematic of the dynamics of sexual assault and the public discourse surrounding it during the Vietnam War. Although the My Lai Massacre was one of the most publicized instances of brutality from the Vietnam War it was *not* outside of the norm of wartime conduct. In other words, the My Lai Massacre and the rape associated with this violence is indicative of a systematic problem within U.S. military culture rather than a unique atrocity as it is often represented.

The melodramatic frame provides a useful lens for interpreting public narratives about the My Lai Massacre. Reading rhetoric about the massacre as melodrama reveals how constructions of villainy enable us to fold the Vietnam War into the myth that the U.S. is a virtuous nation that engages in war *only* when provoked by an enemy. Studying patterns of polarization in war is a useful tool for rhetorical analysis, but the scope needs to be broadened. Muted public discourse about sexual assault indicates that notions of race and gender overlap in war rhetoric. As established in the previous chapter, the melodramatic sense of Manichean dualism between heroes and villains is constructed largely by their treatment of “damsels in distress.” That is, a hero demonstrates his virtue by rescuing the weak whereas the villain demonstrates his treachery by preying upon and threatening to violate the weak. Because we render soldiers virtuously heroic through their professed *telos* of protecting the vulnerable, connecting service members to gendered violence seems more damning than other war crimes, even mass murder. Indeed, mainstream discourse about the Vietnam War not only depicts the massacre as isolated, but also minimizes the associated sexual violence. Thus, reading rhetoric about

the My Lai Massacre as melodrama discloses the role absolutist constructions of identity play in the minimization of crimes of sexual assault committed by U.S. soldiers.

In this chapter, I critique harmful notions of masculine heroism and examine the connections between sexual violence and military culture. To do so I both read mainstream rhetoric as melodrama and examine healing discursive models for discussing war. The juxtaposition of institutional and counter discourses reveals how the cultural amnesia surrounding rape and the Vietnam War enables the construction of a virtuous national identity. In the first section of this chapter, then, I critique public narratives of the My Lai Massacre that minimize the sexual violence that occurred. These narratives are patterned in ways that allow the U.S. public to maintain notions of a virtuous national identity, even while bearing witness to the massacre. I analyze the initial news coverage of the massacre, as well as later journalistic and documentary memorials of the brutality, to explore the melodramatic undertones of this discourse. Cases of wartime sexual assault, I argue, are rarely addressed in public discourse because they mar the reputation of U.S. soldiers and complicate idealized notions of melodramatic heroism. After detailing the tragic massacre and the cultural context within which it occurred, I examine the ways that public address minimized the massacre. Three patterns may be found in the rhetoric about My Lai: the atrocity was presented as an isolated catastrophe, blame was pinned onto villainous individuals who were not characteristic of military culture, and the sexual violence that occurred was largely forgotten.

In the second half of this chapter, I examine rhetoric of the Vietnam veteran's antiwar movement through analysis of personal testimony given during the Winter Soldier Investigation. This example of dissent models an important counter to

melodramatic wartime rhetoric. Vietnam War veterans convened this public hearing with the aim of protesting the conflict. They sought to draw public attention to the brutality occurring in the jungles of Vietnam in order to reveal that atrocities like My Lai were actually a common occurrence during the war and characteristic of military culture. By placing the blame on military culture in Vietnam rather than pinning the violence to individual villains, the testimonies reveal the complexities of war culture and invite institutional critique of the military.

I read the soldiers' dissent through the lens of healing heroism to demonstrate its recuperative potential. In the previous chapter, the Nurses of Bataan modeled healing heroism. The very nature of their profession helped to prevent them from participating in racist rage and violence. The Winter Soldiers model a different application of healing heroism. The training and experiences of Vietnam war culture incurred many to participate, at least to some degree, in racial and sexual violence. Therefore, in this chapter we see how healing rhetoric—rhetoric that rejects polarized caricature to embrace complexity—can help individuals and communities recover from the dehumanizing effects of war culture. As did the Nurses of Bataan, the Winter Soldiers challenge gender norms. In this particular context healing heroism works to expand masculinity to include feminine associated characteristics such as emotion and vulnerability. Through personal narrative and confession, the soldiers modeled an alternative masculinity that allows for the emotional complexity necessity to begin therapeutic processes of rehumanization. Additionally, the Winter Soldier Investigation countered melodramatic tendencies to evade critical reflection on collective life via individualistic narratives by, instead, demonstrating the systemic flaws exacerbating wartime violence.

## Atrocities at My Lai

On March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1968, a brigade of soldiers from Charlie Company entered the hamlet of My Lai in the volatile Quang Ngai Province in central Vietnam.<sup>6</sup> Based on intelligence indicating that members of the 48<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Vietcong who launched the Tet Offensive were currently located in the area, Charlie Company was given orders to destroy the village and kill every living thing they found.<sup>7</sup> They knew that neutral civilians lived in the area, but were informed that most were likely to be absent because residents habitually left the village for the nearby market every morning. They were not given instructions on how to handle civilian encounters. The intelligence that they followed was tragically incorrect. Because My Lai had recently become a target for gunfire, villagers believed “the safest time to undertake all activities was ... early in the morning, which is when farmers tended to their rice and vegetable plantations, and watered and spread fertilizer on their crops.”<sup>8</sup> Consequently, not only were there no, or at least few, Ho Chi Minh sympathizers in the area, but villagers had *not* gone to the market, so the area was bustling with women, old men, children, and babies.

Despite a lack of weapons and even though there were no major resistance attempts, the soldiers from the Charlie Company killed an estimated 500 innocent, unarmed residents and completely destroyed their village in a span of just four hours. One of the few survivors, Tran Van Duc, who was seven years old at the time, recounted the chaotic assault that began without warning:

At 11:00 am, helicopters started flying over My Lai, and some people in the neighborhood heard rockets being fired. My family and I learned that some residents had already been injured by the shots because the rockets were flying low and landed in rice paddies where people were working in the fields. I could hear people scream and cry in a high-pitched wailing sound.

Any civilians who were caught were marched into the center of the village. It resembled a makeshift prison yard full of men, women and children.<sup>9</sup>

The villagers were confused and terrified as they were rounded up by U.S. soldiers. Prior to that morning, most considered soldiers in the nearby military installation at My Khe their friends.<sup>10</sup> Many were killed en masse as soldiers ordered them into ditches and fired at them with automatic weapons. This was how Tran Van Duc's mother was killed; she was shot through the head as soldiers opened fire on the ditch in which his family was cowering. Other villagers were executed individually and many were tortured or mutilated, before being killed. Additionally, the soldiers poisoned wells, burned buildings, and killed livestock. They completely decimated the village, making it uninhabitable for the few, like Tran Van Duc, who survived.

Things were chaotic from the soldiers' perspectives as well. They had been informed that they would encounter Vietcong guerrilla fighters and were instructed by their commanding officer, Captain Ernest Medina, whom they all respected, to expect "a hell of a good fight."<sup>11</sup> They were keyed up with adrenaline as their helicopters arrived, loaded with ammunition. Led by Lieutenant William Calley, the men entered the village anticipating a dangerous battle. The hamlet of My Lai was dense, divided by homes, trees, and bushes. Consequently, the soldiers could only see what was occurring in the small section of the village they occupied.<sup>12</sup> They could hear gunfire from other sections of the village that, to them, signaled that fighting was taking place in the village between U.S. forces and the enemy. However, the gunfire they heard was coming solely from their fellow soldiers.

In the massacre's aftermath, many have wondered how the soldiers involved could have done such a thing. Indeed, there has been much scholarship regarding the

nature of the participants and their leaders and the cause of the atrocity. The majority of this research indicates that there was nothing unique or special about the participants of the massacre. Historians James S. Olson and Randy Roberts describe the soldiers of Charlie Company as very “average,” the typical company deployed in Vietnam, saying that there was “nothing unusual about them.”<sup>13</sup> It was a racially mixed group with a fairly even division of black and white soldiers.<sup>14</sup> Susan Brownmiller describes Charlie Company as a “grunt unit” of mostly willing soldiers who had volunteered for the draft.<sup>15</sup> Albert Pierce describes the company as “[y]oung, inexperienced troops,” high school graduates between the ages of 18 and 22.<sup>16</sup> Like many units in the military that promote a culture of brotherhood, the men of Charlie Company were closely knit. One of its members, Charles West, described his company’s spirit of camaraderie, “We cared about each and every individual and every individual’s problems. This is the way we were taught by Captain Medina to feel toward each other. We were like brothers.”<sup>17</sup> Many companies during the Vietnam War consisted of young, inexperienced groups who had bonded over their wartime toils.

Like most soldiers who were sent to Vietnam, the men of Charlie Company developed a polarized construction of the enemy under the guidance of their leaders; this construction mirrored melodramatic narratives. To U.S. soldiers, the Vietnamese people were like the images of Japanese soldiers in *So Proudly We Hail!* They were not complex individuals, but shadowy villains haunting the jungle. Soldiers, then, were taught by their commanding officers to trust one another because in battle it was “*you and your unit against them*—a faceless, generic enemy. In Vietnam, officers told their men that the enemy could be *any* Vietnamese [person].”<sup>18</sup> As such, when the soldiers of Charlie

Company began to see their “brothers” killed and wounded by snipers and mine traps, paranoia and hatred toward both Vietcong fighters and Vietnamese citizens pervaded the atmosphere. In this “you against them” climate, “[r]acial prejudices developed quickly. Soldiers referred to Vietnamese—friends and enemies alike—as ‘gooks,’ ‘slopes,’ ‘slant-eyes,’ or ‘dinks.’”<sup>19</sup> Such racist code words dehumanized the Vietnamese people, following the same “racial stereotypes that Europeans and Americans [have] applied to nonwhites for centuries.”<sup>20</sup> A private from Texas explained soldiers’ attitudes during the war, “The trouble is, no one sees the Vietnamese as people. They’re not people. Therefore, it doesn’t matter what you do to them.”<sup>21</sup> The training soldiers received in preparation for the warfront reinforced their descent into racist logic. As quoted by a soldier from California:

The G.I.s are supposed to win the people’s confidence, but they weren’t taught any of that stuff. I went through that training, and I learned how to take my weapon apart and put it back together again, and how to shoot, but *no one ever told me a thing about having to love people who look different from us and who’ve got an ideological orientation that’s about a hundred and eighty degrees different than us.*<sup>22</sup>

Without a guide for a more nuanced understanding of difference, U.S. soldiers developed racist dehumanized, attitudes toward the people of Vietnam.

Many who have studied the Vietnam War also assert that the massacre itself was not so unique. According to Heonik Kwon, Vietnamese researchers have documented multiple incidents in which U.S. forces massacred more than one hundred Vietnamese citizens from the same village in a short time span.<sup>23</sup> For example, on the same day of the My Lai Massacre, nearly 100 women and children were killed in the nearby village of Ha My, but this atrocity is rarely mentioned. The Winter Soldier Investigations also reveal other large-scale massacres. One took place in September of 1966 as an act of revenge for

a marine who had been killed by sniper fire. The marines, according to testimony, “destroyed two entire villages, wiping out everything living, the people (and that was men, women, their children), all their livestock, burning the huts, destroying the paddies, their gardens, their hedgerows, just wiped them out—erased them.”<sup>24</sup> While testimony and documentation of these additional atrocities exist, they are rarely recalled for critique within U.S. national discourse.

It is especially pertinent that the sexual violence associated with the massacre has been minimized in U.S. public address. Based on testimony given during the Peers Commission, investigators documented that twenty individuals had been raped at My Lai. Victims ranged from age ten to forty-five. As an additional level of cruelty, of these women and girls, nine were under the age of eighteen. Many of these assaults were gang rapes and many involved sexual mutilation and torture.<sup>25</sup> The rape count documented during the Peers Commission likely under-represents the actual amount of sexual violence at My Lai. According to Weaver, aside from the Peers Commission there has been relatively little research, scholarly or otherwise, into the sexual assault at My Lai making it difficult for an accurate count.<sup>26</sup> The destructive forces of war hinder documentation of such things. Only a handful of Vietnamese witnesses were left alive in the village of My Lai, rendering it highly likely that many sexual assaults went unreported. As Weaver states:

Many of the murdered women identified as rape victims were examined for sexual abuse *only* because they showed outward signs of being raped such as nudity and torn clothing. It is conceivable that some attackers did not leave outward evidence or that some women had opportunity to redress before they were killed and thus were never examined for proof of rape.<sup>27</sup>

In short, the investigation was only able to document those rapes that left obvious external evidence observed and noted by survivors.

The statistical decisions of the Peers Inquiry minimize sexual violence. These numbers do not account for attempted rape or sexual assault, despite the fact that several incidents were documented in detail during testimony. An account by a surviving villager named Khoa demonstrates the elision of sexual assault. Khoa witnessed the rape and murder of a thirteen-year-old girl — an act that *was* documented in the inquiry. However, the inquiry did not tally the rest of Khoa's testimony. According to Khoa, after soldiers had raped and murdered the young girl, they turned to his wife. However, before they were able to rape her, her son's body, riddled with bullets, fell upon her, and once she was covered with blood, the soldiers lost interest.<sup>28</sup> Nor does the investigation include an incident in which a soldier forced seven women to undress with the intent of raping all of them, but got frustrated when one of the women started panicking and, instead, ended up killing them all with a grenade launcher.<sup>29</sup> The omission of these sexual assaults and attempted rapes drastically reduced the official sexual violence tally given by the Peer's Investigation. As I reveal in the following section, public discourse distances sexual deviance from U.S. soldiers by further excluding rape from narratives about the massacre.

### ***Melodramatic (Re)Tellings of Heroism, Deviance and War***

Initial stories and public memory of the My Lai Massacre maintain notions of national virtue by simplifying the moral complexity of the massacre. These narratives may be read and interpreted through the melodramatic frame in a number of ways. First, public narratives about May Lai minimized both the massacre itself and, especially, the

associated sexual assault. This has occurred consistently, but in varying ways, from the initial secrecy in the aftermath of the killings to contemporary historical narratives of the massacre. These narratives allow melodramatic notions of the ideal hero to remain sacrosanct. Secondly, these narratives emphasize individualism in ways that distance rape from military culture. The stories that *do* explore the violent nature of the massacre present the individuals involved as deviant, outside the norm of military culture. The individualistic tone of such narratives allows us to overlook the major structural flaws of militarized culture in a way that maintains a heroic national identity.

The release of information about the massacre as a whole was slow, hindering investigation of the atrocity and, hence, prosecution. Due to concerted military efforts to conceal the tragically failed operation at My Lai, the atrocities that occurred remained secret at first. Sergeant Jay Roberts, a reporter who witnessed the killings at My Lai, wrote a press release stating that the infantrymen “raided a Viet Cong stronghold known as ‘Pinkville’ ... killing 128 enemy in a running battle.”<sup>30</sup> These numbers were echoed in the “Combat Action Report” written by Lieutenant Colonel Frank Barker. The analysis described the operation as “well planned, well executed and successful. Friendly casualties were light and the enemy suffered heavily.” While the report alluded that there were civilians in the area, there was no mention of their mass execution. Instead, the report stated that the “infantry unit on the ground and helicopters were able to assist civilians in leaving the area and in caring for the and/or evacuating the wounded.”<sup>31</sup> The first official military documentation of one of the largest massacres of the Vietnam War insinuated that the encounter was not a massacre at all. The brutality at My Lai was,

instead, depicted as a successful “battle” against an enemy, during which civilians were simultaneously protected.

The U.S. public had no knowledge of the atrocities at My Lai until March of the following year when discharged Army Specialist Ron Ridenhour heard of the incident by happenstance.<sup>32</sup> While patronizing a bar, Ridenhour began sharing war stories with a member of Charlie Company. The soldier, who had himself participated in the massacre, described it in detail. Ridenhour later felt compelled to alert the authorities. The letters Ridenhour sent to President Nixon and to several members of Congress provided impetus for a formal investigation of Charlie Company’s actions in My Lai. Even then, the incident received little public attention until November of 1969, when *Life* and *Time* magazines released a series of photographs taken of the massacre by Sergeant Ron Haeberle.<sup>33</sup> Despite the influx of media attention in the weeks that followed the release of the photos, the tragedy as a whole has since been “muted” in national public memory, according to historian Kendrick Oliver.<sup>34</sup>

The limited public discourse of the massacre has, perhaps, mirrored its investigation and prosecution. The Peers Commission, which was launched at Specialist Ridenhour’s behest, recommended that twenty-five men be charged for committing war crimes or related acts during the massacre. The military only court martialed four people. Of those four, only the commanding officer on the ground that day, Lieutenant William Calley, was found guilty.<sup>35</sup> Even though the initial order to attack the village came from much higher up the chain of command, it was believed that Lieutenant Calley was primarily responsible for the violence. He had been in the village, allegedly ordering his troops to kill civilians en masse. His court martial began on November 10 of 1970. By

March 29 of 1971 he had been sentenced to life in prison. In 1974, President Nixon granted Calley a limited Presidential Pardon. For the deaths of an estimated 500 civilians, one individual served three and a half years in prison.

The prosecution granted even less attention to the massacre's associated sexual violence. Although the Peers Inquiry described rape as part of the "pattern" of the massacre, only one soldier was charged with rape and one soldier was charged with "indecent assault."<sup>36</sup> Despite the investigation's ample documentation that rape occurred, "charges against the accused men were quietly dropped."<sup>37</sup> Not a single incident of sexual assault from the massacre was punished by the U.S. criminal justice system. This is consistent with the larger discursive pattern of overlooking the sexual violence that occurred during the massacre.

Although the soldiers who committed sexual violence escaped formal investigation, the sexual assaults at My Lai did appear in the initial news coverage of the massacre. This attention, however, was limited. Many soldiers were reluctant to speak of the event and many news outlets were similarly reluctant to publish details. Seymour Hersh, the journalist who broke the story in November 1969 and later won a Pulitzer Prize for his reporting of the massacre, both investigated and reported the rape that occurred.<sup>38</sup> Hersh's book on the massacre, based on interviews with members of Charlie Company and released in 1970, describes multiple instances of rape. In his description of the four-hour attack on the village, he reports that one villager witnessed a woman being raped after soldiers had killed her children and another witnessed the rape of a thirteen-year-old girl.<sup>39</sup> Later in the book Hersh reports that few of the soldiers he interviewed

talked openly about rape. He notes that most soldiers knew sexual violence was an “everyday affair” during the war but were reluctant to discuss such crimes.<sup>40</sup>

The tendency to conveniently overlook rape at My Lai is especially evident in the captioning and circulation of Sgt. Haeberle’s photographic documentation of the massacre. One of these images depicts women in a moment between an attempted rape and their murder.<sup>41</sup> The photograph shows four women with three children. An older woman in the front left displays an anguished expression as a teenage girl hugs her from behind, burying her face in the older woman’s shoulder for comfort. Another teenaged girl, in the right of the photo, is buttoning up her blouse. In his testimony during the official Peers Investigation, Haeberle explains that a group of soldiers were trying to “see what she was made of,” and that they “started stripping her, taking her top off.”<sup>42</sup> Jay Roberts, the journalist who accompanied Haeberle during the massacre, told Peers interviewers that soldiers called the girl “V.C. Boom Boom”—the colloquial term for a Vietcong prostitute during the Vietnam War.<sup>43</sup> Continuing, he explains that the older woman appears so anguished because she had been trying to prevent the soldiers from raping her daughter. Roberts testifies that she had been “biting and kicking and scratching and fighting off” the group of soldiers. Once the men realized that an Army photographer and journalist were present they ceased the assault. It was at this moment that Haeberle took the photograph. The decision to kill these individuals occurred only after the photograph was taken. According to Roberts’s testimony, “There was some discussion of what they were going to do with them, and somebody said, ‘Kill them.’” He recalled that he and Haeberle then turned and walked away from the scene, the sound of gunfire

echoing behind them. Because she had redressed before being killed, this girl was not included in the Peers Inquiry's sexual violence tally.

Although this encounter and the mass murder that followed were precipitated by attempted sexual assault, the photograph has increasingly been used as an icon for the mass killings at My Lai, not the associated sexual violence. Sergeant Haeberle sold his photographs first to *The Plain Dealer*, a newspaper in his hometown of Cleveland, Ohio, and then to *Life* magazine for \$50,000.<sup>44</sup> *The Plain Dealer* included truncated details of a sexual assault Haeberle witnessed.<sup>45</sup> The subsequent publication of the photographs and story by *Life* magazine also minimizes the sexual violence. It captions the photo on the first page with reference *only* to the killing, providing the details of the assault only at the end of the article.<sup>46</sup> Other news sources failed to include these details at all. *Time* magazine, as one example, made no mention of the associated sexual violence.<sup>47</sup>

Representations of the photograph in contemporary public memorials of the massacre also omit any reference to the attempted rape. An online PBS photo gallery of the tragedy captions the photo without even a hint of sexual violence. It reads: "According to the testimony, soldiers gathered these women and children together. After taking this photo Haeberle turned, and heard automatic fire. From the corner of his eye, he saw "all the bodies falling over" before walking away." In the spring of 2013, *LIFE Magazine* published a feature for the massacre's forty-fifth anniversary that included the photo. The *LIFE* caption simply states: "Vietnamese villagers, including children, huddle in terror moments before being killed by American troops at My Lai, Vietnam, March 16, 1968."<sup>48</sup> Additionally, two documentaries created for PBS, *Frontline's* 1989 "Remember My Lai," and *American Experience's* 2010 "My Lai" reference Haeberle's photo in

depth, but make no mention of the sexual violence. Given that the attempted assault was clearly documented by the Peers Investigation, which is available to the public, the omission of the details of this photograph is quite striking.

This pattern of minimization suggests a melodramatic frame. Melodramatic narratives position sexual violence as evidence of a villain's evil and position acts to destroy that villain to protect the feminine as evidence of a hero's moral superiority. Sexual violence perpetrated by a hero, or soldier, does not fit within this binary. Because melodrama positions rape exclusively in the realm of the enemy, to acknowledge that U.S. soldiers, presumed protectors, commit crimes of sexual violence could invite the nation to confront the reality that its acts might not always be virtuous. Discourse that follows a melodramatic frame invites a convenient denial of sexual assault committed by U.S. soldiers.

The omission of the sexual violence that occurred during the massacre has only increased in U.S. public memory over time. Although Seymour Hersh briefly discussed rape in his first reports on the massacre, his later accounts, memorializing the massacre, left the unseemly issue of sexual violence out of the story. As Anne Llewellyn Barstow notes, "when Hersh wrote his thirtieth-anniversary piece on My Lai in 1998, he did not mention the rapes. He recalled how the U.S. soldiers had systematically murdered all the women, men, and children that they could find and how some Americans had mistreated and killed prisoners and cut off the ears of corpses. But he did not remember the rapes."<sup>49</sup> Hersh's increasingly sanitized narratives of My Lai, narratives without reference to sexual assault, are not unique. This melodramatic forgetting of soldiers' rapes crimes at My Lai occurs repeatedly in historical accounts of the massacre. Contemporary

representations often render the military violence at My Lai as more isolated and less explicitly brutal than the representations of My Lai that circulated during the Vietnam War Era.

Following the melodramatic frame's public disassociation of rape and the hero, narratives of the massacre that have somehow percolated into public memory often exclude or abstract testimonies of the rapes and sexual mutilation that occurred. It seems that cultural norms enable soldiers to more readily admit to murder than to sexual assault. The aforementioned PBS documentaries minimize the sexual violence in general. The earlier *Frontline* documentary details the massacre through interviews with both U.S. soldiers and a few surviving villagers. While many shamed soldiers confessed participating in brutalities by describing their shooting of innocent villagers, children, and babies, none discussed participating in or witnessing sexual violence. For example, Varnado Simpson describes shooting half of a baby's face off with grisly detail during the massacre, but does not describe the rapes that he documented during the Peers Investigation.<sup>50</sup> While the *Frontline* documentary *did* include testimony of sexual assault, these testimonies were only expressed by the surviving villagers. These testimonies lose some of their power through the film's Orientalizing representations. As Edward Said observes, Western cultures render themselves superior to Eastern cultures by depicting them as feminine, passive, and primitive in discourse and representation.<sup>51</sup> The *Frontline* documentary follows this trend by including testimony exclusively from emotional female victims set against a rural backdrop that includes dirt pathways, meandering farm animals, and grass huts without electricity or running water. There exists no footage of urban areas or Vietnamese intellectuals and the villagers' allegations of sexual violence

are not corroborated by any outside experts. The more recent PBS documentary “American Experience: My Lai” minimizes the sexual violence from the massacre even further. The only reference to sexual violence occurs during an interview with Machine Gunner Greg Olsen, who describes witnessing a soldier forcing a girl at gunpoint to perform fellatio on him. This anecdote, however, occurred before the massacre and is, thus, distanced from the events at My Lai.

Notions of the virtuous hero seems so entrenched in U.S. discourse that even as narratives about Vietnam War atrocities appear in public memory, they often suggest melodramatic caricature. As was the case with the Nurses of Bataan during WWII, more similarities may be found between public discourse about My Lai and melodramatic Hollywood film than between public discourse and the material experiences of those entrenched in war. Although there exists no large-scale Hollywood dramatization of the My Lai massacre, the film *Casualties of War* features several themes related to the atrocity. *Casualties* is based on a true story, known as the Incident on Hill 192. The “incident” captured public attention and resulted in a formal investigation. Led by commanding officer, Sgt. David E. Gervase, whose leadership role in the crime parallels that of Lt. Calley, a five-man Army squad kidnapped, gang raped, and murdered Phan Thi Mao, a young Vietnamese woman. As with My Lai, the soldiers’ excessive violence during the Incident on Hill 192, was publicly attributed to the trauma of witnessing the killing of their fellow soldiers during combat. Additionally, both My Lai and the Incident offer an example of individual heroism. Private Robert M. Storeby attempted to prevent the rape and murder of the Vietnamese woman, which is similar to accounts of Warrant Officer Hugh Thompson, who made efforts to intervene in the My Lai Massacre. Though

they differ in terms of scale, My Lai and Hill 192 both function as public icons for atrocity in Vietnam. Thus, the cinematic narrative of Hill 192 in *Casualties* offers a relevant point of analysis for examining representations of the My Lai massacre. *Casualties* also provides access to one of the few examples in which Vietnam War-era sexual violence actually *is* portrayed in mainstream public discourse. As such, it serves as a proxy for sexual violence at My Lai as it follows the melodramatic tendency to construct heroism and villainy around a feminized victim.

This film, released in 1989 and directed by Brian De Palma, invites us to connect a lone hero's bravery with U.S. national and military identity. The film has been promoted as a "true story," much like the film *So Proudly We Hail!*, which I analyze in the second chapter.<sup>52</sup> Consequently, many in late 80s America believed it to be an authentic narrative of the horrors of war. In this film the character of Sergeant Tony Meserve, played by Sean Penn, is based on Sgt. Gervase of the Incident on Hill 192. Meserve orders his squad to kidnap a Vietnamese girl, Than Thi Oanh, to use as "portable R&R" on their next deployment. Throughout the film, he is depicted as the morally deviant initiator of the violence, just as Lt. Calley had been depicted in news and documentary accounts of My Lai. Of the four soldiers Meserve leads, only one, Max Eriksson, played by Michael J. Fox—a character based on Pfc. Storeby—resists the sergeant's orders. When his squad members kidnap the girl, Eriksson approaches the Sergeant and attempts to convince him to abandon his plans. Throughout the film, Eriksson continues to resist his leader's orders: he does not participate in the group rape of Oanh, he tries to help her escape, he refuses to shoot her when ordered, and he attempts to prevent his fellow squad members from killing her. Though his efforts fail to save the girl's life, he eventually achieves

heroic status by the end of the film. After struggling to convince the chain of command to investigate the crime and being discouraged from reporting the incident by his captain on the grounds that court martials are “notoriously lenient” anyway, Eriksson finally succeeds in having these men court martialed and given maximum sentences.

Throughout the film, Eriksson is discursively constructed as the hero with whom the audience should identify. According to Kathryn McMahon, Eriksson “represents the Army as sanity, rationality, and the rule of law. The audience is expected to identify with Eriksson as the embodiment of the unity of civil society.”<sup>53</sup> In contrast, his fellow squad members are caricatured as deviant individuals for public condemnation. Sergeant Meserve and Corporal Clarke are the hardened and heartless soldiers, PFC Herbert is the unintelligent grunt, and PFC Diaz is the cowardly rookie.

To keep these caricatured soldiers in the realm of deviance and separated from normal wartime conduct, the film effectively distances them from idealized conceptions of the Army. This film does so, in part, through the climactic rape scene. Eriksson, the character with whom we are invited to identify with the military ideal, refuses to participate and is subsequently ostracized by his commanding officer. The remaining members of squad follow Meserve’s orders, violently raping and beating the girl. After the men take their turns raping Oanh, the sergeant steps away from the hooch, or grass hut, to relieve himself upon a tree near the post where he had ordered Eriksson to keep watch. In this moment, the film effectively distances sexual violence from the military. From his spot by the tree Meserve sneers, “You probably like the Army don’t you Eriksson. I hate the Army.” To this Eriksson proudly responds, “This ain’t the Army. This ain’t the Army Sarge.” Through these words, Eriksson cleanses the Army of the

tarnish of rape. The unjust brutality inflicted upon Oanh and, by association, the unjust brutality inflicted upon *all* Vietnamese civilians during the war, is divided from the military and placed upon malicious rogue soldiers. According to McMahon, the film functions to reconstruct the integrity and moral purpose of the Vietnam War:

To re-imagine a good society whose military interventions in third world countries are motivated by a desire to help people, ideological strategies develop to dispel historical disruptions. One such strategy is the reconstruction of ideal heroes. These heroes become the positive subject of imaginary identification. This identification is about how we see ourselves. Identification with such a hero helps reconstruct the fantasy of a society that is not fragmented by internal divisions but in which social relations are complementary.<sup>54</sup>

By inviting us to reject these deviant men, and identify with Eriksson, a reconstruction of the ideal hero, and the “real” army, the film maintains the fantasy of U.S. virtue.

De Palma continues to repair heroic identity through the final court martial scene near the end of the film. As Eben J. Muse observes, the cynical captain who discouraged Eriksson from reporting the crime seems to have “been proved wrong: the court-martial was as severe as could have been hoped. The loose ends are tied up. Order has been reestablished, and it is safe to return to the World.”<sup>55</sup> In order to do so, however, the film must omit details from the case. The film leaves out the fact that, as with Lieutenant Calley of the My Lai massacre, the actual perpetrators involved in the Incident on Hill 192 had their sentences “greatly reduced.”<sup>56</sup> For example, PFC Steven Cabbot Thomas, who committed the actual stabbing and shooting of the Vietnamese woman the group kidnapped, was originally sentenced to life in prison. This sentence was drastically reduced to 8 years, making him eligible for parole after just four years. De Palma’s film—released more than a decade after Thomas was paroled—does not depict the reduced sentences. It concludes with the illusion that justice had been served.

Discourse that presents moral dilemmas through a melodramatic frame, leave citizens without rhetorical tools to address the complexities of war. Such narratives offer an alleviation of guilt rather than nuanced understanding. Drawing from Linda Williams, Lena Kohr explains, “melodrama can lull viewers into feeling that the suffering of the victims at the beginning of the film are resolved once the brave hero defeats the villains toward the film’s end.”<sup>57</sup> Several critics shrewdly observe that *Casualties* follows this pattern. Muse also points out that, like many Vietnam War films that ignore “discussion of the cause and consequences of the war” by placing it in a “metaphysical, rather than social or political context,” *Casualties* focuses on battles between good and evil at the expense of examining larger social issues.<sup>58</sup> This reflects the “individualistic focus” of melodrama that Anna Siomopoulos observes.<sup>59</sup> This tendency advances a discourse that inhibits the public from imagining structural transformations in state policy and social life. Bruce Spear similarly argues that DePalma’s film masks the historical problems of the Vietnam War era, flattening characters in ways that masked the moral complexities at hand.<sup>60</sup> The film simplifies war, allowing U.S. national identity to remain unmarred by crimes of sexual violence. The film shows us that although the reputation of the U.S. may be temporarily tarnished by a few deviant individuals, because they are eventually thwarted by heroes like Eriksson, American wars are ultimately virtuous.

Public narratives of the My Lai Massacre exhibit striking similarities to the narrative structure of *Casualties of War*. Indeed, as the My Lai Massacre was retold and simplified through public discourse it developed into a story about individual heroes and rogue villains. The shape of these narratives mimics the melodramatic frame. The individualistic emphasis and caricature, characteristic of melodrama, masked the

systemic problems that led to the massacre. Pro-war, or war-complacent discourse crafted narratives that affirmed myths of American exceptionalism by noting the virtuous bravery of certain members of Charlie Company and singling others out as villains. Even some anti-war discourse tended towards melodrama. Protests against the Vietnam War often used sexual assault as evidence of the evil nature of the conflict, while regrettably failing to confront the patriarchal assumptions that exacerbate sexual violence during wartime.

As in De Palma's film, which blames the kidnapping and rape of Oanh on Sgt. Meserve's failed leadership, initial media representation of the massacre emphasized Lt. Calley's leadership role at My Lai. As one example, Robert M. Smith's article in the *New York Times* opens by explaining that the army retained an individual on charges that he shot several Vietnamese civilians. Smith's article proceeded to identify this individual as Lt. Calley. While the article mentions the troops he led, the blame was associated with their lieutenant. "It is alleged," Smith writes, "that the *lieutenant advanced* with his troops into the village and, with premeditation, killed what [George W. Latimer, Calley's civilian attorney,] called 'a multiple number' of civilians with his rifle."<sup>61</sup> Although it is never said what "his troops" did with their rifles, the article does quote Latimer again mentioning that there was speculation that "half a dozen others may be involved," but no further details were given. The news media's emphasis on Calley's leadership minimized the responsibility of others involved. The detail that the attack came from much higher up the chain of command, that Calley was simply following orders, was left out of these accounts.

By placing blame on Lt. Calley and ignoring institutional influences on the perpetrator's actions, melodramatic accounts of My Lai leave the U.S. public unequipped to question systemic and cultural catalysts of the extreme violence. As in *Casualties of War*, those held accountable for the massacre were rhetorically quarantined from the rest of the military. Because Calley was the sole individual prosecuted, we are not invited to question the military as a whole. These narratives focus on the lone "bad seed" rather than a problematic culture. As Weaver critiques, "Convicting only one man of these crimes ... effectively denied the army's complicity in these crimes vis-à-vis its policy," which was sufficiently revealed during testimonies during the trial and investigation. If we examine what happened at My Lai with the nuance inhibited by a melodramatic frame, Calley's actions, as previously demonstrated, were indicative of the military culture during the Vietnam War.

Just as *Casualties* upheld Michael J. Fox's character, Eriksson, as a representative military hero, rhetoric about My Lai also emphasized individual heroism. Narratives that rendered Lt. Calley an isolated deviant were balanced with narratives that heralded the heroic actions of Warrant Officer Hugh C. Thompson, Jr. Like the filmic Eriksson, he is framed as characteristic of the U.S. military. Thompson was given a soldier's medal for disobeying his orders to rescue civilians by helicopter during the massacre. Upon witnessing the killings, he landed his helicopter between his fellow U.S. soldiers and a group of defenseless villagers. To "prevent their murder," he confronted the leader of the troops, an officer who outranked him, telling him that he "was prepared to open fire on those American troops should they fire upon the civilians."<sup>62</sup> After blatantly defying a superior officer, Thompson then coaxed villagers into his helicopter and transported them

to safety. He rescued an estimated sixteen unarmed civilians that day.<sup>63</sup> Later, “enraged by the morning’s events,” Thompson “filed an action report with the company commander, Major Fred Watke.”<sup>64</sup> Public narratives position Thompson as heroic in a number of ways. Survivors of the massacre have, rightfully, expressed gratitude for his actions.<sup>65</sup> He was featured by several media outlets for anniversaries and documentaries of the massacre.<sup>66</sup> Thompson’s efforts, however, are highly uncharacteristic of military behavior. Because military action is premised on the chain of command, soldiers are expected to follow orders without question. In most circumstances, a GI would be disciplined for challenging his superiors. Rather than upholding military rules, then, Thompson actually acted in ways contradictory to its structure of hierarchy. Discourses about the massacre are only able to emphasize U.S. virtue by latching onto what was *not* the norm during the Vietnam War.

Such simplistic, melodramatic representations of rape appear outside of mainstream political and popular discourse as well. Mirroring the larger use of rape as a trope for evil, aspects of anti-war rhetoric also engaged with sexual assault in ways that affirmed rather than challenged the melodramatic frame. These narratives employed sexual assault as a trope, posing rape to evince the evil nature of the U.S. government, the military, and the war itself. In these narratives, more emphasis is placed upon condemning the government than in finding justice for the victims. During a 1967 War Crimes Tribunal in Stockholm, American and North Vietnamese soldiers reported the sexual abuse of Vietnamese women by U.S. soldiers. These allegations were used by anti-war activists as evidence of the evil nature of the Vietnam War. However, according to Weaver, tribunal “questioners often (seemingly deliberately) sidestep investigations to

interrogate the brutal sexual treatment of women by American GIs,” thus, little information was solicited about the problem.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, according to Sara Evans, at a leftist conference in Czechoslovakia Vietnamese women petitioned to have a separate women’s meeting to address sexual assault, but the American women turned this down.<sup>68</sup> This presents a significant problem in narratives of rape as told through the melodramatic frame: rape in public discourse is used for political reasons. The needs of those assaulted are not met and systematic problems are not addressed. In the drive to construct a perfect enemy, the nuanced needs of those affected by sexual violence are ignored.

### **Healing Narratives: Presenting the Vulnerability of Patriarchy**

Amidst public discourse rendering Lieutenant Calley the lone culprit of the mass killing at My Lai, acts of dissent led by the Veteran’s anti-war movement both counter and begin to ameliorate the ill-effects of this melodramatically framed discourse. Testimonials of wartime atrocities divulged by Vietnam Veteran’s Against the War (VVAW) during the Winter Soldier Investigation invite an alternative perspective that models a healing heroism. As did the Nurses of Bataan, the Winter Soldiers invite us to undo racial and gender norms. These hearings question hyper-masculine caricatures crafted through melodramatic narratives by demonstrating the violent results of gender and racial hierarchies. They reveal an ironic contradiction of the melodramatic frame: in the process of dehumanizing the enemy, U.S. soldiers themselves are dehumanized into killing machines. In their critique of militarized masculinity, soldiers reveal the pervasiveness of sexual violence and point to its origins in war culture. The hearing addresses sexual violence in ways that complicate notions of heroism and villainy and counter melodramatic fixations on individualism. These testimonies frame My Lai as just

one example of widespread cultural practices by which vulnerable men desperately maintained a guise of masculinity.

The method of dissent exhibited during the hearing serves a therapeutic purpose to assuage the traumas incurred by a dehumanizing war culture. By acknowledging the systemic nature of military violence, instead of blaming misconduct on deviants, the winter soldiers developed their own nuanced understanding of the dynamics of war. Thus, by unsettling the moral certitude of heroic masculinity to illuminate the complexities and contradictions of the Vietnam War, the rhetoric of the Winter Soldier Investigation provides an example of productive transgressive rhetoric. Through my analysis, I demonstrate how healing heroism may help alleviate emotional and cultural wounds by rehumanizing those who participate in wartime violence.

Although veterans have voiced dissent throughout U.S. history, the VVAW marked the first instance of their organized resistance.<sup>69</sup> The group began in 1967, when six veterans conducted an anti-war march through Central Park in New York and grew slowly from there to become the main avenue for veterans' antiwar protests during the Vietnam Era.<sup>70</sup> Most members were "from the very heart of Middle America," most had *not* completed a college degree, and most were under the age of twenty-five.<sup>71</sup> Notably, many of these soldiers had willingly enlisted in the service and had previously held a "moderate conservative outlook," but were "radicalized by their experiences in Vietnam."<sup>72</sup> Although, as in most wars, the majority of those deployed were support personnel, more than half of VVAW members served in combat on the front lines in Vietnam. As a result, emotional and physical trauma motivated their resistance.<sup>73</sup> Several remarked that they were also motivated by "ideological trauma." Many asserted that

actual wartime conduct conflicted with the “ideals they had been taught to cherish and protect.” These veterans believed that through this war, the nation’s leaders had betrayed the U.S. public and the constitution.<sup>74</sup> Worsening these traumas, when they returned home, many were shunned by both the U.S. public and its leaders.<sup>75</sup> In response, they committed themselves to an agenda of nonviolent dissent.

Their position as veterans served to lend a certain authenticity and patriotism to their efforts. The Winter Soldier Investigation drew its name from Thomas Paine’s infamous writings in the pamphlet series, *The American Crisis*. Paine wrote, “These are the times that try men’s souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it *now*, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.”<sup>76</sup> By naming themselves “winter soldiers,” participants affirmed their patriotism, establishing themselves as individuals working to serve their country during tumultuous times. “Their weapon in their effort to end the war was their *voice*, and they felt that their voice would be unimpeachable because what they were saying was grounded in experience.”<sup>77</sup> The soldiers’ lived wartime experiences added credibility to their protests.

Although formally titled an “Investigation,” the event was not an official congressional inquiry like the Peers Commission. Rather, it was a hearing for the public organized to capture media attention. Over the span of three days—January 31 through February 2, 1971—there were a total of seventeen panels, allowing more than one hundred veterans from each branch of the armed forces to reflect upon the war and detail the acts of violence they had either committed or witnessed on the battlefield.<sup>78</sup> These panels were centered on personal testimony and grouped according to themes, such as

racism or press censorship, or by service divisions. The hearings took place in downtown Detroit at the Howard Johnson's New Center Motor Lodge. A wide variety of veterans were represented during the event. There were witnesses "from different periods of the war" and "from each branch of the armed services and virtually every combat unit."<sup>79</sup> As a result of advertisements, spokespersons such as Jane Fonda, and word-of-mouth, many veterans were drawn to attend the hearings, attracting thousands of new VVAW members.<sup>80</sup>

While veterans convened in direct response to U.S. government and news media framing of the My Lai Massacre, they also hoped to spread awareness of the ubiquitous occurrence of war crime in Vietnam. The WSI organizers asserted that the brutality at My Lai was not isolated. They believed that they "could not allow the people of this country to be deceived by such statements as 'They must have gone berserk' and 'My Lai was clearly an aberration on the part of a junior officer and the small group of men he commanded.'"<sup>81</sup> As organizer Joe Uργο explains in an interview about the hearings:

In the fall of 1969, there was a discussion in VVAW around this question of Calley and war crimes, and what we realized is that Calley was a scapegoat. What he did is what was done on an everyday basis all over Vietnam by every unit. We knew from our own experiences that this was just normal operating procedure.<sup>82</sup>

Part of the aim was to de-sensationalize My Lai, to demonstrate that the atrocity was consistent with military conduct in Vietnam. They sought to demonstrate that war crimes were connected to military policy. They also aimed to demonstrate that this "criminal" policy stemmed from dehumanization caused by a country "permeated with racism, obsessed with communism, and convinced beyond a shadow of doubt that we are good and most other countries are inherently evil."<sup>83</sup> In its own way, then, the hearing provided

a public space to critique the representations of gender and war that were framed through melodrama.

The Winter Soldier Investigation, however, has received criticism for its failure to attend to gender. Of the over one hundred panelists, only four women were included.<sup>84</sup> During the hearings, one audience member accused the panel's organizers of sexism.<sup>85</sup> Historians, such as Andrew Hunt, have observed that the hearings "failed to address crucial gender issues related to the Vietnam War."<sup>86</sup> Exemplary of the Vietnam Era anti-war movement as a whole, the exclusion of women from the WSI was, indeed, problematic. However, though scholars rightly critique the exclusion of women during the antiwar movement, this exclusion does *not* mean that the hearings did not address "crucial gender issues." The omission of women as participants is, certainly, masculinist, but to proclaim that the hearing failed to address issues of gender because it lacked female representation stems from a problematic tendency to render masculinity invisible by relegating "gender" to women. The hearing reveals important issues related to masculinity, and the instances where soldiers address sexual assault reveal the complicated dynamics of masculinity in relation to the feminine in the context of war. These testimonies substantiate Cynthia Enloe's argument that gendered notions of masculine aggression and feminine vulnerability are consciously constructed through and necessary for militarization.

Indeed, through their testimony, many soldiers revealed the degree to which notions of masculinity and femininity are constructed through military rhetoric. These soldiers' testimony depicted aggressive violence as a way to perform masculinity during the Vietnam War. As one example, Ronald Palosaari, Specialist Fourth Class in the 11<sup>th</sup>

Brigade of the Americal Division, described a situation in which the Civilian Independent Defense Group (CIDG) had “blown off the top of [an NVA soldier’s] head,” and then removed his ear. His testimony indicates that both the act itself and his reaction to it solidified a certain image of masculinity:

This feeling that we had that it was, you know, a rather humorous incident, or, you know, looked upon as being a good thing, and *we were really men because*, not that the CIDG had done this, but because, you know, it was an act that we would have liked to have perpetrated ourselves, I think. It's something, you know, it's, it's more or less condoned over there. And the feelings that you have are the policies of the military—that this is really, you know, *a thing to be manly about*.<sup>87</sup>

Winter Soldiers associate the performance of masculinity through callous destruction of the enemy with basic military training during the Vietnam War. “Aggression and the seeking of dominance,” according to R. Wayne Eisenhart, “were equated with masculinity.”<sup>88</sup> Drawing from his own combat training, Eisenhart continues, stating that aggressiveness was seen as “a means of protecting our lives as well as our masculine self-image.” Testimony after testimony tied masculine superiority to problematic behavior.

Military information officers, including photographers and journalists, demonstrated how the military exploits notions of feminine passivity. They reveal that the military has an active policy of gendering information circulating about the war. The military’s Public Information Office maintained a strategy of censorship that limited representations of the feminine in ways that heroicized U.S. soldiers. In his testimony, Lieutenant Larry Rottmann provides a list of several news topics censored by his commanding officers. This list includes “Female VC,” meaning that reports on Vietnamese women rebels were censored as part of official policy. Rottmann talks at length on this particular item of censorship explaining when stories of Vietcong women were allowed and when they were not: “If the story emphasized the *bravery or*

*determination* of women guerrillas, it was, *of course*, killed.”<sup>89</sup> Continuing he states, “If, on the other hand, it made a point of how VC were hurting so bad from U.S. presence that they were forced to recruit women (who supposedly were not as good fighters), the story would pass.” This passage is telling of military reliance upon feminine vulnerability. Women guerrilla fighters were excluded from war reporting when the story revealed their strength and bravery. And, further, the very presence of women waging combat was written as a weakness, not a strength. To corroborate his claim, Rottmann reads a portion of a story he submitted about a Vietcong woman who served as the “point man” to ambush U.S. soldiers. The GIs who found her dead body were surprised to find a woman. In the article, which ultimately was censored, he wrote that, “This clash was but one of several in recent weeks which involved female VC” and continues to describe another incident. He then provides a Xeroxed copy of sheet from the Infantry Information Office censoring and rejecting this article. Representation of the feminine as anything other than vulnerable, it appears, is deliberately prevented by the military, a strategy characteristic of the melodramatic frame.

Rottmann’s testimony indicates that military press news reports mimic the melodramatic notion that only enemy villains wage violence upon women. He explains that only in “isolated cases” were stories of the U.S. military killing women cleared for press release. “[A]ny such story draws a bad light on our forces,” he explained, “A girl killed in an ambush at night doesn’t help our image. Agreed she may be dangerous, but the press always doesn’t see it that way [*sic*].”<sup>90</sup> The military press regularly censored news stories in ways that distanced U.S. soldiers from villainous acts against women.

The WSI testimonies critique militarized masculinity and, in doing so, undermine the gender norms feminist scholars associate with rape culture, thus offering a powerful critique of wartime sexual violence. Soldiers exposed both the chaotic nature of wartime sexual assault as well as its sheer banality. Renee Heberle asserts the transgressive potential of such testimonies. She asserts that discourse about sexual violence frequently reinscribes masculinity's dominant position in society by positioning rape as an inevitable outcome of patriarchal power. In this essay, Heberle invites us to question what might happen if we reverse this status. Drawing from the work of Elaine Scarry, she asks:

What if... sexual violence were shown to be the sign of the instability of masculinity rather than the sign of the totality of patriarchal power? What if sexual violence were argued to signify the limits of patriarchy, rather than to represent its totalizing authority or power over women as a system?" In response to her own question she contends: "It would not make it any less severe. In fact, it would show just how much is invested by patriarchy in sustaining the 'reality' of sexual violence and constituting its devastating effects on women's bodies as real and thus impenetrable."<sup>91</sup>

Corroborating this alternative view of aggression, Heberle observes that violence often occurs more readily and more aggressively when the attacker feels a loss of control.<sup>92</sup> She posits that truly transgressive testimony and representations of sexual violence should, thus, reveal the "impotence of masculinist social power" rather than the "reality" of masculinist social power. The winter soldiers depict the impotence of militarized masculinity by emphasizing chaos to expose the sense of powerlessness that occurs on the warfront. In doing so, they position gendered violence as a desperate attempt to assert masculinity amidst this chaos and depict hypermasculinity as an ultimately disempowering constraint that dehumanizes the soldier and severely curtails his actions.

As such, these stories may be used to counter melodramatic notions of power, heroism, and gender.

Accounts of sexual violence during the Winter Soldier Investigation may, indeed, be read as exposing the powerlessness of the U.S. military in Vietnam. Many testimonies divulged that, like the My Lai Massacre, extreme violence often succeeded altercations that resulted in mass U.S. casualty. Through this association, veterans framed acts of sexual violence as desperate attempts to compensate for feelings of powerlessness. A sergeant in the 1<sup>st</sup> Air Cavalry Division, Michael Hunter, describes an atrocity committed by Bravo Company after the Tet Offensive, the same incident of mass U.S. casualty that drove the My Lai Massacre. Hunter explains that these soldiers entered a village in search of the enemy that had instigated the attacks. Instead, they found a civilian village. There, “the young women were separated from their children and the older women and the older men... They were told at gunpoint that if they did not submit to the sexual desires of any GI who was there guarding them, they would be shot for running away.”<sup>93</sup> Three women were then raped by U.S. soldiers. The connection Hunter makes between U.S. losses and GI rape crimes allows us to read soldiers’ violence as signifying the absence of control. Hunter and other Winter Soldiers positioned sexual violence in the Vietnam War as an attempt to reassert control after military loss.

The Winter Soldiers also depicted general attacks against the feminine as a method to assert power and masculinity in the face of uncertainty. “It has been argued by many,” Heberle argues, “that sexual violence is the means by which men can control the sexual ‘otherness’ and potentially threatening powers of women; that men live in fear of the feminine principle as something that undermines their sense of place in the world and

use sexual violence to undermine the power of the feminine.”<sup>94</sup> Soldiers’ testimonies frame gendered violence in ways that corroborates this point. In the words of a former marine who spoke at the hearing

it seems to me that the philosophy over there is like somehow or another *we’re more afraid of females* than we are of males, because, I don’t know why, but the female was always like *you never knew where you stood*, so you went overboard in your job with her in all your daily actions. You doubled whatever you would do for a male. Because we always heard these stories that, like, the fiercest fighters were the females over there. You know, *we didn’t want to be embarrassed by getting our asses kicked by a bunch of females*.<sup>95</sup>

He explains that aggression toward women increased because U.S. soldiers in the Vietnam War experienced uncertainty, never knowing where they stood. This testimony presents violence against the feminine as a method to maintain a sense of control, to maintain a sense of the masculine superiority entitled to them through patriarchal notions of gender. Yet it also reveals the fragility of patriarchy: if women *were* inherently weaker than men, these soldiers would have no reason to fear getting their “asses kicked by a bunch of females.” As another soldier states “I felt like I was a god. I could take a life, I could screw a woman.... You had the power to rape a woman and nobody could say nothing to you.”<sup>96</sup> Through these descriptions, veterans expose the rhetorical role violence against women plays in producing militarized masculinity to reveal the precariousness of masculine power. The extreme measures taken to maintain the illusion of masculine dominance indicates the fragile precipice upon which patriarchy stands.

WSI testimonies countered heroic, masculine individualism by demonstrating numerous ways by which military leaders failed to protect the innocent and vulnerable during the Vietnam War. Soldiers depict the hierarchical structure of the military as fragile, easily unsettled in the face of chaos. Sergeant Mike McCusker, an Infantry

Combat Correspondent for the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, reveals military leadership's failure to *prevent* sexual violence. The information officer testified that a rifle squad of nine men followed "what they called a Viet Cong whore" into a village.<sup>97</sup> Instead of capturing her, he explains, "they raped her—every man raped her. ... and then, the last man to make love to her, shot her in the head." The official squad leader, a sergeant, who McCusker describes as "useless" abstained from the raid because it was "against his morals." However, instead of stopping his squad from committing the offense, "because they wouldn't listen to him anyway, the sergeant went into another side of the village and just sat and stared bleakly at the ground, feeling sorry for himself." Melodramatic notions of heroism, built upon ideals of independence, hierarchical leadership, and virtue seemed illusory in such accounts.

Dissenting veterans also positioned rape as characteristic of military policy during the Vietnam War. While some leaders were forced to condone sexual violence as evinced in the paragraph above, others actively promoted it— much like Sargent Tony Meserve in *Casulties of War*. In contrast to the film, which asserted that the actions of Sargent Meserve "ain't the army," winter soldier narratives reveal that sexual violence was not anomalous among military leaders. WSI participants framed the U.S. military as flawed and absent of inherent virtue, as demonstrated by the testimony of Specialist Fourth Class Michael Farrell of the Ninth Infantry Division of the Army. Farrell stated: "Our platoon sergeant told us... 'If there's a woman in a hootch, [*sic*] lift up her dress, you know, and tell by her sex; if it's a male, kill him; and if it's a female, rape her.'"<sup>98</sup> He connected his sergeant's attitude to the "brutalizing effect that war has on people and that the Army helps to foster." The testimonies of Specialist Fourth Class Joe Galbally and Sergeant Ed

Murphy of the Americal Division both demonstrate how melodramatic military culture affected those who might be otherwise inclined to actively prohibit sexual abuse.

Galbally spoke of a patrol of eight soldiers from his company who entered a village and found a young girl hidden in a bomb shelter. “She was taken out,” he explained, “raped by six or seven people in front of her family in front of us, and the villagers [*sic*].”<sup>99</sup>

Murphy, his fellow soldier, corroborated the testimony and illuminated how authorities viewed this practice. Their platoon leader was led by a minister who, according to Murphy, initially was a “high-character man.” The minister, Murphy explains, eventually began “condoning everything that was going on *because it was a part of policy*. Nobody told you that it’s wrong. This hell changed him around. And he would condone rapes. Not that he would do them, but he would just turn his head to them because who was he in a mass military policy.”<sup>100</sup> Together, the testimony of Murphy and Galbally frame rape as characteristic of war culture.

Accounts that focused on the sheer “ordinariness” of gendered violence, provided an effective antidote to melodrama by highlighting the institutional nature of sexual violence, rather than projecting it onto deviant villains. Rachel Hall argues that anti-rape activism is most effective when it focuses upon sexual violence as a *cultural practice*, as these testimonies do.<sup>101</sup> By revealing the sheer banality of sexual violence committed by American GIs in Vietnam, Winter Soldiers modeled a highly effective critique of sexual abuse in military culture. According to Weaver, the hearings revealed that “outright rapes occurred so frequently that when the veterans testified to them, they sounded almost mundane.”<sup>102</sup> For example, Joe Galbally explained that, due to the normalcy of sexual abuse, Vietnamese villagers were “aware of what American soldiers do to them so

naturally they tried to hide the young girls.”<sup>103</sup> It appears that during the Vietnam War, the Vietnamese people associated sexual violence with U.S. soldiers as readily as Americans had associated sexual violence with Japanese soldiers after the Rape of Nanking. Sergeant Jamie Henry, of the Fourth Infantry Division, recounted two of his fellow troops “leading a young girl, approximately 19 years old, very pretty, out of a hootch [*sic*]. She had no clothes on so I assumed she had been raped, which was pretty SOP.”<sup>104</sup> His labeling of rape with military jargon “SOP,” or standard operating procedure, exposed the normalcy of wartime rape. The testimony of Corporal Christopher Simpson from the 11<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment exemplified this as well. When an audience member inquired about the prevalence of sexual assault, Simpson responded “Me myself, I think it’s pretty usual over there.”<sup>105</sup> Painting a similar portrait, information officer Mike McCusker began his testimony by stating that as an information officer, he “went out with damned near every Marine outfit in all of I Corps.”<sup>106</sup> Based on these experiences, he stated, “I discovered that no one unit was any worse than another. That this was standard procedure. *That it was almost like watching the same filmstrip continually, time after time after time. Within every unit there was the same prejudice; there was the same bigotry toward Vietnamese.*” Repeated accounts of sexual violence shared during the hearings made it impossible to distance war crimes from the military. In contrast to the melodramatic frame, which pins evil to an identifiable person or nation, these testimonies connect wartime sexual assault to banal systemic failures.

As indicated by McCusker’s above commentary on the soldiers’ prejudice and bigotry toward the Vietnamese people, these testimonies highlight the link between racism and sexual violence. One veteran on the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division panel further

connects racist objectification to gendered violence. He explains: “I think that in regards to women in Vietnam, first of all, you get this feeling sometimes when you’re over there that you don’t even think of their sex. This is really disgusting. *You don’t even think of them as human beings, they’re ‘gooks.’* And they’re objects; they’re not human.” Such testimony suggests that the dehumanization that results from polarized narratives had a violently adverse affect upon the lives of Vietnamese women.

Through their testimonies, soldiers revealed that the dehumanization and the inflated sense of power and virtue fostered by U.S. militarization, together, resulted in a violent culture. One participant indicated that some soldiers felt entitled to Vietnamese women’s bodies: “There are women available. Those women are of *another culture, another color, another society*. You don’t want a prostitute. *You’ve got an M-16. What do you need to pay for a lady for?* You go down to the village and you take what you want.”<sup>107</sup> The Otherness of Vietnamese women, he posited, enabled soldiers to justify sexual assault. In this excerpt, he also connected the possession of weapons to abusive behavior. The sense of virtue inherent in melodramatic heroism amplified the problem of sexual violence. Weaver documents this in the specific context of the Vietnam War, observing that many soldiers believed that “Vietnamese women ought to ‘lay a little leg’ on American GIs in exchange for their trouble.” She argues that this attitude “points to another cause of the widespread rape during the war: a sense of sexual entitlement linked to soldiers’ belief in American exceptionalism—the *belief that America’s wars are just, heroic*, and desired by the people ‘for whom’ they are fought.”<sup>108</sup> These observations invite the realization that violence occurs more readily when a sense of morality and virtue stem from one’s subject position rather than one’s behavior.

Yet, despite critique of the sexualized violence that occurred in Vietnam, the WSI did *not* enact melodrama in the reverse. In her exploration of rhetoric that counters the dehumanizing effects of war, Wilz posits that while it is important to challenge imaginings of the “heroic warrior,” it is also important to challenge the idea that soldiers are simply “mindless killers” as well and reveal the more “abstract” reality of the battlefield.<sup>109</sup> The winter soldiers modeled this as they confessed their participation in, witnessing of, or complacency in acts of violence, through testimonies that built a nuanced portrait of the Vietnam War. While there were stories of brutality against women, the hearings indicated that not all soldiers participated in sexual violence. For example, a panelist on the Prisoner of War panel noted that in his experience with interrogating women, there was no “sensationalism.” He stated that women “weren’t taken advantage of in any way” by the men in his platoon.<sup>110</sup> The Winter Soldier testimonies demonstrate that while the melodramatic caricature of the “hero” was gravely inadequate for U.S. troops in Vietnam, neither did the caricature of the “villain,” or “mindless killer,” capture the range of experiences that occurred during the war.

The Winter Soldier Investigation, indeed, provides an effective counter to melodramatically framed narratives by demonstrating the complexity of material experiences of Vietnam. It depicts acts of violence against an enemy not as powerful and righteous, but as chaotic. The atrocities that happened in Vietnam are presented as an indication that the war was a flawed and flailing endeavor. Soldiers revealed both the pervasiveness of chaotic sexual violence during the conflict and the cultural factors that motivated some men to rape and abuse Vietnamese women. In doing so, they counter the melodramatic frame’s individualistic tendency to isolate absolute villains as the culprit of

such crimes. In short, the Winter Soldiers counter the moral certitude of melodrama by unmasking the brutalities and criminal behaviors of their fellow GIs.

As theories of cultural criticism from a mythic perspective hold, it is not enough for cultural criticism to deconstruct myth or indoctrination. Because myths are central to a society, their deconstruction can create an agonizing, disorienting void. As such, plausible alternative understanding must be established to fill said void and create a path for productive social change. Melodramatic narratives remain popular because their simplicity comforts cultures at war. To fill this void, we must model counter-rhetoric for understanding moral dilemma. The Winter Soldier Investigation did so by modeling a form of public dissent that defied caricature in ways similar to the healing heroism performed by the Nurses of Bataan. The WWII nurses, by the very nature of their work, were not trained to eliminate the enemy. While they had likely been exposed to the processes of dehumanization of the other, they had not been dehumanized themselves. Vietnam War Era soldiers, in contrast, *had* been dehumanized into mindless killing machines. As Wilz states, “military thus reduces the soldier to a bestial, savage level incapable of thought and taught to kill on command.” Therefore, the Winter Soldiers show us how healing heroism may operate to rehumanize those who have been deeply entrenched in a culture of wartime violence.

The collective testimonies of the winter soldiers reveal that a healing heroism may be enacted in resistance performed through self reflection. This is done, in part, through rhetoric of rehumanization. Through her analysis of the film, *Jarhead*, Wilz notes the importance of countering discourses of militarized masculinity with rehumanizing rhetoric and sets forth characteristics of this recuperative process. Rhetoric of

rehumanization, according to Wilz, allows us to see beyond caricatures of the heroic soldier. Such rhetoric includes models of soldiers who fight against the dehumanizing treatment they have received in the military, highlighting the fact that soldiers, and those who witness such performances, “still retain the ability to think for themselves even after experiencing severe training efforts to the contrary.”<sup>111</sup> By defying moral binaries and acknowledging the complexity and uncertainty of war the hearings allowed veterans to counter caricature and, thus, to begin recovering from their wartime traumas. Like the Nurses of Bataan, the Winter Soldiers defy gender binaries as well. In this particular context, they challenge traditional notions of masculinity. When men associated with a militarized masculinity that entails dominance, rationality, and individualism profess their vulnerability and explore their emotions—concepts traditionally associated with femininity—they trouble the melodramatic gender hierarchy.

An important step in the rehumanization of soldiers entails them recognizing the role of military indoctrination in patterning their thought and action during war. In reflecting on the WSI, many soldiers report that they were so indoctrinated with military culture that expressing emotion during their testimonies was quite difficult. They frame their own actions and thoughts as constrained by processes of military institutionalization. Scott Moore’s testimony recorded after the hearings for the *Winter Soldier* documentary reveals that notions of soldiering and masculinity constricted his participation in the hearings:

Scott Moore: ... When I was on the stage there I was really uptight, I was trying to put myself in the mood where I would be very, very cold... because I realized I would probably start crying.

Interviewer: Why were you afraid to start crying?

Scott Moore: *Because I'm still imbued with all that shit that was said. It hasn't gotten all out of my system.* (laughs) That's right, it really hasn't, it takes a lot of time. It's just a matter of dealing with it in terms of, realizing it. It won't come out at once. It comes gradually. Hopefully someday it will be gone. But, it's still there. And I accept it. And I realize it I think especially this weekend. You know, I saw a lot of guys who were in the same bag, man, and that's important.... It'll come, it's just a matter of realizing. And, that you have to realize fully what in fact you've been taught.<sup>112</sup>

Moore has been so “imbued” with military culture that he had difficulty expressing his own emotions. Testimony from Scott Camile recorded after the hearings also speaks to the dehumanizing effects of the military's separation of masculinity and emotion. He expresses feelings of powerlessness in overcoming the limitations of such a culture:

Scott Camile: “Sometimes when I talk about [the Vietnam War atrocities], I laugh all the time, you know because *I don't want people to think I'm not a man in this kind of the way I've been brought up again that you're supposed to be a man, and men are hard and they don't have feelings and stuff.*”

Interviewer: Has your concept of what a man is changed?

Scott Camile: Yes, I don't any more. But even though I don't. Like, I had some sensitivity courses, and it got where you know, sometimes guys would cry, and sometimes I felt like crying. Like we'd really see a sensitive film and get into something really deep, but I'd start to and I'd think about something else. *Like even though I know I shouldn't think of a man the way it is, I just can't change. I try to change, but I still try to be brave and things like that, and hard and emotionless.*<sup>113</sup>

Camile blames the distinct opposition he perceived between feelings and masculinity upon processes of militarization. Even as Camile critiques this concept of manhood he confesses that he still feels inhibited from expressing emotion. The difficulty these men had in experiencing vulnerability demonstrates the tenacious and disempowering effects of melodramatic notions of masculinity.

Statements made by soldiers attest to the healing properties of public dissent enacted through self-reflection. In historian Richard Stacewicz's oral history of the

VVAW, he notes that, “some of the veterans who spoke out during these hearings experienced flashbacks and other trauma as a result of their testimony. They were willing to risk this because they felt a strong need to reveal the truth.”<sup>114</sup> And, indeed, many participants remarked on the range of emotions experienced during the hearings. As explained in the book published by VVAW about the event, many soldiers participated in the hearings because they “wanted to purge the guilt which grew out of an inability to find any moral reason for the brutality, the waste, the destruction, which they had seen.”<sup>115</sup> By bringing experiences that had been suppressed into the open, soldiers seemed to establish a therapeutic process to address this guilt. Hunt describes it as “a therapeutic event” where soldiers told difficult stories and grappled with PTSD. He details the reactions of several participants:

One former army sergeant, who was ‘shaking and half in tears,’ later recalled that it was ‘the first time I ever got up in front of a group of people and told them anything about myself.’ Other witnesses confronted their past for the first time in Detroit. ‘I came here for a lot of reasons,’ one explained. ‘I have bad dreams. I have nightmares. I have guilt feelings.’ William Bezanson traveled to Detroit to present his testimony and ‘find out how many of my brothers felt the same way I did.’<sup>116</sup>

Such revelations demonstrate the therapeutic potential of this act of dissent. One participant, Scott Camile, continued the healing dialogue that began during the Winter Soldier Investigation at various speaking engagements beyond those sponsored by VVAW. As he stated in an interview, he did so because when he spoke about it, “it [made him] feel better.”<sup>117</sup> And these are just a fraction of the statements made by participants commenting on the healing ends of the public hearing.

The *Winter Soldier* documentary created by the VVAW includes several interviews conducted after the hearings. Many indicate that in resisting military

indoctrination, the winter soldiers began processes of healing. Through self-reflection, the soldiers begin thinking for themselves which, according to Wilz, plays an important role in rhetoric of rehumanization. Commentary by Mark Lenix demonstrates that, for him, recognizing military indoctrination offered a path toward healing:

We were in the army, we were the army. That's the whole thing. And that's what's so scary... We were definitely soldiers to the end. That's what's so strange about it. That the indoctrination, the training and things you have make you that way. And then when you see that you were that way, that you were living a lie, you weren't living your life, you were living... it's almost like a road map that someone had laid out in front of you... Then all of the sudden it's wrong. Once you realize it's wrong, you've got it licked. *But the point is you have to bring it out, you have to confront it openly.*<sup>118</sup>

As Lenix indicates, once he realized that his understanding of war was created through military instruction; he could recognize that it was wrong. It allowed him to realize that military culture did not provide the best, or only orientation to the world. Once this realization occurred, according to Lenix, "you've got it licked," the healing process could begin. The brutal complexities of their wartime experiences could be brought into the open, once the ideologies that prevented these experiences from being acknowledged were exposed.

While the Winter Soldier Investigation provided inspiration for the veterans' anti-war movement and provided a space for soldiers to begin to heal from trauma, public discourse still exhibited a limited melodramatic frame. Political and media reactions to the hearings indicate our cultural discomfort in witnessing associations between vulnerability and masculinity, especially in the context of war. The press "basically ignored" the WSI and the Nixon administration actively sought to discredit the Veterans' anti-war resistance as a whole. Instead of reporting on the growing veterans' anti-war movement, the press continued to report on the My Lai Massacre in melodramatic form.

While the winter soldier hearings were being held, “news of the war crimes trial of Lieutenant William Calley,” the scapegoat of the massacre, “was being broadcast over network television almost every night.”<sup>119</sup> These reactions strongly evince national desires to cling to melodramatic narratives in times of chaos. Jerry Lembecke characterizes the negative response to the Winter Soldier Investigations as resulting from the fact that the picture it painted of U.S. soldiers “was not pretty. These were not embraceable ‘good veterans.’”<sup>120</sup> He comments that this image began to close the gap between “‘us,’ the good guys, and ‘them,’ the evil-incarnate Asian others.” Further compounding this affect, he continues, is the fact that the investigations “also gave Americans a troubling glimpse of the enemy—troubling because that glimpse did not confirm the bad-guy image of the Vietnamese anymore than the veterans’ testimony confirmed the good-guy image of U.S. soldiers.” In short, The Winter Soldier Investigations were ignored because they could not be contained within a melodramatic frame. The VVAW protests at large troubled U.S. moral certitude. Unsurprisingly then, when the government began to discredit the dissenting veterans by claiming that they had not actually served in Vietnam, the news media simply followed suit, favoring more comfortable stories that discredited the horrors recounted during the investigations.

Further indicating the ways by which vulnerability is systematically separated from masculinity, public narratives sought to discredit the Winter Soldiers by questioning their manhood. Slandering the soldiers as “unmanly homosexuals,” Vice President Agnew said that VVAW members who attended the famed protest in Washington where they discarded their combat medals:

didn’t resemble the majority of veterans that you and I have known and seen. I don’t know how to describe them, but I heard one of them say to the other: ‘If

you're captured by the enemy, give them only your name, age, and the telephone number of your hairdresser.'<sup>121</sup>

Agnew's comment is indicative of the general public's difficulty in accepting performances of masculinity that include emotion. Such public resistance to the performance of vulnerable masculinity indicates that the Winter Soldiers, indeed, were challenging deeply held cultural norms. As such, this oft-ignored example of public discourse warrants rhetorical attention as a model of important counter-discourse to mainstream melodramatic narratives.

## **Conclusion**

The My Lai Massacre, and especially the associated sexual assault that occurred, makes it readily apparent that our supposed "villains" may be unjustly victimized by heroes, and that our "heroes" may perform in ways we more readily associate with villains. In short, it unsettles melodramatic caricatures of heroism. The public minimization of the sexual assault that transpired during the massacre, as well as the limited exposure of the event as a whole, occurs because the atrocities at My Lai blur the boundaries between heroes and villains. By silencing the sexual assault perpetrated during the My Lai massacre, public narratives allow us to maintain the comforting illusion that our soldiers are inherently virtuous. Many see the soldiers that participated in the massacre as merely doing what they were told, and that the killings were inevitable. As a resident from one of the massacre participant's hometown told the *New York Times*, "Thing like that happen in war. They always have and they always will. But only just recently have people started telling the press about it." He continues, stating, "It's bad enough to have to kill people without telling everybody about it... This sort of thing should be kept classified."<sup>122</sup> Rape, however, makes such entitled impunity more

difficult. It disrupts the establishment of U.S. identity as “righteous” because it falls outside of the imagined norms for wartime conduct. Thus, when public representations of My Lai rearrange and omit details of sexual violence, they confirm a morally virtuous U.S. identity. This is not to imply that the resulting formation of American public memory about the Vietnam War has been entirely straightforward, or that Vietnam veterans have universally been deemed heroic in contemporary U.S. discourse. Rather, the point is that even in a climate in which the U.S. has confronted its ambiguous and troubled legacy in Vietnam, frank public recognition of such sexual violence, even in the face of fully conclusive evidence, is still, it seems, a step too far.

Critical discussion of sexual violence and its connection to cultural power structures may help initiate much needed processes of healing social ills. Veteran testimony at the Winter Soldier Investigation offers an incredibly important model of dissent. Soldiers held frank, self-reflexive discussions of the violent war crimes that occurred in Vietnam. They also broke military indoctrination through independent, autonomous thought. They posited theories about the destructive violence, connecting hyper-aggression to gendered and racial ideologies of the U.S. military. They demonstrate that the melodramatic heroism of the military has the tendency toward objectification of people—both the perpetrators and victims of violence, which results in cruelty. Mark Lenix’s comments from the Winter Soldier documentary demonstrates this:

When I first entered the service, I thought, that sounds like a good idea, *I will be a hero. And just think of this I’ll have a rock hard body and golly.* Because when I went into the service that’s where my head was at. I was the average middle class American. It was just the thing to do. *And they dehumanize you so much, that the enemy is no longer a human being...* He just becomes the enemy. And therefore, when you’re confronted with this, all you think of it’s just like another target. And they’ve trained you to shoot targets. So, when it comes right down to it, it’s not a man, it’s a target. When you start to realize it. My god! Look at this! This can’t be

me, man, after all this time I know that I shouldn't be doing this. But well, here I am. I had been trying to justify them from this period of time, because I knew it wasn't right, but I had to justify it some way, because I was doing it. Then all of the sudden I realized that no, there is no justification man. *What I have done is wrong. I have to face it, I have to admit that.*<sup>123</sup>

If heroism is signified by enemy conquest, then objectification of the enemy must occur so that individuals may engage in the violence necessary to do so. This process of dehumanization is coupled with problematic performances of masculinity. Lenix also thought that having a "rock hard body," that is an impermeable body capable of physically dominating others, fit with this image of heroism. Rocks are inanimate objects, and so Lenix's metaphor appropriately reflects the dehumanizing processes of militarized masculinity. Scott Camile's comments also confirm the link between dehumanization, militarism, and masculinity. He says that one of the main reasons that he joined the military was because, "I wanted to see for myself whether I was really a man or not. And I figured that was how I could find out. ... I wanted to see what kind of a person I really was. Was I really brave, was I a chicken?" The investigations thus demonstrate the connection between violence and militarized masculinity. Importantly, they do so without glorifying violence by connecting it to power. The testimony associates wartime brutality with a sense of powerlessness and chaos. Extreme violence appears to have occurred because men, under the false expectation that they were righteous heroes, were actually just floundering chaotically in the jungle. Because they were so imbued with hegemonic masculinity, they were incapable of performing otherwise. The soldiers were essentially rendered powerless by military ideology.

However pervasive the cult of militarized masculinity may be, the Winter Soldier Investigation also demonstrates that critical engagement with its norms does enable

change. Through reflexive rhetoric that mirrored the healing heroism of the Nurses of Bataan, these soldiers both reveal the dehumanizing melodrama has on its supposed heroes and practice alternative masculinities. By exploring the complexities of their wartime experiences, by openly engaging with the brutality and resulting cognitive dissonance they experienced as a result of the war, by performing in ways traditionally associated with femininity, that is sharing emotions through personal testimony, they effectively counter melodramatic narratives. And, perhaps most importantly, they began the process of healing from the traumas of war. This two-day public hearing demonstrates the importance of engaging with our “evils” as cultural, as opposed to projecting them onto individuals.

My analysis throughout this chapter, however, is not meant to be a totalizing one. Certainly not *all* soldiers embody melodramatic notions of heroism. Indeed, the Winter Soldier Hearing itself reveals this through testimony from soldiers who did not feel comfortable with the brutality they witnessed, and through stories of individuals who abstained from sexual and other excessive violence. However, the type of heroic masculinity in which soldiers prove their manhood and valor by attacking the enemy is the idealized form of masculinity in the military. Thus, with very rare exceptions of dissenters like Warrant Officer Hugh Thompson, most of those who did not participate in cruelty to Vietnamese civilians were complacent with their fellow soldiers performances of melodramatic heroism. And most soldiers, as I demonstrate in the following chapter, have remained complacent with these imaginings of masculinity today.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites “Public Identity and Collective Memory in US Iconic Photography: The Image of ‘Accidental Napalm,’” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 20 (2003): 41.

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- <sup>2</sup> Hariman and Lucaites “Public Identity and Collective Memory,” 41.
- <sup>3</sup> Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 44.
- <sup>4</sup> Yiannis Mylonas, “Discourses of Counter-Islamic-Threat Mobilization in Post 9/11 Documentaries,” *Journal of Language and Politics* 11 (2012): 412, 415–16.
- <sup>5</sup> Gina Marie Weaver, *Ideologies of Forgetting: Rape in the Vietnam War* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 74.
- <sup>6</sup> Truda Gray & Brian Martin, “My Lai: The Struggle Over Outrage” *Peace and Change* 33 (2008): 90; & Kendrick Oliver, “Coming to Terms with the Past: My Lai,” *History Today* 56 (2006).
- <sup>7</sup> Tet is the Vietnamese lunar New Year celebration. To honor the holiday, both sides had agreed to a ceasefire, but Vietcong and North Vietnamese guerrilla fighters led a surprise attack against South Vietnam. Afterwards, the 48th Battalion retreated to “Pinkville,” the area that included My Lai. James S. Olson and Randy Roberts, *My Lai: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston, MA: Bedford Books, 1998).
- <sup>8</sup> Tran Van Duc, “The Diaries of My Lai Orphan Tran Van Duc,” *Salem News* trans. by David Calleja September 7, 2010, <http://www.salem-news.com/articles/november222010/tran-duc-tk.php> (retrieved February 8, 2014).
- <sup>9</sup> Duc, “Diaries of My Lai.”
- <sup>10</sup> Heonik Kwon, *After the Massacre: Commemoration and Consolation in Ha My and My Lai* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2006), 30.
- <sup>11</sup> Olson and Roberts, *My Lai*, 18.
- <sup>12</sup> Olson and Roberts, *My Lai*, 21.
- <sup>13</sup> Olson and Roberts, *My Lai*, 10.
- <sup>14</sup> Olson and Roberts, *My Lai*, 10 and Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1975), 103.
- <sup>15</sup> Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, 103.
- <sup>16</sup> Dr. Albert C. Pierce, “Moral Courage in Combat: The My Lai Story,” lecture and video presentation from the Center for the Study of Professional Military Ethics.
- <sup>17</sup> Olson and Roberts, *My Lai*, 12.
- <sup>18</sup> Olson and Roberts, *My Lai*, 11. My emphasis
- <sup>19</sup> Olson and Roberts, *My Lai*, 8.
- <sup>20</sup> John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 10.
- <sup>21</sup> Olson & Roberts, *My Lai*, 9.
- <sup>22</sup> Olson & Roberts, *My Lai*, 9.
- <sup>23</sup> Kwon, *After the Massacre*, 30–31.
- <sup>24</sup> Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) “Miscellaneous Panel” *The Winter Soldier Investigation*, Detroit Michigan, January 31 – February 2, 1971, [http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML\\_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter\\_Soldier/W\\_S\\_28\\_Misc.html](http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter_Soldier/W_S_28_Misc.html) (accessed February 8, 2014).
- <sup>25</sup> Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai* (New York: Penguin Group, 1992), 129.
- <sup>26</sup> Weaver, *Ideologies of Forgetting*, 1–18.
- <sup>27</sup> Weaver, *Ideologies of Forgetting*, 75.

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- <sup>28</sup> Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, 104.
- <sup>29</sup> Bilton and Sim, *Four Hours*, 131–32.
- <sup>30</sup> Olson & Roberts, *My Lai*, 27. The terms “enemy” and “running battle” imply that this was a dangerous but heroic encounter. Sergeant Roberts’s imagery of those killed sharply contrasts the unarmed civilians who followed orders during the actual event.
- <sup>31</sup> Olson & Roberts, *My Lai*, 31. The remarks are not wholly inaccurate. Technically, there was one soldier, Hugh Thompson Jr., who defied orders to airlift injured civilians from the area. His actions distinctly contrast the behavior of the thirty-three soldiers the Peers Inquiry estimated had participated in the killing of civilians in the village.
- <sup>32</sup> Olson and Roberts, *My Lai*.
- <sup>33</sup> Claude Cookman, “An American Atrocity: The My Lai Massacre Concretized in a Victim’s Face” *Journal of American History* 94 (2007): 154.
- <sup>34</sup> Oliver, “Coming to Terms.”
- <sup>35</sup> Lieutenant General W. R. Peers, USA (Ret.), *The My Lai Inquiry* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), 227. Also, according to Olson & Roberts, this discrepancy is, in part, due to a 1955 Supreme Court Ruling that gives Army soldiers immunity from being prosecuted for crimes committed during war after they have been discharged from the military (*My Lai*, 170).
- <sup>36</sup> Bilton and Sim, *Four Hours*, 382.
- <sup>37</sup> Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, 105.
- <sup>38</sup> Seymour Hersh, “Lieutenant Accused of Murdering 109 Civilians,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 13, 1969, 1Z, 19A.
- <sup>39</sup> Seymour M. Hersh, *My Lai 4: A Report on the Massacre and its Aftermath* (New York: Random House, 1970), 72.
- <sup>40</sup> Hersh, *My Lai 4*, 185.
- <sup>41</sup> Cookman, “An American Atrocity,” 154.
- <sup>42</sup> Ronald L. Haeberle “Interview,” in *Report of the Department of the Army Review of the Preliminary Investigations Into the My Lai Incident*, Volume II Book 11 (1970): 18.
- <sup>43</sup> Jay A. Roberts “Interview,” in *Report of the Department of the Army Review of the Preliminary Investigations Into the My Lai Incident*, Volume II Book 14 (1970): 22.
- <sup>44</sup> Cookman, “An American Atrocity,” 157.
- <sup>45</sup> Joseph Eszterhas, “Cameraman Saw GIs Slay 100 Villagers,” *The Plain Dealer*, Thursday, November 20, 1969, 4B.
- <sup>46</sup> Hal Wingo, “Exclusive Pictures, Eyewitness Accounts: The Massacre at Mylai,” *Life* 67 (December 5, 1969): 43.
- <sup>47</sup> “My Lai Massacre,” *Time*, November 28, 1969, 17–19.
- <sup>48</sup> Ben Cosgrove “American Atrocity: Remembering My Lai” *LIFE.com*, <http://life.time.com/history/my-lai-remembering-an-american-atrocity-in-vietnam-march-1968/#1> (accessed February 8, 2014).
- <sup>49</sup> Anne Llewellyn Barstow, *War’s Dirty Secret: Rape Prostitution and Other Crimes Against Women* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2000), 5.
- <sup>50</sup> In his Peers Commission testimony, Varnado Simpson reported witnessing four fellow soldiers commit gang rape. “I saw [them] go into a hut and rape a 17 year old girl... When they all got done, they all took their weapons... and fired into the girl until she was dead.

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Her face was just blown and away and her brains were just everywhere.” Olson & Roberts, *My Lai*, 89.

<sup>51</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Verso, 1977), 51, 108 & 138.

<sup>52</sup> Kathryn McMahon, “Casualties of War” *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 22 (1994): 12.

<sup>53</sup> McMahon, “Casualties of War,” 5.

<sup>54</sup> McMahon, “Casualties of War,” 13.

<sup>55</sup> Eben J. Muse, “The Land of Nam: Romance and Persecution in Brian DePalma’s *Casualties of War*” *Literature Film Quarterly* 20 (1992): 211.

<sup>56</sup> McMahon, “Casualties of War,” 12.

<sup>57</sup> Lena Khor, “The Politics of Sentimentality and Postsentimentality” *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 24 (2012): 219.

<sup>58</sup> Muse, “Land of Nam,” 206.

<sup>59</sup> Anna Siomopoulos, “Political Theory and Melodrama Studies,” *Camera Obscura* 21 (2006): 180.

<sup>60</sup> Bruce Spear “Political Morality and Historical Understanding in *Casualties of War*” *Literature and Film Quarterly* 20 (1992), 243.

<sup>61</sup> Olson & Roberts, *My Lai*, 163.

<sup>62</sup> Pierce, “Moral Courage in Combat,” 4.

<sup>63</sup> Olson & Roberts, *My Lai*, 91.

<sup>64</sup> “Biography: Selected Men Involved with My Lai” *American Experience*, PBS.org, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/mylai-biographies/> (accessed April 9, 2012).

<sup>65</sup> Duc, “Diaries of My Lai”

<sup>66</sup> See, for example: Rebecca Leung, “An American Hero: A Vietnam Veteran Speaks Out About My Lai,” *60 Minutes* CBS News, May 6, 2004, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/an-american-hero/> (retrieved February 8, 2014); “Back to My Lai” *60 Minutes*, CBS News, March 29, 1998, <http://www.cbsnews.com/videos/back-to-my-lai/> (accessed February 8, 2014); “‘Blood and Fire’ of My Lai Remembered 30 Years Later” *CNN World News*, March 16, 1998, <http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9803/16/my.lai/> (accessed February 8, 2014); “My Lai” *American Experience*, (Boston: PBS Distribution, 2010); and “Remembering My Lai,” *Frontline* (Alexandria, VA: PBS Video, 1989).

<sup>67</sup> Weaver, *Ideologies of Forgetting*, 50.

<sup>68</sup> Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women’s Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980).

<sup>69</sup> Michale Bibby, “Fragging the Chains of Command: G.I. Resistance Poetry and Mutilation” *Journal of American Culture* 16 (1993): 31.

<sup>70</sup> Richard Stacewicz, *Winter Soldiers: An Oral History of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 1.

<sup>71</sup> John Kerry and Vietnam Veterans Against the War, *The New Soldier* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1971), 8.

<sup>72</sup> Kerry et al., *The New Soldier*, 10.

<sup>73</sup> Stacewicz, *Winter Soldiers*, 3.

<sup>74</sup> Stacewicz, *Winter Soldiers*, 2.

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- <sup>75</sup> Stacewicz, *Winter Soldiers*, 3.
- <sup>76</sup> Andrew E. Hunt, *The Turning: A History of Vietnam Veterans Against the War* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 59.
- <sup>77</sup> Stacewicz, *Winter Soldiers*, 3.
- <sup>78</sup> Hunt, *The Turning*, 57.
- <sup>79</sup> Hunt, *The Turning*, 68-9.
- <sup>80</sup> Hunt, *The Turning*, 57.
- <sup>81</sup> Vietnam Veterans Against the War, *The Winter Soldier Investigation: An Inquiry into American War Crimes* (United States: Beacon Press, 1972), xiii.
- <sup>82</sup> Stacewicz, *Winter Soldiers*, 235.
- <sup>83</sup> Vietnam Veterans Against the War, *The Winter Soldier Investigation*, xiv.
- <sup>84</sup> The women who spoke during the investigation include Virginia Warner, mother of a POW; Dr. Marjorie Nelson, a medical doctor who volunteered at a civilian health center in Quang Ngai; Mary Enemy of the American Friends Service committee who worked at a Buddhist orphanage in Da Nang. Hunt, *The Turning*, 71.
- <sup>85</sup> Hunt, *The Turning*, 71.
- <sup>86</sup> Hunt, *The Turning*, 71.
- <sup>87</sup> Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), "Americal Division" *The Winter Soldier Investigation*, Detroit Michigan, January 31 – February 2, 1971, [http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML\\_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter\\_Soldier/W\\_S\\_49\\_Americal.html](http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter_Soldier/W_S_49_Americal.html) (accessed February 8, 2014).
- <sup>88</sup> R. Wayne Eisenhart, "You Can't Hack It Little Girl: A Discussion of the Covert Psychological Agenda of Modern Combat Training," *Journal of Social Issues* 31 (1975): 16.
- <sup>89</sup> Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), "25th Infantry Division and Public Information Office" *The Winter Soldier Investigation*, Detroit Michigan, January 31 – February 2, 1971, [http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML\\_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter\\_Soldier/W\\_S\\_40\\_25Infantry.html](http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter_Soldier/W_S_40_25Infantry.html) (accessed February 8, 2014), parenthesis in text.
- <sup>90</sup> VVAW, "25th Infantry Division and Public Information Office."
- <sup>91</sup> Heberle, "Deconstructive Strategies," 67.
- <sup>92</sup> Heberle draws from examples of gendered violence to explain the inverse relationship between power and aggression. In cases of intimate partner abuse, she observes that individuals most risk dangerous violence when they attempt to gain control or leave their partner. When "batterers experience a lack of control," they try, "through violence, to gain it back." Heberle, "Deconstructive Strategies," 69.
- <sup>93</sup> Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), "1<sup>st</sup> Air Cavalry Division" *The Winter Soldier Investigation*, Detroit Michigan, January 31 – February 2, 1971, [http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML\\_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter\\_Soldier/W\\_S\\_09\\_1AirCav.html](http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter_Soldier/W_S_09_1AirCav.html) (accessed February 8, 2014).
- <sup>94</sup> Heberle, "Deconstructive Strategies," 68.
- <sup>95</sup> Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), "1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division" *The Winter Soldier Investigation*, Detroit Michigan, January 31 – February 2, 1971, [http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML\\_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter\\_Soldier/W\\_S\\_06\\_1Marine.html](http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter_Soldier/W_S_06_1Marine.html) (accessed February 8, 2014).

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- <sup>96</sup> Weaver, *Ideologies of Forgetting*, 34.
- <sup>97</sup> VVAW, "Miscellaneous Panel."
- <sup>98</sup> Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), "1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions," *The Winter Soldier Investigation*, Detroit Michigan, January 31 – February 2, 1971, [http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML\\_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter\\_Soldier/W\\_S\\_46\\_1Infantry.html](http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter_Soldier/W_S_46_1Infantry.html) (accessed February 8, 2014).
- <sup>99</sup> VVAW, "Miscellaneous Panel."
- <sup>100</sup> VVAW, "Miscellaneous Panel," my emphasis.
- <sup>101</sup> Hall, "It Can Happen" 13.
- <sup>102</sup> Weaver, *Ideologies of Forgetting*, 55.
- <sup>103</sup> VVAW, "Miscellaneous Panel."
- <sup>104</sup> Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), "3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division," *The Winter Soldier Investigation*, Detroit Michigan, January 31 – February 2, 1971, [http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML\\_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter\\_Soldier/W\\_S\\_15\\_3Marine.html](http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter_Soldier/W_S_15_3Marine.html) (accessed February 8, 2014).
- <sup>105</sup> VVAW, "1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division."
- <sup>106</sup> VVAW, "Miscellaneous Panel."
- <sup>107</sup> Weaver, *Ideologies of Forgetting*, 34.
- <sup>108</sup> Weaver, *Ideologies of Forgetting*, 73.
- <sup>109</sup> Kelly Wilz, "Rehumanization through Reflective Oscillation in *Jarhead*" *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 13 (2010): 595.
- <sup>110</sup> Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), "Prisoners of War Panel," *The Winter Soldier Investigation*, Detroit Michigan, January 31 – February 2, 1971, [http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML\\_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter\\_Soldier/W\\_S\\_27\\_POW.html](http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter_Soldier/W_S_27_POW.html) (accessed February 8, 2014).
- <sup>111</sup> Wilz, "Rehumanization" 603.
- <sup>112</sup> Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) *Winter Soldier Documentary* (New York, NY : Distributed by New Yorker Video, 2006)
- <sup>113</sup> Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) *Winter Soldier Documentary* (New York, NY : Distributed by New Yorker Video, 2006)
- <sup>114</sup> Stacewicz, *Winter Soldiers*, 234.
- <sup>115</sup> Kerry et al., *The New Soldier*, 10.
- <sup>116</sup> Hunt, *The Turning*, 73.
- <sup>117</sup> VVAW, *Winter Soldier Documentary*.
- <sup>118</sup> VVAW, *Winter Soldier Documentary*.
- <sup>119</sup> Kerry et al., *The New Soldier*, 10.
- <sup>120</sup> Lembcke, *Spitting Image*, 61.
- <sup>121</sup> Lembcke, *Spitting Image*, 99.
- <sup>122</sup> Olson & Roberts, *My Lai*, 180.
- <sup>123</sup> VVAW, *Winter Soldier Documentary*.

## **CHAPTER 4 – MELODRAMA MARCHES ON: SEXUAL ABUSE WITHIN THE CONTEMPORARY U.S. MILITARY**

*“There’s always talk that if you’re captured by the enemy, you can expect that you will be raped and tortured. ... I didn’t get a whole lot of training on what happens when it’s soldier on soldier.”*

– Anonymous ROTC Cadet.<sup>1</sup>

Historically, the problem of soldier-on-soldier rape within the U.S. military has been largely silenced. Sexual assault was not officially acknowledged as an offense by the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) until 1992 and “initially only female victims were recognized.”<sup>2</sup> It took more than a decade after acknowledging the problem for the military to establish an official policy regarding rape within the ranks. In February of 2004, Donald Rumsfeld issued a memorandum in response to numerous sexual assaults of those deployed in Iraq and Kuwait.<sup>3</sup> The military established a task force in order to create an official sexual assault prevention and response policy. This policy went permanently into effect in October of 2005 and the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO) began overseeing all related policies and procedures.<sup>4</sup> Yet, even with official policy in place, the problem of sexual assault remained at epidemic proportions and was largely hidden from the public. As film director Kirby Dick has observed, the military “has been very good at conveying that [sexual assaults] are isolated. They’ll deny it or then blame the victim or they’ll say it’s been dealt with and it’s in the past. This has been covered up for generations.”<sup>5</sup> The military has expended more energy in covering up the problem than it has in addressing the problem.

U.S. media coverage of military sexual violence has also been quite limited. According to Kirby Dick, “The media has given a huge pass to the military in the U.S. For a long time the media would only report on these as individual issues, they would

never look at the broad systemic problem.”<sup>6</sup> Further, such stories tended to stereotype the women involved either as harlots betraying an innocent man or as helpless victims.<sup>7</sup> On occasions when sexual assault in the military percolated into the public realm, the media typically represented the problem as a rare, sensationalized scandal or as instigated by a few predatory individuals. As such, the media follows the same melodramatic pattern in reporting criminal behavior among members of the military that it followed in reporting the My Lai Massacre. In the 1990s, two scandals received a plethora of media attention. In 1991, over one hundred U.S. Navy and Marine Corps aviation officers were accused of sexually assaulting more than eighty military and civilian women at a symposium in Las Vegas in what is known as the Tailhook Scandal. In 1996, twelve male officers were charged with sexually assaulting female trainees under their command in what is known as the Aberdeen Scandal. As with My Lai, the media depicted these scandals as isolated events. Thus, as Aberdeen and Tailhook made headlines, mainstream public discourse ignored the everyday sexual harassment, assault, and rape of men and women in the military.

Nearly twenty years after the acknowledgement of soldier-on-soldier rape as an offense, and more than five years after the establishment of SAPRO, the problem has remained unaddressed in a significant way. As detailed in my introductory chapter, the most recent statistics estimate that 26,000 men and women were sexually assaulted in the military in 2012. To address these staggering numbers, veterans and military sexual assault survivors began advocacy efforts to increase awareness, prevention, and prosecution of the issue. In 2009, the Service Women’s Action Network (SWAN) spearheaded these efforts by testifying five times before the U.S. Congress on sexual

violence within the military.<sup>8</sup> As a result, congress ordered an investigation of SAPRO that found that the office had been “sporadic and inconsistent” in its efforts to address the problem. Then, on February 15, 2011 lawyer Susan Burke and SWAN filed a lawsuit against the Secretary of Defense at the time, Robert Gates, and his predecessor Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, for the failure to properly address military sexual violence. Immediately, this lawsuit brought the issue of rape in the ranks to public attention, snowballing other prominent advocacy efforts as detailed later in this chapter.

While this advocacy has been instrumental in drawing attention to the systemic nature of the epidemic, the military still struggles to meet the level of accountability called for by these efforts. As recently as the summer of 2012, the Lackland Air Force base was involved in a scandal in which seventeen male instructors sexually assaulted or raped at least 43 female trainees, reminiscent of the Army’s Aberdeen Scandal. Additionally, even though the media’s attention on the issue has dramatically increased, mainstream public discourse about wartime sexual assault often remains entrenched in melodramatic patterns.

This chapter tracks the melodrama and paradox inherent within institutional rhetoric about military rape and then contrasts these discourses to advocacy efforts that aim to end military sexual violence. To do so, I first illustrate the rhetorical structure of military rape culture and demonstrate how reading this discourse as a melodrama reveals its inherent gender hierarchy and helps desensationalize sexual violence. Then, I examine the ways by which the U.S. Department of Defense continues to narrate and adjudicate the rape epidemic in melodramatic ways, even as the issue is increasingly brought to public awareness. Despite activists’ calls for a large-scale social change in military

culture, the DoD continues to blame its sexual violence problem on deviant individuals unable to master their sexual urges. It also addresses criticism by positioning itself as acting heroically to punish these deviant predators. This individualistic rhetoric assists the military in maintaining a positive, heroic image. As a consequence, it also obstructs deliberation on how to implement cultural and policy changes that may better serve survivors of sexual violence.

In the second half of this chapter, I assess numerous rhetorical strategies for public advocacy against military sexual violence. Primarily, these efforts are driven by the personal stories of survivors of military sexual violence. These narratives model healing heroism to varying degrees. Similar to the other manifestations of healing heroism examined in prior chapters, these contemporary efforts embrace complexity and highlight the systemic, rather than individualistic, nature of sexual violence. The personal narratives of veteran survivors in these examples also continue the un-doing of gender exhibited in earlier examples of recuperative rhetoric. These testimonies empower those affected by sexual violence and feature the stories of male survivors. Because victimhood, powerlessness, and femininity are still so closely linked in U.S. culture, these efforts transgress archaic gender norms. In doing so, they also reveal another application of healing heroism. Personal narratives, in these examples, show how rhetoric of healing heroism may be applied to nurture those affected by gendered violence in ways that are far more productive than simply seeking out and punishing rapists. In this case, healing heroism helps to rehumanize those who have been objectified through sexual violence by empowering them to become active agents in the public sphere.

My analysis of narratives of healing heroism here also offers a prime opportunity to consider the merits of personal testimony in public advocacy to address gendered violence. Using the melodramatic frame as a lens for assessment, I argue that the most productive examples of these advocacy efforts counter melodrama's tendencies of individualism, victimization, caricature, and gender hierarchy. Not mired by the confines of mass appeal, it appears that online advocacy efforts may have the most potential to counter melodramatic narratives through personal testimony. In my analysis then, I highlight new media activism for its capacity to proliferate strategies of rhetorical empowerment that embody tropes of healing heroism.

### **Sexual Assault in the Military: A System of Abuse**

Startling statistics about rape in the military reveal an epidemic of sexual violence, indicating flaws in the military's ability to prevent and adjudicate these crimes. According to statistics from the Department of Defense (DoD), 3,374 instances of sexual assault were *reported* in the military in fiscal year 2012.<sup>9</sup> The Service Women's Action Network (SWAN) states that while sexual assaults in general are "notoriously under-reported, this problem is *exacerbated* in military settings."<sup>10</sup> In fact, the DoD itself estimates that a mere 13.5% of survivors report assault. As such, by the DoD's own estimation, there were 26,000 sexual assaults within the military last year; those attacked include 14,000 men and 12,000 women.

Those affected by sexual assault confront hostile pressures against filing sexual assault allegations in the military, offering one likely reason for the discrepancy in the number of rapes reported and the number estimated. Many service members are discouraged from reporting out of fear that they themselves will receive official

punishment.<sup>11</sup> As one of many examples, public affairs specialist in the Air Force, Marti Ribeiro, put her weapon down one evening to smoke a cigarette. She was subsequently attacked by a fellow service member, forcibly dragged from her post, and raped behind nearby power generators. When she reported the incident to the authorities, she was told that if she filed a claim, she would be charged with “dereliction of duty for leaving her weapon unattended in a combat zone”—a charge that often results in a court-martial.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, she felt compelled to remain quiet and the perpetrator went unpunished. As another example, rape cases are often prosecuted as adultery charges, which results in the blame and punishment of the survivor.<sup>13</sup> There are many levels on which a survivor of sexual violence may be punished upon making rape allegations in the military.

One’s presumed sexuality could also result in punishment and discharge. Prior to the repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, many straight and gay service members alike were afraid to report their attack for fear of being “outed.” After Michelle Jones was raped by her squad leader and former best friend, he told her, “If you tell anybody about this, I’ll tell everyone you’re a dyke and you’ll get booted out.”<sup>14</sup> So she decided that filing a report was not worth the risk. “If I had spoken out,” she said, “I would have been the one investigated.” As Jones testifies to the *Guardian*, prior to the repeal of DADT, sexual orientation was taken more seriously than sexual assault. Because sodomy itself is a crime in the military, according to Mic Hunter, “some men who were sexually assaulted do not report the assault for fear that military authorities might decide what took place was not an assault but a consensual act, and file a charge of sodomy.”<sup>15</sup> As a result, many have refrained from reporting sexual violence for fear of being dishonorably discharged.

In addition to legal punishment, there are also cultural and professional consequences for reporting rape. This includes a widespread culture of retaliation against the men and women in the military who report sexual assault. Many survivors avoid reporting sexual assault due to fear of social reprisal from fellow service members or their attackers.<sup>16</sup> In a *Guardian* article, Kate Weber tells of being shamed by friend after confiding in her that she had been raped: “Before long, I was being called a whore and a bitch by everyone [in my unit].”<sup>17</sup> In addition, attackers often threaten physical violence to silence the individuals they assault. While serving in the Air Force, Michael was walking across a construction site when, suddenly, he was struck from behind and momentarily knocked out. When he regained consciousness, a group of three service members were raping him.<sup>18</sup> His attackers threatened to kill him if he reported the assault, so Michael kept the incident to himself for over thirty years. Those survivors who *do* report are often stigmatized as “liars, whiners and weaklings.”<sup>19</sup> Survivors frequently face increased sexual abuse after reporting an assault. Others worry that filing a sexual assault report will be detrimental to their career.<sup>20</sup> Such concerns are not unfounded. Indeed, many survivors are pushed out of the military after making sexual assault allegations.

Military sexual violence often goes unpunished, even when the attack *is* reported, indicating a severe systemic flaw. According to SWAN, prosecution rates are “astoundingly low” — less than twenty-one percent of reported cases even went to trial in 2010. Of the 529 perpetrators who actually entered the courtroom, only fifty-three percent — a mere 281 individuals — were convicted. Despite increased public recognition of sexual assault within the military, prosecution of rape remains proportionately low. In fiscal year 2012, only 594 of the 3,374 rapes that were reported

were charged via court martial.<sup>21</sup> The lack of serious prevention and punishment as well as the retaliation against those who come forward, all indicate the systemic nature of this issue. The military rape epidemic is not the fault of errant individuals marring the reputation of the military, but a consequence of the military's failure to seriously address these crimes and punish offenders.

This failure to prosecute sexual violence, unfortunately, is not unique to the military. A common misperception that has pervaded across history and cultures is that women frequently falsify rape allegations. According to Susan Brownmiller, "a historic concern and abiding fear" of men has been: "what can happen to a fine, upstanding fellow if a *vengeful female lies* and cries that she has been assaulted?"<sup>22</sup> Continuing, she asserts that the "[d]isbelief of a woman who said she had been raped had been built into male logic since the days when men first allowed a limited concept of criminal rape into their law."<sup>23</sup> However, multiple studies demonstrate that fear of the false rape accusation is unfounded. It is estimated that only 2-8% of all rape allegations are false.<sup>24</sup> Of those allegations found "false," most are labeled as such because the survivor stops pursuing the charges for personal reasons, including the emotional turmoil of the trial. When these numbers are compared to the statistic that only 16% of all sexual assaults are actually reported, it is apparent that a "fine, upstanding fellow" is far more likely to rape an individual without punishment than be falsely accused.

Consistent with this historical pattern of misperception, many members of the U.S. military believe, according to Hunter, that individuals file rape allegations to "avoid taking responsibility for their own behavior."<sup>25</sup> Former Marine Stephanie Schroeder was physically attacked and violently raped by a fellow Marine in 2002. The non-

commissioned officer with whom she filed the complaint dismissed the allegation.

Schroeder recalls the officer saying, “don’t come bitching to me because you had sex and changed your mind.”<sup>26</sup> Many erroneously believe that those who report rape frequently consent to sex and then, after a change of heart, “cry rape.”

As in the civilian world, survivors of sexual assault in cases involving alcohol often struggle to have their allegations taken seriously. This is especially problematic because, quite often, women are either directly pressured to drink by superiors, or feel the implicit social pressure to drink in order to build camaraderie with fellow soldiers.

Lieutenant Elle Helmer, a public affairs officer for the Marine Barracks, was obliged to attend a St. Patrick’s Day Pub Crawl by her superior officer as a mandatory work event. “Helmer says she was required to drink shots of liquor at the same pace as the bigger male officers and when she drank water to try to keep herself from becoming intoxicated, she was required by the major to drink an extra shot as a punishment.”<sup>27</sup> When she became too intoxicated and left the group, her superior officer instructed her to accompany him to his office to discuss a business matter. Once there, he forcefully knocked her over, causing her to lose consciousness, and proceeded to rape her.

The question of consent becomes murky in the eyes of the military justice system even in cases where alcohol is *not* involved. Often, perpetrators of sexual violence claim that the sex was consensual. By reputation, rape is the crime that is “the easiest to charge and the hardest to disprove.” However, Susan Brownmiller counters that by asserting that rape “has traditionally been the *easiest to disprove* as well.”<sup>28</sup> She observes that there is a “provable bias by police and juries against the word of the ... victim,” especially if he or she falls outside the caricature of the white, virginal damsel in distress.<sup>29</sup> This was

apparent in the case of Darchelle Mitchell, described in the introductory chapter. Despite ample evidence, Mitchell's rapist was found not guilty because the court ruled that he thought he had consent. Although Brownmiller's work on rape was written in 1975, her findings on the culture of rape in the U.S. still resonate: rape remains the easiest crime to disprove.

Military authorities often question the mental health of rape survivors as yet another strategy to evade investigating rape allegations. Jenny McClendon, a sonar operator in the Navy was diagnosed with a personality disorder (PD) after reporting that she had been raped by a superior officer. Officers accused McClendon of lying, pressured her to remain quiet about the incident, and eventually forced her to leave her station and attend counseling for anger management. There, on the basis of a 15-minute assessment, she was diagnosed with a PD. "[W]hen she asked for one-on-one counseling with a woman therapist, she was told she was *resisting treatment*."<sup>30</sup> McClendon's story is not unique. Anu Bhagwati, the executive director of SWAN, observes a pattern within the military of diagnosing survivors as having a PD in order to discharge them from the military. "It's convenient to sweep this under the rug. It's also extremely convenient to slap a false diagnosis on a young woman ... and then just get rid of them so you don't have to deal with that problem in your unit."<sup>31</sup> According to Iraq Veterans of America, the DoD has wrongfully discharged nearly 26,000 service members on the basis of their having pre-existing "Personality Disorders." This is especially egregious because those diagnosed with PD somehow managed to successfully complete basic training with this supposed "pre-existing condition."<sup>32</sup> Because mental health experts categorize PD as a pre-existing condition, those discharged on these grounds lose their pensions, health

benefits, education benefits, and may have their enlistment bonuses revoked. This type of discharge also prevents an individual from enlisting in the military again at a later date and carries this stigma over to civilian employment opportunities.<sup>33</sup>

In short, the military's practices of preventing and adjudicating rape are woefully inadequate. Military officials too often discourage those who have been assaulted from reporting their attack, too often blame sexual violence on the victim in some way, and too often punish those who have made rape allegations. These flaws are rooted in U.S. cultural perceptions about rape in general. The myths that women regularly make false rape allegations and that only a certain type men commits sexual violence are strongly embedded in the public imagination. In both military and civilian culture, these melodramatic misperceptions prevent important conversations about the cultural dynamics of sexual violence. As demonstrated by various literatures, crimes of sexual violence are exacerbated by cultures that promote hegemonic performances of masculinity. Ironically, this hegemonic masculinity is often fulfilled under the guise of protecting the feminine from sexual violation and is, thus, cemented in both war and rape culture.

### **Melodrama, Rape Culture, and the Military**

The pervasiveness of sexual assault in the military indicates not that deviant predators have infiltrated the military, but that problematic understandings of gender and sexual violence exist within military culture itself. These problematic assumptions originate in a rape culture (also found in the civilian realm) that parallels the absolutist nature of melodrama. Indeed, war culture and rape culture share many similarities: both rely upon an inequitable gender hierarchy and mutually exclusive categories of good and

evil. The rigid binary system of the melodramatic frame structures our understanding both of war and of sexual abuse. Because these binaries seem so normal, it is difficult for the complexities of sexual violence to find their way into public discourse. Thus, rhetoric of rape in the military constitutes a series of paradoxes and confusion. As Allison and Wrightsman argue, the oversimplification of rape in public discourse leads to severe societal misunderstandings.<sup>34</sup> This inhibits prevention, prosecution, and survivor support in cases of sexual violence. To address the problem it is imperative to explore the paradoxical discourse regarding rape. In this project, I detail the linkages between melodrama and military rape, situating the problem within the larger context of U.S. rape culture. Understanding these discourses as melodramatic helps denaturalize some of rape culture's problematic myths.

In chapter two, I demonstrated that limited constructions of heroic masculinity and victimized femininity grant agency to maleness while rendering femaleness passive.<sup>35</sup> Building upon this idea, in this section I explore how this framework establishes masculine heroism as *superior* to those coded as feminine and, hence, inherently vulnerable. This hierarchy ultimately results in the paradox of military rape rhetoric: although a masculine hero is defined by his willingness to protect the feminine, performances of this ideal often jeopardize the feminine. The hero's protective role in the melodramatic frame grants him superiority over both the enemy *and* the damsel in distress. This occurs because the rescue narrative begins with the presumption that the damsel in distress is unable to save herself, positioning the feminine as inferior to the hero. The superiority constructed through these rigid gender norms enable exaggerated and harmful manifestations of masculinity.

The strict separation of masculinity and femininity is embedded within the everyday language and culture of the military. Based on the words of a drill instructor, legal scholar Madeline Morris argues that “manliness” in the military “means a warrior spirit that is based upon a sense of brotherhood, fraternalism—which, obviously, excludes women.... When a military organization is called to war, the mission is to kill and to dominate the opposing force. And domination is generally associated with a masculine thing. There’s very little remorse. That’s where the manliness thing comes into play.”<sup>36</sup> Military training constructs the feminine as passive, weak, subordinate and fundamentally distinct from masculinity. Sam Keen also asserts that militarized masculinity requires conquering the feminine. “The warrior psyche is created by a systemic destruction in the male of all ‘feminine’ characteristics.... Drill instructors ... are following an ancient military tradition when they insult recruits by calling them ‘sissies,’ ‘pussies,’ or ‘cunts.’”<sup>37</sup> As Gina Weaver explains, military training historically consisted of strict and repeated appeals to gender identity. “Women provided a negative example and common ‘other’ for the servicemen.... Thus, a properly militarized masculinity was achieved by denying any positive connection between male and female and, in fact, disavowal of anything considered feminine.”<sup>38</sup> Within the melodramatic frame, the hero does not just craft an identity in opposition to the villain, but also he forges his identity in opposition to any people, behaviors, or things coded feminine.

While some may argue that the increasing inclusion of women in the military signals that the military is departing from the patriarchal warrior psyche, the abuse many women and men experience while serving indicates otherwise. When more women began joining the armed services, gendered derogatory terms were removed from the military’s

*official* training language. However, according to Morris, the sentiment that the “feminine” indicates a weakness that is Other than a soldier remains among male and female service members alike.<sup>39</sup> One representative example from 2012 indicates that such sentiment still occurs and that even some military women have internalized patriarchal ideologies of gender. A female officer in charge of the barracks protocol office where Marines file complaints posted a “Hurt Feelings Report” on her Facebook page with the comment “My Marines crack me up!”<sup>40</sup> The image resembles a form that one would complete to file a harassment report but contains excessive feminine metaphors to mock those who file complaints. It includes a section where the individual can check a box for the “Reasons for filing this report.” The list includes such options as: “I am a pussy;” “I have woman like hormones;” “I am a Queer;” and “I am a little bitch.”<sup>41</sup> Through language that genders weakness and passivity as feminine qualities, the document asks for the name of the “‘Real Man’ who hurt your sensitive little feelings” and the name of the “little sissy” filing the report. Although the officer claims that she posted the image as a “joke,” it is quite telling of the military’s exclusion of femininity.

Scholars associate the gender constructs that pose masculinity against the feminine (and its presumed weakness) with sexual violence. Madeline Morris suggests that certain attitudes toward women typically found in the culture of the U.S. military increase the propensity of rape.<sup>42</sup> Groups that hold “attitudes of distrust, anger, alienation, or resentment toward women” are more likely engage in acts of sexual violence.<sup>43</sup> Morris proposes that stereotypical attitudes about gender roles also increase rape proclivity. Such attitudes include “views that women should not do men’s work nor men do women’s work, that a man is the head of the household, and that women should take a passive role

in courtship.”<sup>44</sup> Similarly, O’Toole, Schiffman and Edwards argue that sexual violence is consequential of social systems that devalue women “as secondary citizens in need of control by men.”<sup>45</sup> Other scholars indicate that normative constructions of gender reify the rape myths that often allow sexual violence to remain unpunished. Barbara Barnett maintains that the “dual message of male dominance and female dependence helps sustain rape myths.”<sup>46</sup> She, thus, invites us to view sexual violence as a “symptom of the larger problem of gender equity.”<sup>47</sup> As this scholarship reveals, the idea that women must rely upon men for protection, as found in melodrama, has harmful consequences.

Thus, the paradox of melodramatic discourse: although a melodramatic narrative often revolves around rescuing the feminine, the gender norms behind this frame fuel rape culture. Performances of masculinity associated with protective, powerful, melodramatic heroism can be problematic. According to Michael Kimmel, hegemonic ideals associating manhood with power are often performed through violence.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, ample research indicates a connection between hyper-masculine ideals and sexual violence specifically.<sup>49</sup> Eileen L. Zurbriggen’s research indicates a strong correlation between the type of masculinity required of soldiers and the type of masculinity common in rape perpetrators in U.S culture at large.<sup>50</sup> Similarly Morris observes that traditional and rigid standards of masculinity that “emphasize dominance, assertiveness, aggressiveness, independence, self-sufficiency, and willingness to take risks, and that reject characteristics such as compassion, understanding, and sensitivity have been found to be correlated with rape propensity.”<sup>51</sup> Such characteristics, as I demonstrate in chapters two and three, abound in melodramatic notions of the soldier. In the film *So Proudly We Hail*, discussed in chapter two, Lt. Summers is rendered heroic through his independent

initiative to acquire quinine despite his injuries. In doing so he was assertive, and willing to take a risk, he embodied the quintessential characteristics of the melodramatic hero. The Winter Soldier Investigation, discussed in chapter three, revealed that it is often difficult for men to display compassion and sensitivity. Even those soldiers dissenting from military culture found it difficult to participate in sensitive performances of their emotions. Sexual violence, it seems, is exacerbated by the same strict gender hierarchy upon which melodramatic heroism relies.

Performances of melodramatic “heroism” yield increased proclivities for sexual violence, which contradicts the motivating *telos* found in melodramatic narratives: protection of the vulnerable. Victim blaming plays a key role in discursively ameliorating this paradox. At its core, the rhetoric of victim blaming involves disciplining performances of femininity. In this way, militarized masculinity may disassociate itself from the feminine without rejecting “woman” as a whole. The rhetoric of victim blaming serves as a selector that rejects women who defy traditional norms of femininity. According to Mic Hunter, misogynistic culture places the traditional “ideal woman,” the type of woman who is passive and grateful to the men who protect her, upon a pedestal. However, women “who do not fit his narrow definition are not worthy of respect—quite the opposite. They are to be disdained and punished.”<sup>52</sup> Iris Marion Young’s conception of masculinist protection also helps us understand this phenomenon. According to Young, “good” women obediently remain under the protection of a man. A woman may be deemed a “bad” woman if she fails to secure such protection, or if she “refuses such protection by claiming the right to run her own life.”<sup>53</sup> This yields hostility toward nontraditional women. Without a male protector, a woman is considered to be open to

domination by other men. Women who join the military not only reject the notion that they must remain attached to a protective masculine arm, but also assert that they themselves may perform the role of protector. As Young argues, being protected places one in a subordinate position.<sup>54</sup> Thus, the melodramatic perception that the feminine needs to be protected by the masculine creates a climate in which the femininity is always already subordinate.

Victim-blaming rhetoric that separates “good” women who follow gender norms from “bad” women contributes to a culture in which attackers may often rape with little consequence. Throughout history, Brownmiller observes, the belief that “a virtuous woman either cannot get raped or does not get into situations that leave her open to assault,” has remained pervasive.<sup>55</sup> As such, women who are raped “may be questioned about how their behaviors, actions, dress, and speech (or silence) provoked an attack.”<sup>56</sup> Those behaviors that counter the caricature of the ideal women – assertiveness, sexual agency, entering presumed “male” spaces — fall under the harshest scrutiny.<sup>57</sup> By this rationale, a woman who rejects masculine protection to join the military, or who walks alone at night, or who drinks large amounts of alcohol, does not subscribe to the norms of a “good” woman and is, according to this harmful misperception, likely at fault. Following suit, military authorities often blame assaults on rape survivors’ non-traditional gender behaviors. Indeed, authorities and attackers alike frequently assert that individuals who have been “raped” actually “wanted it.” Ariana Klay, a Naval Academy graduate and Iraq War veteran, was gang-raped in the Marine Barracks in 2010. After the attack, Klay was taunted by her fellow male officers who claimed that by “by wearing makeup and running shorts,” she welcomed the harassment.<sup>58</sup> Another survivor testifies

that in 2012, after she reported her assault, her Senior Chief allowed the entire crew to ridicule her, insinuating that she was not wronged, but a promiscuous woman. Someone wrote “SLUT” across the mirror in her barracks with lipstick and her fellow crewmembers made phone calls to her mother telling her that she had “raised a slut.”<sup>59</sup>

Such disciplining of gender also adversely impacts male survivors. Men frequently have their sexual orientation and masculinity questioned after an assault. Scholarship on male rape indicates common misperceptions that a “real” men can defend themselves against rape and that only gay men can be raped.<sup>60</sup> According to Sleath and Bull, who examine sexual assault in U.S. culture, these gender norms cause victim blaming.<sup>61</sup> Here again, sexual assault norms in the military appear consistent with the civilian realm. Brian Lewis describes his rape by a fellow Navy sailor. Upon returning home after being discharged for behavior problems associated with the rape, he reported that several male relatives shunned him. His own family members shamed him for his assault and speculated that, “he might have been a willing participant.”<sup>62</sup>

The rhetoric of victim blaming allows certain acts of sexual violence to be taken more seriously than others, allowing a harmful culture of impunity to arise. A symptom of rigid gender hierarchy, the rhetoric of victim blaming disciplines non-traditional performances of femininity. In doing so it addresses a paradox presented by the melodramatic frame: while the traditional, masculine hero’s ability to protect the damsel from violation renders him virtuous, the rigid gender hierarchy inherent within this structure is characteristic of discourse that enables sexual violence. Dominant social narratives fault assaulted individuals for departing from gender norms in lieu of blaming his or her abuser for their criminal behavior. Thus, strictly defined gender roles, such as

those found within the melodramatic frame, grant passes to abusers by placing responsibility on victims. As a result, U.S. society believes the rape allegations of “pure and innocent victims” like Jessica Lynch, but disregards allegations when the story may be told that a “wanton female ... provoked the assailant,” or when a male has been sexually assaulted.<sup>63</sup>

Another discursive manifestation of this paradox that warrants exploration is the belief that women who join the military should somehow *expect* to be raped by their fellow soldiers. This contradicts ideals that heroic soldiers refrain from such behaviors but is often assuaged via tropes of biological heteronormativity. Rather than blaming the victim, this rhetoric blames hormones. This view has been expressed by those in power positions on a number of occasions and is historically consistent of rape culture. In February of 2012, journalist and conservative pundit, Liz Trotta, appeared on *Fox News* and launched into a polemical tirade critiquing the military’s expensive sexual assault prevention and treatment efforts.<sup>64</sup> After citing a pentagon report that revealed an increase in gendered violence, she responds, “What did they expect? These people are in close contact.”<sup>65</sup> Trotta paints the portrait that women in the military should just expect to be raped because men will be unable to control their sexual urges. Similarly, when the matter of military rape was discussed by the Senate Armed Services Committee in the summer of 2013, Republican Senator Saxby Chambliss blamed the problem of military rape on nature: “The young folks that are coming into each of your services are anywhere from 17 to 22, or 23... Gee whiz, the level — the hormone level created by nature sets in place the possibility for these types of things to occur.”<sup>66</sup> As with victim blaming, this rhetoric disciplines women who step outside traditional gender roles to join the military.

Perhaps more insidious, it also naturalizes male violence by portraying it as biological, inevitable, which according to Rachel Hall, “supports the mistaken assumption that men are incapable of curbing violence and abuse.”<sup>67</sup> Trotta’s and Chambliss’s commentaries position sexual assault as a biological byproduct of gender differences. This biological determinism minimizes the institutional and cultural causes of sexual violence. One could interpret their position as a contradiction to the notion that heroic men do not rape. However, the rare perpetrator who is actually convicted of rape, ceases to be seen as a hero. In this configuration, rape is seen as evidence of a person’s personality flaws or villainy, rather than evidence of the flaws of patriarchal culture.

Critique of rape on a cultural level is, thus, inhibited when the problem of sexual violence is exclusively blamed on rogue villains who are distanced from cultural norms. The rigid categorization of good and evil found within the melodramatic frame also informs our understanding of sexual abuse. Several scholars note that public discourse typically caricatures rapists as intrinsically evil.<sup>68</sup> Brownmiller discusses the impact Freudian psychology has had in creating a mal-informed image of a rapist who is “infantile” in nature and acts on an “uncontrollable urge.” Rapists are publicly imagined as “psychopaths,” “victims of a disease,” and “sadistic.”<sup>69</sup> Hunter asserts that, “[m]any people would like to believe that those who commit sexual crimes are evil, mentally ill, or somehow different than the rest of us.”<sup>70</sup> By this sentiment, those who commit rape are animalistic villains with uncontrollable sexual urges. This discourse positions rape within the realm of psychopathy and, in doing so, renders rape an individual act rather than a social problem.

Sexual abuse has, rightly, been categorized as villainous behavior. However, when we categorize good and evil as mutually exclusive within human personalities, this prevents us from addressing sexual abuse committed by those who are not easily identified as criminal. Rhetoric that associates sexual abuse with caricatured *individuals* leaves no room to discuss the influence patriarchal social norms have in proliferating sexual violence. As Hall puts it, binding the rapist to imagery of horror “naturalizes rape, causing us to forget what we have learned from feminists; namely, that sexual violence is a cultural effect of gender relations under compulsory heterosexuality.”<sup>71</sup> By masking the cultural motives of sexual violence, narratives that follow the melodramatic frame uphold notions of liberal individualism that privatize social problems.

The idea that only psychopathic men or boys with uncontrolled hormones commit rape conceals what scholarship from multiple disciplines has found: rape is *not* an act of lust, but an act of power and control.<sup>72</sup> “One of the reasons people commit sexual assault is to put people in their place, to drive them out,” says Hunter in his psychological research on sexual abuse in the military. “Sexual assault isn’t about sex, it’s about violence.” Rape does not occur simply by having individuals of different genders in close contact, it occurs by promoting within individuals the idea that they need to prove their masculinity by dominating others. A former member of the U.S. Coast Guard, Kori Cioca, featured in the *Invisible War* documentary, demonstrates this in her analysis of her experience of sexual abuse by her supervisor:

And he started with sexual advances. And when I denied those, he became more hostile. And I think he got to the place where he just hated me. And he didn’t rape me because I was pretty or that he wanted to have sex with me; he raped me because he hated me, and he wanted to show me that I wasn’t as great as I thought I was...<sup>73</sup>

Cioca's rape occurred not because her supervisor acted on uncontrollable sexual urges, but because he felt threatened by her and, to compensate, asserted his dominance. Discourses that depict rape as an assertion of power invite critical discussion as to why certain individuals feel entitled to such power, allowing explorations of the patriarchal motives behind sexual violence.

Analysis of sexual assault against men also incriminates the patriarchal drive for dominance. As occurs in "other predominantly male environments, male-on-male assault in the military... is motivated not by homosexuality, but power, intimidation, and domination. Assault victims, both male and female, are typically young and low-ranking; they are targeted for their vulnerability."<sup>74</sup> Such is the case of Heath, who was just seventeen when he joined the Navy.<sup>75</sup> When he first arrived, he travelled for a weekend at the Army and Navy Hotel in New York City with fellow shipmates. One night, after passing out from drinks with his crew, he awoke to find one shipmate ejaculating onto his face and another removing his pants to grab his genitals. The military often, for both men and women, becomes about proving strength, toughness— notions coded masculine—by rejecting weakness. Thus, because rape is a crime of dominance rather than lust, perpetrators often attack men with physical characteristics or behaviors associated with femininity or weakness. Thus, individuals like Heath, who are young and vulnerable, are regularly targeted for sexual abuse by those wishing to prove their masculinity.

Sexual violence motives also appear to parallel the racialized polarization of the melodramatic frame. Survivor testimony on the Protect Our Defenders website suggests that some perpetrators target non-white or non-American men because of their difference. Amando, a former marine originally from the Philippines, recalls that relationships

between he and his fellow service members were strained. “Not a lot of people wanted to associate with me because... of my ethnic background,” he states.<sup>76</sup> One night he was brutally attacked by six members of his platoon who all took turns in raping him in various ways. Similarly, Greg’s story also demonstrates the role of difference in sexual abuse:

In 2009, I arrived in Fort Benning, GA. I had recently arrived in the U.S. and wanted to become part of the American dream and serve my new country. Soon after I arrived on base, fellow recruits made it clear they did not like my accent. They didn’t want me in “their Army.” The bullying began. I thought if I ignored it and kept my head down it would go away. I was called “commie faggot,” and worse. Within days of arriving at Fort Benning I was raped in the barracks.<sup>77</sup>

This excerpt reflects melodrama’s characteristic polarization. The melodramatic hero is defined by having superiority to Others. The hero is *not* the feminized victim in need of rescue, inflected in the use of the term “faggot.” The hero is *not* the animalistic enemy jeopardizing “American” values, inflected in the use of the term “commie.” By attacking these Others, perpetrators demonstrate their masculine superiority.

In understanding that rape is most often motivated by a drive for power and control, rather than lust, it is important not to go so far as to position rape as a signifier power. As discussed in chapter three, gendered violence often occurs when the perpetrator feels his or her power is waning. Returning to Heath’s story, when he challenged his attackers dominance over him by reporting the incident, his attackers retaliated with increasingly violent abuses. Due to the frequency of these attacks, along with the Navy’s failure to take preventative action, Heath went AWOL. Eventually, however, he was found and returned to the same unit only to experience even more violent attacks. The abuse culminated during an incident in which he was “ransacked” while in the shower, beaten, and raped with a toilet cleaning brush. Sexual assault *within*

the military, it seems, follows a pattern similar to that which we saw of violence during the Vietnam War. It often follows a loss of power.

Melodramatic narratives that blame or discredit victims or emphasize the abnormality of the perpetrator produce harmful cultural misunderstandings about rape. Such narratives present rape as a crime of individuals who either step outside their gender roles or who are inherently evil and unable to control their sexual urges. This individualistic focus circumvents productive critique of the patriarchal, heterosexual norms that play a role in sexual violence. This rhetoric positions women's dependence upon men as inevitable. To expose the rhetoricity of this discourse, in the following section, I read military narratives about rape as melodrama. This reading both highlights the socially constructed nature of these narratives and illustrates the fissures of patriarchal masculinity, demonstrating that heroes are not as powerful as they appear in hegemonic discourse.

### **Narratives of the Hero and the Villain**

The overlapping discourses of patriarchal gender hierarchy and polarized difference intrinsic to both the military and the melodramatic frame, indeed, exacerbates a rape culture that enables many sexual assault cases to go unprosecuted. However, when a number of advocacy efforts began to obtain notoriety at the beginning of 2012, it became difficult for the DoD to continue to publicly deny its epidemic sexual assault problem. At the end of January of that year, Kirby Dick's documentary *The Invisible War* made headlines for earning the Audience Award at the Sundance Film festival. Then, on March 6, a lawsuit filed by Susan Burke against DoD's secretaries Robert Gates and Donald Rumsfeld captured the media spotlight. Shortly thereafter, the Military's 2011

Fiscal Year Report on Sexual Assault was released, indicating little, if any, improvement. Just one week later, on April 20, 2012, Susan Burke filed another lawsuit, this time against West Point and the Naval Academy. Yet, even as social advocacy groups began drawing public awareness to the severity of the problem in 2011, the military continued to rely upon narratives that mirror the melodramatic frame, evading serious action under the guise of the heroic identity.

This series of public condemnations left the DoD scrambling to maintain the sanctity of the hero. Military authorities conducted a number of rhetorical maneuvers to distance rape from its ranks as it publically addressed the issue. Following historical precedents of melodrama, heroism appears frequently as a trope in this rhetoric. By rendering a hero's virtue unquestionable, sexual assault allegations may be blatantly denied. As Hunter observes, "Military leaders' stereotypes of what a sexual abuser is make it difficult for them to believe their personnel are capable of sexual abuse and make it impossible for them to identify their own behavior as abusive."<sup>78</sup> Such stereotypes include the Freudian notion that caricatures sexual abusers as infantile psychopaths. Mentally ill and often raced, projected stereotypes of the rapist cloud judgments in sexual violence cases. Hunter documents that sexual abusers confronted with evidence that they have acted in a criminal manner respond with incredulity. Many will "concede that they are guilty of minor wrong doing, but they will continue to insist that, because they are otherwise nice, decent men, they were not really being abusive."<sup>79</sup> Many believe that military personnel of good reputation, rank, status, and character are simply incapable of committing violently abusive acts.

The role heroic identity, or the “halo effect,” plays in occluding justice appears in several military sexual abuse cases. As one example, when Kate Weber confided in a friend that she had been raped by one of their fellow soldiers, her friend refused to believe her: “I know that guy. He’s married and he would never do such a thing. You’re a liar and a slut.”<sup>80</sup> Unable to believe that an “honorable” married man would do such a thing, her entire unit harassed her after she filed a complaint. We also see the halo effect in a case of sexual violence during the Lackland Air Force Scandal. Lt Col James Wilkerson, described as an “air force superstar,” was convicted of aggravated sexual assault in November of 2012, sentenced to a year in jail, and dismissed from the Air Force. The following February, his commanding officer Lt. General Craig Franklin overturned the conviction:

[Franklin] exercised his discretion under the Uniform Code on Military Justice and concluded, against the recommendation of his legal counsel, that the entire body of evidence was insufficient to meet the burden of proof beyond a reasonable doubt.

As the ‘convening authority’, Franklin was not required to provide further explanation for his ruling, although he later released a letter explaining he had based his decision in part on supporters who described Wilkerson as a ‘*doting father and husband*’ who could not have committed such a crime.<sup>81</sup>

Many believe that military personnel of good reputation, status, and character—doting fathers—are simply incapable of committing abusive violence. In short, rhetoric that exhibits melodramatic caricature and absolutism contributes to a decreased willingness to see within “heroes” the potential for deviant sexual violence.

Authorities also deployed the guise of heroism via narratives erroneously implying that the military was acting swiftly and valiantly to combat sexual assault. As allegations of the military’s rape epidemic increasingly percolated into public awareness, the DoD exaggerated its actions to address the problem. In a press release responding to

the *2011 Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military*, the DoD claimed that their statistics indicated an improvement in the military's handling of sexual assault. The press release states that there was a "10 percentage point increase in the rate of courts-martial charges compared to fiscal year 2010. The proportion of military subjects against whom commanders decided to take disciplinary action for sexual assault offenses by preferring court-martial charges has increased steadily since fiscal year 2007."<sup>82</sup> In looking at the numbers, however, there is little demonstration of improvement in the annual report. The data actually indicates that fewer charges were successfully prosecuted. Nancy Parrish, president of Protect Our Defenders, provides a detailed comparison of the numbers between 2010 and 2011:

In 2010, 1,025 actions were taken by commanders on the grounds of sexual assault, in 2011 there 791 [*sic*]— a decrease of 23%. The number of initiated court-martials [*sic*] fell 8%, from 529 in 2010 to 489 in 2011. The number of perpetrators convicted of committing a sexual assault decreased 22%, from 245 in 2010 to 191 in 2011.<sup>83</sup>

The decrease in punishment is not a result of a decrease in sexual assault allegations. According to the military, there were 3,192 incidents of sexual assault reported in 2011. This number demonstrates a 1% increase from the number of sexual assaults reported in 2010. While the numbers may not show a statistically relevant increase, they certainly do not mirror the decrease in convictions. The military, however, positively spins this increase. Air Force Major General Mary Kay Hertog, who heads the DoD's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO) has argued that "the slight rise means more service members are confident enough in the system to report their assaults."<sup>84</sup> This number is simply too small to indicate either an increase in attacks or an increase in confidence of reporting.

The DoD also rendered itself heroic through claims of grand policy action. Shortly after the release of FY11's sexual assault report and the third military rape lawsuit, Leon Panetta, former Secretary of Defense, made claims of "new" sexual assault policies. He announced that the "most dramatic" change would be to move the adjudication of rape allegations higher up the chain of command.<sup>85</sup> This means that "unit commanders at the company or squadron level" would no longer "have authority to decide whether to take further action in reported cases of attempted rape, forcible sodomy or sexual assault."<sup>86</sup> A Joint Staff Official for the DoD justified the move by stating, "The further 'north' you go [in rank] the more attention there is paid to this ... They get a level of training that somebody at the O-3 level wouldn't necessarily get." Continuing, the official claimed that these senior officers will have "a more neutral ability to take a look at the facts ... and make a reasoned decision."<sup>87</sup> Keeping rape investigations within the chain of command insinuates that there is nothing wrong with the military hierarchy itself. These actions fail to critically examine how a rape culture operates within the military, and, consequently, fail to induce the cultural shift necessary to address the problem.

Despite publicity of these "new" policies, according to Nancy Parish, "Senior commanders have always had responsibility for handling rape and sexual assault." However, this system has never functioned properly. Because the military assesses senior officers on their ability to maintain a disciplined unit, these officers are actually highly unlikely to be "neutral." For example, when survivor Brian Lewis reported his rape to his superiors, they refused to hear his complaints. "It was swept under the rug," Lewis explains, "The commanding officer's fitness reports are based on discipline under his

command, and to admit you have a rapist on your ship doesn't look good.”<sup>88</sup> According to SWAN's policy director, Greg Jacobs, “We looked at the systems for reporting rape within the military of Israel, Australia, Britain and some Scandinavian countries, and found that, unlike the U.S., other countries take a rape investigation outside the purview of the military.” Indeed, SWAN speculates that keeping investigations within the military may significantly contribute to the epidemic of sexual assault occurring in the U.S.

In many examples, leaders continued to simply deny the epidemic of sexual violence in the military. When the Lackland Air Force Base scandal broke in the summer of 2012, Air Force spokespersons downplayed the problem. Mac Thornberry, the Vice Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, which is responsible for the funding and oversight of the DoD, rendered Lackland an isolated scandal rather than a systemic crisis. After discussing the issue with General Edward Rice Jr., the commander of the Air Education and Training command, Thornberry reported, “there is no evidence of a widespread problem.” The issue, he observed, “seems to be very limited.”<sup>89</sup> He portrays Lackland as a manageable glitch. From these talks, Thornberry concluded that the military itself could best deal with the issue, stating that General Rice was “moving out very aggressively to deal with it.” Through such statements, Thornberry repositions the military as heroic and efficient.

Prevention efforts also maintain the respectability of the military through rhetoric infused with victim blaming. The military's 2009 prevention campaign, “Our Strength is for Defending,” led by Dr. Kaye Whitley, former director of the Pentagon's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO), turned sexual violence into an alcohol issue. In an effort to promote bystander intervention as a rape prevention strategy,

Whitley told service members, “If you see one of your buddies serve drinks to somebody to get them drunk, maybe what you do is step in and say ‘Why don’t you wait until she’s sober?’”<sup>90</sup> And this was not an off-hand comment. SAPRO actually printed a series of posters for this campaign that stated: “My Strength is for Defending, so when I saw that she was drunk, I told him, ‘Ask her when she’s sober.’” This campaign ultimately places the blame of sexual assault upon female intoxication rather than male aggression. It fuels misconceptions that rape allegations are a product of drunken regrets and reinforces the idea that women are merely passive receptors of sexual advances. A letter issued by leaders of the Coast Guard in 2012 states that “Commanders must train service members to ensure they understand, for example, that consumption of alcohol can impair the judgment of *both* parties.”<sup>91</sup> Attending to the sobriety of “both parties” in a sexual assault case seems aimed more at preventing upstanding young men from being accused of sexual assault by an unruly drunk woman than about preventing individuals from being assaulted while serving their country.

Perhaps the DoD’s most melodramatic rhetoric is that which deflects criticism by scapegoating rapists as individual deviants, distancing sexual violence from the military. Rather than addressing the cultural and systemic structures that create a climate in which those with proclivities for sexual abuse flourish, the DoD projects the problem onto others. The rhetorical focus upon the perpetrator as a “predator” has been consistent throughout the military’s rhetoric.<sup>92</sup> The commentary of Dr. Whitley, the director of SAPRO in 2010, exemplifies this pattern as she characterizes discussion on the issue: “One of the things that one of our leaders recently said is that we want to get so good at prosecuting these guys that if there’s anybody walking around out there that’s a predator,

they'll think that the military is the last place they want to end up.”<sup>93</sup> Such sentiments still resound in 2012. During the trial for Staff Sergeant Luis Walker, the primary defendant in the Lackland Air Force scandal, the prosecutor, Major Patricia Gruen, referred to him as a “wolf in sheep’s clothing” and a “[c]onsummate predator.”<sup>94</sup> The media latched on to Gruen’s “predator” remark, repeatedly spreading it through news headlines.<sup>95</sup> This rhetoric blames sexual violence on deviant individuals, positions them as antithetical to military culture and, thus, evades systemic critique of the military’s gender policies.

The racialization that occurs in the rhetoric of villainy also appears prominently in this example. Of note is that Sergeant Walker is not white. Of all the military personnel involved in the Lackland scandal, this non-white “wolf” received the most notoriety. This racialized approach to prosecuting military sexual assault has historical precedence. According to historian Mary Louise Roberts, during the Allied invasion of Normandy in WWII, U.S. soldiers were widely known to have sexually assaulted French women and girls. During this time, seventy-six percent of those who were court-martialed were African American, reflecting a melodramatic tendency to project sexual assault onto racialized bodies. Though these African American men were, technically, members of the U.S. military, this was not an inclusive space. The same Jim Crow laws that characterized the home front also characterized the military and most units were segregated.<sup>96</sup> Despite the eradication of Jim Crow laws the tendency to associate sexual deviance with soldiers of color, it seems, continues today. By blaming errant, often racialized individuals for the problem of sexual abuse, the military prevents the critique necessary to change its patriarchal structure.

The popularity of narratives of predation reveals the degree to which U.S. culture relies upon caricatures of villainy. It is simply inconceivable that one could be both a wolf and a sheep at the same time. When we discover that someone has committed a sex crime he or she becomes an absolute and total villain. This rhetoric allows the U.S. American public to individualize the problem of sexual assault. Individuals presumed guilty of sexual assault are perceived to have committed the crime due to internal character flaws. This sentiment is also apparent in the halo effect, by which presumably respectable (read white and heterosexual) men are believed incapable of such crimes. The assumptions that inform this rhetoric indicates what Burke might call the human tendency to become rotten with perfection. The pervasiveness of this mentality feeds the sentiment that the gender hierarchy is inevitable, natural, but this hegemonic narrative is as carefully constructed as any high-budget Hollywood melodrama.

### **Personal Testimony on the Forefront: Military Sexual Violence Advocacy**

While the military rhetorically positions itself as heroic, various advocacy efforts against military sexual violence model rhetorical strategies that engage the systemic nature of the problem. Most of this advocacy work is achieved through veteran survivor testimony. However, these efforts are not equally productive. Several, intentionally or not, reveal certain elements of melodrama. I analyze several of these advocacy efforts through the lens of healing heroism, to assess the degree to which they first critique and begin to reconcile harmful patriarchal side effects of the melodramatic frame. An online interactive documentary produced by Protect our Defenders not only challenges melodrama's privatized depictions of rape, but it also counters the melodramatic tendencies to advance caricatures and gender victimhood. The degree to which it eschews

melodramatic gender norms perhaps indicates the potential of new media narratives to model productive counter rhetoric. The advocacy efforts of Protect our Defenders demonstrate the potential for healing heroism to engage and shift political and military policy. This rhetoric not only holds the potential to heal public discourse, but also serves therapeutic purposes for those objectified by gendered violence. Instead of remaining passive objects of violence, these men and women are rehumanized—as they author their own stories they become empowered agents in the public realm.

In a similar fashion to the Winter Soldier Hearings of the Vietnam War Era, the movement to address military sexual violence reverses the tendency to blame melodramatic villain archetypes and instead critiques the military's prevention and adjudication system itself. All of the varying military sexual violence resistance efforts conduct critique at the institutional rather than individual level. As mentioned in the introduction, The Service Women's Action Network (SWAN), in partnership with attorney Susan Burke filed a lawsuit, *Cioca et al v. Rumsfeld et al.*, in February of 2011. Previous high-profile court cases involving sexual assault in the military, such as scandals like Tailhook and Aberdeen, focus on the perpetrators involved. This lawsuit, instead, invites the large-scale cultural critique necessary for social change by placing the blame on the military itself. This suit was initially filed on behalf of sixteen plaintiffs, but grew to include twenty-eight men and women. The lawsuit was filed against former Secretaries of State Robert Gates and Donald Rumsfeld on the grounds that the military and its leaders had repeatedly failed to investigate sexual assaults, failed to prosecute perpetrators, failed provide access to an adequate judicial system, and failed to abide by Congressionally-ordered reforms to prevent rapes and assault.<sup>97</sup> In addition to pointing

out the institutional failures, the suit directly critiques the problems of the internal climate of the military:

Defendants ran institutions in which perpetrators were promoted and where military personnel openly mocked and flouted the modest Congressionally-mandated institutional reforms. Defendants ran institutions in which Plaintiffs and other victims were openly subjected to retaliation, were encouraged to refrain from reporting rapes and sexual assaults in a manner that would have permitted prosecution, and were ordered to keep quiet and refrain from telling anyone about the criminal acts of their work colleagues...<sup>98</sup>

By filing a suit against top military leaders and by focusing on the ways defendants “ran *institutions*,” this suit provides an effective counter to melodramatic rhetoric. No scapegoats appear in this initial lawsuit, there are no evil “predators” insidiously attacking the weak, there are simply leaders who have led institutions that fail to address the needs of their own. The lawsuit was dismissed December 13, 2011 on the grounds that “The alleged harms are *incident* to plaintiffs’ *military service*.” The rhetoric of the dismissal furthers harmful assumptions that women, or “feminized” individuals, who enter masculine spaces should somehow expect sexual assault. Such rhetoric refuses to recognize that a cultural shift is required to remedy the problem. Although the lawsuit failed to result in legal action, it was quite successful in drawing public attention to the issue and productively framing the problem as existing within the military institution itself, rather than with lone individuals.

The lawsuit was an important step in a wave of public advocacy efforts designed to spread public awareness about the sexual assault epidemic and to increase prevention and prosecution within the military. After *Cioca v. Rumsfeld* was dismissed, advocates appealed the ruling and filed other similar lawsuits. In directing these additional lawsuits towards individual branches of the military, Burke and SWAN continued their systemic

critique. The second lawsuit was filed on March 6, 2012 on behalf of eight women against the Navy and Marine Corps. The defendants include the Secretary of Defense (SoD) at the time, Leon Panetta, former SoDs Gates and Rumsfeld, one current and two former Commandants of the Marine Corps, and one current and two former Secretaries of the Navy. “Beginning with the Tailhook scandal in 1991,” the complaint states, “military leadership has been claiming that it is taking effective steps to address the problem. That is simply not true.” Continuing, the suit claims that although “defendants testified before Congress and elsewhere that they have ‘zero tolerance’ for rape and sexual assault, their conduct and the facts demonstrate the opposite: they have a high tolerance for sexual predators in their ranks, and ‘zero tolerance’ for those who report rape, sexual assault and harassment.”<sup>99</sup> Again, this lawsuit blames the *system* for military sexual violence.

While the rhetoric references sexual “predators,” possibly invoking the melodramatic villain, the lawsuit avoids individualized narratives of villainy. Rather than punitive measures directed toward deviant perpetrators, the suit condemns top military leaders rather than the perpetrators of sexual violence. In this suit, military leaders are blamed for contributing to culture and policy that enable sexual violence to more readily occur. This illuminates the systemic factors that contribute to rape, rather than blaming the problem on caricatured villains. “Defendants’ repeated and unexcused failures to abide by the laws designed to reduce rape, sexual assault and harassment... directly and seriously harmed Plaintiffs and others who have reported” sexual violence. “Rather than being respected and appreciated for reporting crimes and unprofessional conduct, Plaintiffs and others who report are branded ‘troublemakers,’ endure egregious and

blatant retaliation, and are often forced out of military service.” This suit interpolates the military’s processes of handling sexual violence into the role of defendant.

The third lawsuit was filed on April 20, 2012 against the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, and the Military Academy in West Point, New York, on behalf of two female plaintiffs. The defendants listed are Former SoD Robert Gates, the secretaries of the Army and Navy at the time of the suit, and the former superintendents of the United States Military Academy and the United States Naval Academy. The suit uses similar rhetoric from the first two. Stating that both West Point and the Naval Academy “claim to be teaching young men and women to hold themselves to the highest standards of ethical conduct. Yet both institutions systematically and repeatedly ignore rampant sexual harassment. Both institutions have a history of failing to prosecute and punish those students found to have sexually assaulted and raped their fellow students.” Again, here, prosecutors file complaints against the institutional system rather than the individuals who committed the crimes. By avoiding rhetoric that scolds caricatured villains for their personal failures of morality, these three lawsuits advance structural critique. The lawsuits reveal that not only are presumed “heroes” failing to properly protect those within the ranks, but that there is a pervasive and harmful cultural attitude toward sexual assault within the military.

Public advocacy campaigns also highlight the institutional and cultural mechanisms at play in the military sexual assault epidemic. Executive Director of SWAN, and military sexual violence survivor, Anu Bhagwati, has been interviewed on a number of occasions. Always, she highlights the problem as a system failure rather than an individual failure. In a direct critique of the manner in which the military conducts

itself, Bhagwati states in an interview that, “In a system that is entirely built on rank and intimidation, it is no wonder that survivors do not come forward more often about the most brutal and horrifying experience of their lives.”<sup>100</sup> Here she critiques the military itself, calling into questions its rigid reliance upon hierarchy.

Other advocacy efforts critique the military less directly. These efforts question not militarization itself, but rather the military’s ability to protect those in its ranks. On April 6, 2011, Congresswoman Jackie Speier began making a series of speeches oriented to spread awareness and invite congressional action to address the epidemic of military sexual violence. On November 16 of the same year, she introduced the Sexual Assault Training Oversight and Prevention (STOP) Act. This instrumental legislation “takes the reporting, oversight, investigation, and victim care of sexual assaults out of the hands of the normal chain of command,” and instead places jurisdiction in the hands of an autonomous office “comprised of civilian and military experts.”<sup>101</sup> By moving the handling of sexual assault outside of the chain of command, the STOP Act intervenes in systemic structures, rather than simply aiming to punish individual perpetrators. This is apparent in the first press conference held for the proposed legislation. The conference begins with Speier sharing a brief anecdote about one survivor’s treatment after her sexual assault. “Take an aspirin and go to bed,” the woman was told. Speier condemns this “prescription” given to a soldier who was raped and mutilated by her superior officer. She highlights the military’s inadequacy in addressing rape and challenges the hero’s relationship to the victim, stating that those who are assaulted suffer from “a second act of victimization: they suffer, while their attackers go unpunished.” In this second act, the military is the perpetrator.

In avoiding critique of the military itself, however, it is difficult to avoid some melodramatic tendencies. Indeed, Speier's rhetoric parallels the melodramatic frame at times. Throughout her press conference for the STOP Act Speier reinforces tropes of heroism and villainy:

...more than an injustice. It is, according to some of our military leaders, a threat to our military readiness. Members of military units survive on the code of watching out for each other, when sexual assaults and rapes are hushed, ignored or treated lightly, trust in a unit is compromised, *along with its collective readiness to engage the enemy.*<sup>102</sup>

By emphasizing how sexual violence hinders the military's operation, she critiques only the military's handling of sexual assault, without questioning militarization at large. By focusing on the importance of maintaining readiness in order to "engage the enemy," she mirrors the melodramatic polarization of the Other that encapsulates much of U.S. military propaganda. The tone of this narrative echoes melodrama by pitting U.S. forces against an unnamed, ambiguous "enemy," defined solely by its opposition to the U.S., reinforcing the need for the U.S. military.

Non-profit organization, Protect Our Defenders, works collaboratively with Representative Speier who serves as the "Honorary Chair" of the organization. Rather than focusing on the legislative arena, Protect Our Defenders focuses on spreading public awareness. Perhaps because it is not tethered to constituent support as is Representative Speier, Protect Our Defenders advances a systemic critique that more effectively counters the melodramatic frame. Protect Our Defenders led this public awareness campaign primarily through new media, which includes an "interactive documentary" by which viewers choose from short but emotionally compelling YouTube videos that feature stories from survivors. Each clip ends with interactive links that connect viewers to

online petitions, encouraging them to take action to help initiate policy changes such as Representative Speier's STOP Act. These clips feature stories, told by survivors themselves, which illuminate the systemic nature of the problem. In one "Survivor Story," Jenny, who was attacked by a military superior, narrates that, "The commanding officer, his or her head is on the chopping block if a rape happens under their watch. The chain of command has a vested interest in keeping this under the rug."<sup>103</sup> This puts the blame for the epidemic on the commanders rather than individual perpetrators. Additionally, Parrish, of Protect Our Defenders, frequently writes for blogs and other alternative news sources to spread public awareness of the institutional nature of military sexual violence. This is amply evident in her response to Fox News commentator Liz Trotta's remark that women in the military should "expect" to be raped. Parrish asserts, "what Liz Trotta said ... reflects the thinking of far too many in the military."<sup>104</sup> She condemns the military's "antiquated" Sexual Assault Prevention Program for perpetuating the "mentality of blaming the victim." Directly critical of the military, Parrish states that the "outdated mindset" of this "broken system" has caused the staggering epidemic of rape by allowing "rape and sexual assault to go virtually unchecked."

Like Speier, Parrish does not directly critique the military as a whole, but justifies change with a message that works in conjunction with the system. However, Parrish's rhetoric relies less upon melodramatic notions of heroes and villains. Her tone demonstrates how critique *within* a system like the military can avoid being ensnared by that system. She describes the military as an "institution that *defines itself* in terms of honor and integrity, but which acts with very little of either when it comes to handling

rape or sexual assault in its ranks.” Rather than positioning the armed forces as inherently honorable, she positions honor and integrity as derivative of actions. She then juxtaposes the military’s own terms with its terrible failure at handling sexual assault, using irony to highlight the hypocrisy. This failure, she states, has the effect of “undermining readiness, unit cohesion, and morale.” Her justification parallels that of Speier’s, but without antagonistic emphasis on an enemy. Instead, she models healing heroism by emphasizing cohesion and morale.

The bulk of military sexual violence advocacy efforts rely upon testimony from survivors. Personal narrative has a history within the feminist movement as a whole, and especially gendered violence advocacy. This rhetorical strategy rehumanizes those objectified by sexual violence. Many feminist scholars have argued that personal testimony serves as a potent source for sense-making and knowledge production. As such, the authoring of one’s own story can be highly empowering. It also holds the power to heal problematic social ills. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell situates personal narrative as a uniquely feminine style of rhetoric, arguing that its inclusion in political discourse has the capacity to shift masculinist social structures.<sup>105</sup> According to bell hooks, personal narratives hold the transformative potential to repoliticize such things as gendered violence by challenging the tendency to individualize and privatize social phenomenon.<sup>106</sup> Barbara Pickering adds that personal testimony may serve as an important form of evidence in public discourse because it introduces a relational, rather than purely rule-based, standard of morality and contributes to feminist epistemology.<sup>107</sup> The prevalence of survivor testimony in advocacy against military sexual violence provides an important rhetorical resource for shifting masculine, hegemonic discourses.

Reliance upon testimony of veteran survivors allows activists to critique the military on an institutional level without villainizing the military in its entirety. Such a critique avoids the melodramatic tendency of reduction. This is important because it allows veteran survivors, many of whom felt, and still feel, proud of their service to narrate their complex relationship with the military through this movement.<sup>108</sup> The *Invisible War* documentary, by relying on survivor narratives, shows us one such example. In numerous interviews, director Kirby Dick states that the film itself is “not anti-military.”<sup>109</sup> This position stemmed from the participation of the survivors themselves. Dick explains that this is because “almost all the survivors said they did not want to participate in the film if it was anti-military.”<sup>110</sup> So, the director explains, he and producer Amy Ziering “made the choice to honor their wishes.” To do otherwise would have mirrored a disempowering melodramatic rescuer mentality that denies the agency of women themselves by implying that others know best. Instead of impressing their political views on the participating survivors, these filmmakers assisted individuals in a way that respected their autonomy and ultimately empowered them. This models an important strategy: when advocating on behalf of those affected by sexual violence, assuring survivors’ consent in how they are represented is of the utmost importance.

However, as Alcoff and Gray warn, survivor testimony runs the risk of being recuperated within dominant discourses.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, though the *Invisible War* was created in the interest of helping survivors, its reception and framing exhibit a number of troubling melodramatic undertones. It furthers gendered notions of victimization by focusing primarily upon female survivors. The film centers upon the experiences of Kori Cioca who, like the famed Jessica Lynch, embodies the “ideal” victim: young, petite,

white, heterosexual and cisgendered. Additionally, the press kit describes the film as “a moving indictment of the systemic cover-up of military sex crimes, chronicling the *women’s* struggles to rebuild their lives and fight for justice.”<sup>112</sup> The press kit description does briefly mention that men are affected by sexual violence in its final paragraph, but the first two paragraphs clearly position this as a documentary about women. The producers intentionally featured women because, according to Ziering, “Women can lead the charge on this.”<sup>113</sup> The documentary *does* include the perspectives of a few men, and one male sexual assault survivor: Michael Matthews. Matthews’ story, however, is minimized in the promotion of the film. He does not appear in any of the photos downloadable with the press kit, only white female survivors are included within this batch of photos. Additionally, this press kit only briefly mentions Michael in its list of survivors featured in the film, where he is positioned last. This minimization of male sexual abuse reflects larger patterns of public rhetoric about sexual assault. Brownmiller observes that crimes of sexual abuses in which “men rape other men or boys are quickly forgotten, whereas men who rape and torture women remain infamous.”<sup>114</sup> Despite estimates that half of military sexual assault survivors are men, their stories rarely make headlines. The *Invisible War* follows this discursive trend.

One might make the case that, because male rape survivors experience more cultural stigma, they are less likely to speak publicly about their experience and, hence, share their stories less frequently. This may have some merit. Amy Ziering explains that during the process of making *The Invisible War*, she discovered that it was “much, much more difficult” for men to talk about the issue.<sup>115</sup> However, as I will discuss below, nearly *all* survivors of *both* genders are stigmatized from speaking about their

experiences. It seems that “mainstream” nature and budget of the documentary influences its narrative arc. Arguably, a high budget film is more likely to cater to melodramatic caricatures of the “damsel in distress” to gain popularity. This documentary capitalizes on society’s familiarity in witnessing young white women as vulnerable and suffering. This frame seems to have helped the documentary gain notoriety. It won the Audience Award at the 2012 Sundance Film Festival; inspired Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta to initiate policy changes (albeit somewhat misguided); and moved a wide variety of film critics to write reviews attesting to the power of the film.

In emphasizing imagery of jeopardized women, however, the documentary makes a spectacle of feminine suffering. Ultimately, this strategy reinforces gendered social hierarchies. Women’s personal testimony, which Director Kirby Dick describes as the “soul of the film,” functions to demonstrate the “reality” of the problem.<sup>116</sup> A review in *The New York Times* avows that the survivor stories—described as “difficult to hear”—were “the heart of the film.”<sup>117</sup> Together, personal stories work to create a film that “leaves viewers weeping and seething.” The *Invisible War* is described in reviews with such visceral terminology as “heartbreaking,” “chilling and inflaming,” and “tough to stomach.”<sup>118</sup> In short, the framing of the film sensationalizes suffering.

The sensationalism of feminine suffering that occurs in the *Invisible War* objectifies survivors of sexual violence. Heberle demonstrates the harmful consequences of such sensationalized representations. “In the politicized context of the struggle against sexual violence,” she argues, “as we try to finish the puzzle that will represent the reality of masculinist sexual violence to the world, we risk participating in the construction of the spectacle of women’s sexual suffering.”<sup>119</sup> According to Heberle, the problem of

spectacle rhetoric, is that it sustains traditional forms of masculine power and limits women's agency, causing feminists and antiviolence advocates to increasingly turn to the "legitimate" violence and paternalistic protection of the state. "In the long run," she argues, "state-centered, bureaucratic, and legalistic strategies may do more to normalize violence as a constitutive aspect of political life than to prevent sexual violence as a constitutive aspect of social life."<sup>120</sup> By relying exclusively on punitive strategies, states imply that violence is inevitable. In this mindset, there is little room to address the cultural roots of sexual violence. In other words, when melodramatic narratives of sexual violence abound, punitive measures are employed instead of much needed measures to shift patriarchal social structures and better support survivors.

Thus, the rhetorical strategy of personal testimony is not *inherently* liberating. Testimony may be a powerful tool in political discourse, but personal narratives of sexual violence may also be bent toward melodramatic ends. As Heberle argues, simply sharing narratives of sexual violence for the purposes of illuminating the problem is not inherently productive, instead, we must be aware of the "the performative and interventionist quality our representations."<sup>121</sup> Feminist scholars offer guides for assessing the transgressive potential of narratives of sexual violence. Rachel Hall contends that productive political discourse about sexual violence positions rape *not* as a horrific but natural byproduct of biological processes, but instead as a discursively constructed byproduct of patriarchal culture.<sup>122</sup> This framing encourages a polity to seek ways to heal patriarchal social ailments, rather than simply blame perpetrators. To most effectively address the problem of sexual violence in society, advocacy efforts must offer alternative narratives to those perpetuated by rape culture.

To measure the success of anti-rape activism, then, I argue we might examine a rhetoric's potential to shift and heal damaging norms of dominant hegemonic discourses. Given that melodrama overlaps discourses that may excuse or exacerbate sexual violence, we might judge representations of survivor testimony for their ability to transcend melodramatic tendencies of individualism, victimization, caricature, and gender hierarchy. Testimonies on the Protect Our Defenders (POD) website certainly achieves the latter; these survivor stories sharply critique the military system without projecting the problem onto villains.

The POD "Survivor Stories" model a way to evoke the strong affective response achieved by melodrama, without relying on the reductive and disempowering caricatures of the melodramatic frame. This occurs because POD testimonies juxtapose survivors' pride in the military with the military's egregious failures to support them. The stories featured on Protect Our Defenders' interactive documentary follow a consistent format. Each begins with the survivor describing his or her high regard for the military. Many of these individuals come from proud military families. Many of these individuals associate the military with terms like "courage and honor and dignity and character." Many of these individuals believed the military would allow them to be a part of something "bigger than" themselves, and to "save lives."<sup>123</sup> Because these clips are so short, the viewer progresses quite quickly from witnessing individuals' heartfelt expression of respect and admiration for the military, to witnessing the military's great lack of respect for their needs and personhood. This ironic juxtaposition increases the emotive effect of these videos by expressing the pain and disappointment that arises not only from the sexual assault itself, but also from the failure to receive support from an institution with

which these individuals identify and respect. By combining both the survivors' respect for the military as well as their disappointment, the "Survivor Stories" embrace a level of nuance that cannot be accounted for by a melodramatic frame.

The testimony of survivor "Jenny" exemplifies how ironic juxtaposition functions in these survivor stories. Her narrative proves that morally complex rhetorical strategies can be as, if not more, powerful than melodramatic discourse. As the clip begins, Jenny recalls with a smile, "When I first joined in the Navy ... I absolutely loved the idea of being there for each other, struggling, pulling together, being a team." Then she describes how she and her fellow women soldiers were defined as Other from the team. Jenny's fellow sailors targeted her for harassment during training because she was a woman or, in the words of her class leader, "split tail," "hey-you-with-the-hair," or "bitch." She explains that, because she reported sexual harassment, she was "ostracized" and repeatedly assaulted and raped by her superior while on midwatch. Jenny bluntly describes the preventative measures to which she resorted because nobody on her "team" would help:

Every other day, he and I would be on a midwatch together. And that was at his request. And I knew what this was gonna be, because he'd been harassing me, and there had been previous rapes. So I showed up, with... underneath my coveralls, I would have a sports bra, a t-shirt, another sports bra, and I had picked up in Puerto Rico these Lycra pants to make it harder for him to get to me. Because we're talking about a two-hour midwatch, and I thought if I could just distract him long enough...

Then, she explains how, after attempting to commit suicide, she finally reported the assaults, only to find that the "investigation was far worse than the rape in so many ways." Her repeat attacker "briefly lost rank, which was restored by the end of deployment." Of the punishment, Jenny said, "it's kind of like you decide to slap

somebody on the wrist, and then you miss.” Her critique is quite sharp. She begins by revealing her hope in the camaraderie of the Navy and quickly progresses to exposing the gender discrimination she confronted on duty and the military’s subsequent failure to support her. It is only by working within the military system, by working with the survivors who still take pride in their military service but condemn the military’s gender culture, that the “Survivor Stories” advance such a powerful argument. Were the organization to disregard the military as a whole, the compelling irony of these narratives would be lost.

However, given that all military sexual violence resistance efforts have exhibited some form of institutional-level critique, this alone provides an insufficient standard of judgment. A progressive discourse against sexual violence must also avoid the melodramatic tendency for caricature, especially gendered caricature. In contrast to the *Invisible War*, the “Survivor Stories” challenge the gendered norms of victimhood established within hegemonic discourse. As feminist scholars observe, breaking societal associations between victimhood and femininity offers an incredibly important intervention in rape culture. Hall asserts that to challenge rape myths we must counter representations of the “feminine” as inherently vulnerable.<sup>124</sup> Heberle similarly suggests that, to be productive, advocacy efforts must depict diverse experiences of sexual violence and include stories of resistance that subvert the images of women as vulnerable.<sup>125</sup> Testimonies on the POD website do so: its self-stated mission of Protect Our Defenders is to “honor, support, and give voice to the brave *men* and women in uniform who have been raped or sexually assaulted.”<sup>126</sup> Following through with this inclusivity, of the nine different “Survivor Stories” on the organization’s website, three

feature male survivors and four feature women of color. Additionally, Nancy Parrish circulates the under-told narratives of male survivors by discussing the problem on alternative news blogs. POD's conscious effort to include diverse survivors shakes melodramatic understandings of sexual violence by demonstrating that it is not always the petite, white, feminine Jessica Lynch-types who are subject to vulnerability.

Although the *Invisible War*'s positioning of military sexual violence as a woman's issue, and especially a white woman's issue, may make its message more palatable to mainstream audiences, there are obvious consequences to the ease with which this message circulates. The value of advocacy against military sexual violence lies beyond its potential to initiate policy change. It also performs a healing function as it ameliorates the sense of isolation felt by those who have experienced sexual violence in the military. Thus, the failure to include male survivors, and survivors of color, is something of a detriment in *The Invisible War* that is not fully justified by its widespread reach.

In contrast to *The Invisible War*, POD advocacy efforts transform "victims" into "heroes" to empower those who have been sexually abused. While noting the ambivalence of survivor testimony, Alcoff and Gray contend that transgressive personal testimony positions survivors as "both witnesses and experts, both reporters of experience and the theorists of experience" so as to challenge "structures of domination and relations of power."<sup>127</sup> Exemplifying this, the POD empowers survivors by highlighting successes they have achieved after their sexual trauma. Each clip ends on a positive note, explaining how these individuals have resisted the objectifying effects of sexual assault by recovering their agency. Several survivors present as experts and theorists in these

clips who have founded their own programs or organizations to address military sexual violence. For example, survivor Panayiota founded the Military Rape Crisis Center, which offers case management, victim advocacy, support groups, education and research for survivors and their families. She also launched *MyDutytoSpeak.com*, a public blog that helps survivors recover from their trauma by providing them space to write and share their stories. As Panayiota explains, breaking the “silence of abuse” through writing liberates the writer and has the potential for “helping someone else who is feeling the same way.”<sup>128</sup> Another individual featured in “Survivor Stories,” Rebecca, founded the Walk Against Rape, which sponsored fifty-two different walks in fifty-two different cities in the U.S. in order to help raise awareness for the issue. As such, these testimonies avoid transcending into tales of powerlessness.

The movement also serves to redefine the concept of “protection” as exhibited in narratives reliant upon the melodramatic frame. Melodrama creates a sense of hierarchy, in which the hero rescues the always-already victim. Protect Our Defenders, in name and in mantra, creates an egalitarian sense of social support. “Our troops protect us, and we should protect them.” This concept eschews the idea that the “strong” are needed to care for the “weak” as is the case in melodramatic notions of protection. Instead, it models how individuals may care for one another without the bounds of hierarchy. “Survivor Stories” avoids turning melodramatic, again, by empowering survivors. Sharing one’s personal narrative of a stigmatized experience holds the potential for strength through healing heroism. Michael Matthews, a survivor-advocate, exhibits this in his testimonial on POD. Michael kept his assault a secret, from even his wife, for thirty years until his PTSD was triggered on September 11. In his testimony, he describes the personal peace

he found once he finally shared his story: “It was like someone took this great weight off of me, it was like tears of joy at that point, you know, to have this secret released from me.” Prior to sharing his story, Michael attempted suicide four times, but, as he explains:

all four times, I didn’t die. It was like, maybe the universe is trying to tell me something, maybe I need to get out there and fight for the rights of those who can’t fight for themselves right now. I don’t want people to suffer like I suffered. I don’t want them to wait thirty years before they get help. And I’m going out there and I’m telling this story.<sup>129</sup>

Within this excerpt, Michael is positioned as powerful by speaking up to share his story. As Alcoff and Gray suggest, “if disclosure can make the survivor feel courageous and transgressive, this represents a positive intervention into patriarchal constructions of subjectivity and is not simply caught with the recuperative machinations of power.”<sup>130</sup>

Michael’s story also models empowerment for its potential to inspire his fellow survivors to begin their own healing process. As his wife, who also appears in the video, explains, “You just tell your truth. As painful as it may be sometimes, so that it just might touch something in somebody else. It just might set up a thought like, well, maybe I *can* go get help. If they can do it, maybe we can do it.” Yet, these narratives do so without unraveling into a reductive discourse that renders closeted survivors into “helpless victims in need of patriarchal protection.”<sup>131</sup> Michael shared his story to help those who “can’t fight for themselves *right now*.” This language neither places those affected by sexual violence within a state of perpetual victimhood, nor does it suggest the need for an institutional heroic rescuer to intervene. It encourages survivors to eventually “fight for themselves,” but does not dictate a when, how, or form for those actions. By leaving the conditions for recovery open, narratives allow survivors to voice their own needs.

These personal narratives not only yield emotionally compelling advocacy, but they also create a source of healing for survivors. Michael's story, which is representative of the other "Survivor Stories," illustrates the therapeutic possibility of testimony. Nancy Whittier demonstrates the importance of sharing narratives of trauma through her analysis of the childhood sexual abuse movement. She argues that personal narratives of trauma may be empowering because emotional expression provides "a way of breaking the silence and secrecy that characterize child sexual abuse, of releasing the emotions they were not allowed to express as children, and of learning to trust their own feelings after having been told to deny those feelings following abuse."<sup>132</sup> Testimonies provide a way to transform feelings of shame, fear, and grief into feelings of pride and happiness—provided they avoid the disempowering effects of the melodramatic victim caricature.

Personal testimony can play an incredibly important role in inspiring both political action and collective healing. Whittier observes that survivor testimonies:

also constitute emotional labor because they encourage politicized emotional responses in others. Open display of the emotions of trauma can evoke similar feelings in others as they are reminded of their own experiences or feel that it is acceptable to express such feelings. They also evoke a feeling of anger (activists talk about how it is sometimes easier to feel angry about someone else's mistreatment than one's own), a sense of not being alone that includes feeling connected to others, supported, and 'safe,' the absence of fear, and relief of shame... The display of the emotions of resistance can also evoke similar feelings in others—seeing that others feel strong or happy or unafraid makes it possible to feel that way oneself, partly because it changes the normative response to child sexual abuse of falling apart.<sup>133</sup>

Thus, as with the Nurses of Bataan, the survivor activists have drawn strength through collectivity, rather than relying exclusively upon patriarchal protectors for help. This collectivity encourages survivors to share their stories. After *The Invisible War* was released Kori Cioca remarked that she received many emails from fellow survivors "who

said that my story told their story. I even met a woman at a screening in Yellow Springs, Ohio, who stood up in front of the entire audience during the Q and A and said she had just told her story for the first time in 19 years, and that seeing *The Invisible War* gave her the power to forgive herself. It is healing for me to know that sharing my story has given others their voice and the knowledge that they are not alone.”<sup>134</sup> By witnessing others share their experiences, many survivors feel safe to share their own stories. In a blog post on SWAN’s website, Rebekah Havrilla testifies to this point. “I stepped into a public forum along with a few other brave souls with the intent of bringing awareness to a serious issue within the military. I also wanted to help others feel safe about telling their own stories. Both of these things have occurred, and more. Hundreds of other people came forward with their stories.”<sup>135</sup> The collective activity of this movement helps to create a safer space for individuals to speak, listen, and heal.

This is especially important because military sexual violence is a particularly difficult experience to disclose. In part this occurs because, as with civilian culture, survivors of sexual assault are so often stigmatized, discredited, and blamed for their attack to the effect of shaming individuals into silence. The commanding officers to whom survivors must report have a vested interest in silencing this problem and survivors often experience violent retaliation from their attackers and fellow service members. In addition, the emotional impact of the trauma can make it difficult for survivors to face everyday social interactions, let alone testify about their horrifying experiences to the public. Rebekah Havrilla emphasizes the emotional discord in coming forward. She states, “I cannot speak for everyone [who has publicly shared their experiences of sexual violence], but I can imagine based on my own involvement how much thought must have

gone into deciding to step up and speak out, and how much anxiety this decision may have caused them.”<sup>136</sup> Given this, the importance of creating a safe space for narratives about sexual violence cannot be overstated.

The difficulty in sharing one’s story also occurs because of survivors’ sense of isolation. Many expressed feeling alone after their attack. Kori Cioca, who is featured in the *Invisible War*, notes that it is incredibly important for survivors to know they are not alone. Prior to her participation in the documentary, she says, “I really thought I was the only one who’d been raped, because that’s how the Coast Guard made me feel. They made me feel like I was the only one, that I was the problem.”<sup>137</sup> Hunter writes that while conducting research for *Honor Betrayed*, his book about sexual abuse in the military, he discovered that “even though many of those who told me their stories had obtained therapy they did not disclose the abuse” to their therapists.<sup>138</sup> When he inquired why they kept their abuse secret, one of the most common reasons survivors reported was that, “I thought I was the only one.” Debunking illusions of isolation by sharing one’s story may encourage more survivors to share their experiences and get help. The blog, *My Duty to Speak*, was founded by survivor Panayiota Bertzikis on this very premise. It began as a writing workshop in Cambridge, Massachusetts and transitioned to a blog designed to help survivors heal through the act of writing their experiences.<sup>139</sup> As described on the blog, “By writing about what one went through while wearing the uniform the silence of abuse has been broken liberating ourselves while also might be helping someone else who is feeling the same way.”<sup>140</sup> By including the voices of the men and women who have experienced sexual violence, the movement becomes not about politics, not about creating heroes and villains, but about healing and empowerment.

The contrast between “Survivor Stories” and *The Invisible War* suggests that online advocacy efforts may increase the likelihood for productive models of healing heroism to flourish. In its tendency to rely upon sensationalized accounts of feminine suffering, the *Invisible War* still seems constrained to the popular melodramatic frame, likely because a high budget film necessitates a wide general audience. However, the “Survivor Stories” are not beholden to the same monetary constraints. It is likely not a coincidence that the online documentary, then, departs further from melodramatic conventions. Though the circulation of the “Survivor Stories” was smaller, for rhetorical analysis purposes it demonstrates an important model for activism and a gauge by which to measure other efforts. Further, the interactive nature of online documentary eschews the need for an individual character with whom its audience may identify. The viewer, be it another survivor in need of inspiration or a more general audience member, may choose to watch the survivor stories that compel them the most and still receive the same message of courage in the face of injustice. This allows the advancement of multiple subject positions.<sup>141</sup> This is an incredibly important advantage for efforts that serve both political and healing purposes.

## **Conclusion**

The culture of sexual violence in the military and U.S. society at large is a product of harmful patriarchal gender norms. As several feminist scholars argue, to fully address the issue of sexual violence, then, such norms need to be denaturalized. Meaning, we need to demonstrate that sexual violence flourishes *not* as consequence of biological gender differences, but is, rather, a byproduct of rigid gender socialization. Thus, in the first section of this chapter, I demonstrate the rhetoricity of harmful discourses of rape in

the military by reading them as melodrama, thus highlighting the discursive maneuvers that produce this culture. Rape culture mirrors melodrama through reliance upon an inequitable gender hierarchy and racial polarization. Hegemonic discourses of rape in the military avoid acknowledging and properly addressing the issue of sexual violence either through repeated use of melodramatic narratives that either deny sexual violence through narratives of heroic identity, or blame the problem on deviant “predators.”

Veterans and survivors of sexual assault have made strides in healing this problematic culture, drawing public awareness to military rape, and initiating productive policy changes. This movement relies heavily on personal testimonies, which have appeared in lawsuits, blogs, documentaries, and Congressional speeches, in order to build emotion and, consequently, momentum. Because, as Heberle and others suggest, personal narratives are not inherently productive, critical analysis of testimonial is important. Due to the harmful connections between rhetorical patterns of rape culture and the melodramatic frame, the most productive usage of personal testimony in the movement to address military sexual violence would challenge these patterns. To varying degrees much of this activism does so. The bulk of these advocacy efforts avoid mirroring the melodramatic tendency to scapegoat the problem onto deviant individuals. Instead, activists critique the systemic issues that contribute to the epidemic of gendered violence in the military, calling for policy measures that strip the military of its power to adjudicate cases of sexual violence. However, turning away from polarization does not necessarily denaturalize rape culture.

For progressive intervention into rape culture, activists must also challenge the gendered caricatures of the melodramatic frame. Because the sexual violence objectifies

its “victims,” discourses are necessary to rehumanize and empower survivors. The online documentary created by Protect Our Defenders provides the best example of this. First, rather than positioning the feminine as always-already vulnerable, the virtual documentary deconstructs victimization by sharing narratives of both men and women who have been affected by military violence. Additionally, these advocacy efforts have taken feminine-associated tropes and discourses and placed them in positions of power. Many of the supposed “victims” turn their situation into a space of empowerment by sharing their stories in ways that inspire others to seek help and by creating social organizations designed to help fellow survivors. The collective, egalitarian version of “protection” exhibited by the movement also offers an effective counter to the melodramatic frame. Finally, these efforts shift the terms of public address. Through their personal narratives, a rhetorical maneuver often placed outside of the realm of public, masculine space, survivors become prominent and effective rhetorical actors in the political sphere.

Narratives of healing heroism hold the potential to ameliorate the harms of patriarchy and racism to enable large-scale public change. Melodramatic narratives overemphasize individual heroes, individual villains, or individual victims. As Linda Williams and Anna Siomopoulos both argue, by focusing on social ills as individual failures rather than cultural problems, melodrama contributes to public address that hinders structural and institutional transformations. The Protect Our Defenders documentary, in contrast, embraces complexity both by including multiple voices with multiple perspectives, and by revealing the nuance of these positions. These efforts have the positive effect of advancing a more inclusive dialogue and modeling how complexity need not hinder a movement’s message.

While the *Invisible War* has received the most publicity of all advocacy efforts and may seem to have had more direct impact on the issue, the smaller-scale advocacy efforts, arguably, hold a greater healing potential. The *Invisible War* was viewed by Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, who then initiated several new policy “changes.” These government efforts, however, fail to adequately challenge military culture. Thus, the success of rhetorical advocacy should not be judged only by its ability to reach government leaders. This measure maintains faith in patriarchal systems of hierarchy. In the case of gendered violence, which typically involves severe personal trauma, it is important to attend to the various therapeutic effects of advocacy discourse. The “Survivor Stories” specifically, include narratives from individuals of diverse genders, races, ethnicities and, albeit to a lesser degree, sexualities. The interactive documentary thus extends its therapeutic potential to more individuals. Additionally, these efforts are important in that they provide a space for the issue to be challenged and addressed outside of the masculinist arena of the military.

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## **CONCLUSION – IDEALS OF CHIVALRY: JUST WHO AND WHAT DOES TRADITIONAL “HEROISM” PROTECT?**

Sexual violence during wartime is an epidemic problem that plays a curious role in public rhetoric. It is at once ever present, pervading the cultural imaginary as the threat of the raping enemy consistently fuels wartime propaganda, as evident in representations of the Nurses of Bataan.<sup>1</sup> Yet, it also remains a silenced and unprosecuted crime in cases where U.S. soldiers conduct sexual violence, such as during the My Lai Massacre and in the current epidemic of sexual assault within the military. Reports of wartime sexual assault are rarely investigated and seem to be illegible outside of imaginings of the animalistic, raping enemy. Nicola Henry documents this paradox: “Although wartime rape has been repeatedly condemned as the ‘worst of crimes’ through history in political rhetoric,” she observes, “in practice these crimes have very much been neglected, disregarded, denied and downplayed.”<sup>2</sup> These paradoxical attitudes towards rape in the context of war reveal that sexual violence is at once public and privatized. Through discourse that follows a melodramatic frame, wartime rape is flouted obsessively as evidence of the enemy’s evil and discreetly ignored when the time comes to seek justice for those attacked.

Throughout this project, I reveal the melodramatic underpinnings of this paradoxical discourse about war and rape in the United States for the purposes of critical intervention. I demonstrate that hegemonic war rhetoric, which presents war as a rational, masculine endeavor, actually follows a melodramatic frame. Then, I highlight this narrative structure’s discordances with lived wartime experiences. In doing so, I denaturalize such discourse by exposing the extensive rhetorical maneuvers required to maintain perfect melodramatic caricatures. This method reveals the contradictions and

irrationality of melodramatic rhetoric and unsettles the rigid gender hierarchy and problematic racialized polarization upon which it revolves. Inspired by humanist myth and discourse theory that examines contradictions in discourse for their potential to create “spaces of dissension,” which transform patterns for understanding social life, I examine productive alternative rhetoric in each chapter. These spaces of dissent contribute to my critique of melodramatic rhetoric by further exposing its departure from material experiences of war. Importantly, they also provide valuable models to help heal the discursive ills that abound in rhetoric surrounding sexual assault. Throughout my analyses, melodrama serves as my critical heuristic, leading me toward the points in U.S. public discourse in which there exists problematic rhetoric about sexual violence. Put differently, overly simple narratives structured by melodramatic caricature indicate that more complex and productive modes of understanding have been overlooked. Such narratives that warrant critical reflection.

In my first chapter, I examine World War II discourse to explore the foundations of contemporary war rhetoric. I track the ways melodrama has established heroism, revealing that war discourse (be it found in film, the news media, or political discourse) articulates a sense of valor that is tied strongly to performances of hypermasculinity and relies upon a perceived threat to justify conflict. Heroic identity, then, in U.S. culture is constituted in relation to the victim in jeopardy and the threatening villain. Through an analysis of *So Proudly We Hail!*, a 1940s film inspired by the experiences of a group of nurses who were held as prisoners of war in the Philippines, I demonstrate how heroic identity is constructed in Hollywood melodrama. The potential violation of “damsels in distress” motivates the plotline of *So Proudly*. Key scenes in the film, such as the

marriage of the head nurse played by Claudette Colbert to a heroic soldier and Veronica Lake's self immolation to prevent Japanese soldiers from raping her fellow nurses, construct the feminine as inherently vulnerable and, thus, necessitating masculine protection. The type of heroism formed through these relationships overemphasizes individualism as a heroic trait, relies upon rigid gender hierarchy, and fosters the racialized polarization that so many rhetorical scholars connect to the violent hatred and state of fear that enables a nation to rally to war. Consequently, the sharp reliance upon victimization denies feminine agency, which, as many feminist scholars observe, reinforces patriarchal norms and exacerbates rape culture.

After establishing this pattern, I reveal the presence of this melodramatic frame in representative samples of political and media discourse from World War II through to the War on Terror. Rhetoric circulating about the Nurses of Bataan during WWII follows a logic that closely mirrors the melodramatic frame. Moreover, though U.S. society holds the presumption that it has departed from the gender and cultural norms of the WWII era, these ideas of progress are erroneous. Narratives that both emphasize the fragility of female POWs and the evil and sexual deviance of the enemy were also in abundance in discourse about the Jessica Lynch rescue. The mythic pattern of melodrama remains consistent throughout U.S. history, only its setting and cast of characters shift over time. The "damsel in distress," in contemporary times, may now serve in positions other than nursing; Jessica Lynch served the Army as a unit supply specialist. Very recently, women were granted the right to serve in combat roles. However, the relationship between femininity and masculinity set forth in melodrama still abounds in hegemonic public

discourse. As revealed by this discourse, U.S. culture, it seems, still has difficulty in imagining women as anything other than vulnerable.

Following my critique of melodramatic depictions of feminized vulnerability, I then juxtapose the heroism imagined via the melodramatic frame with an alternative heroism, a healing heroism, which contradicts melodrama's harmful tendency to dehumanize. Whereas the melodramatic frame relies upon caricature, polarization, and gender hierarchy; a healing heroism accounts for social complexity. The narrative of the Nurses of Bataan crafted through *So Proudly We Hail* sharply contrasts the lived experiences of the women taken as prisoners of war in the Philippines during WWII. These experiences demonstrate ways by which we might draw from the performance of nursing to reimagine a heroism that embraces human fallibility, emphasizes a peaceful collectivity that balances identification and division, and privileges the work of restorative action over antagonistic action. This heroism operates outside of the gender and racial binaries of the melodramatic frame.

This alternative heroism holds the capacity to lead us toward the comic perspective, which serves as an antidote to alleviate the narrowing effects of frames of rejection. Kenneth Burke contends that the path to human advancement comes by the comic move of "picturing people not as *vicious*, but as *mistaken*." The act of healing both friend and foe requires this mindset. Burke might take issue, however, with my articulation of heroism within the comic form. He differentiates frames of acceptance, such as heroism, from the comic corrective because "[h]umor is the opposite of heroic."<sup>3</sup> The heroic promotes "*magnification*, making the hero's character as great as the situation he confronts." Our heroes become so enlarged, he argues, that we fail to recognize their

flaws. This is apparent in our failure to address crimes of sexual violence committed by U.S. soldiers, granting further credence to Burke's critique. However, as mythic criticism reminds us, humans hold a strong drive to establish heroic narratives. Cultural fixations on the concept of the hero illustrate the need for strong positive forces during times of chaos. Indeed, to ameliorate the sorrow and loss of war, citizens may need the comforting idea that their own, or their loved one's, sacrifice was noble.<sup>4</sup> With this in mind, we might understand the pervasiveness of melodramatic heroism not as a falsehood to be remedied, but as a fiction that allows a citizenry thrust into war by its leaders to cope with grief. We might accept the comfort provided by idea of heroism, while rejecting the polarizing tendencies of *melodramatic* heroism, thus offering a more sustainable critique. The nuance of healing heroism has the capacity to demonstrate the valor of a service member's labor, without melodramatically exploiting the pathos of threat too often used to justify armed conflict.

Through the story of the Nurses of Bataan, then, we might envision a heroism that more fully nurtures the public soul and that, ultimately, counters the polarizing function of the melodramatic frame that perpetuates war. Because the metaphor of healing heroism is rooted in the act of nursing, as opposed to wartime combat, it points toward social actions rooted in health rather than destruction, nurturing over fighting. Relying neither on polarization nor the dehumanization of Others, it offers a way of envisioning conflict as a social illness to be treated, rather than an evil to be eliminated. As such, the healing heroism modeled by these WWII nurses serves as a recuperative alternative to the melodramatic frame.

Through the polarizing effect of the melodramatic frame, we project our own shame of sexual aggression upon our wartime enemies. By projecting rape onto our enemies, we undermine our capacity to address gendered violence in the U.S. As a result, the sexual violences of privileged members of U.S. culture (that is, those who fit the narrow strictures of hegemonic masculinity) too often remain unexamined. Thus, after establishing what melodramatic and healing heroisms entail in chapter two, I further critique how melodramatic conceptions valor inhibit much needed critical examination of sexual violence during wartime. I do so by unsettling melodramatic heroism's relation to the caricatures that constitute it, focusing on the relationship between heroism and the villain in chapter three and, in chapter four, the relationship between heroism and the presumed vulnerable.

In chapter three, I examine the My Lai Massacre, the most notorious Vietnam War Era atrocity, emphasizing how it blurs the sharp distinction between hero and villain. Melodramatic discourse, however, discursively maintains boundaries between good and evil through its tendency to minimize sexual violence committed by U.S. soldiers. The My Lai Massacre presents an interesting case study of such discourse: it has percolated through public memory as the most notorious war crime of the era. Representations of the massacre both in the early 1970s as well as public memorializing of the war beginning in the 1980s widely addressed the killings and destruction. The sexual abuse, however, received far less attention. It was never prosecuted and has been increasingly abbreviated in public discourse. This pattern, I argue, reflects a melodramatic frame, which invites us to associate sexual deviance exclusively with the enemy. Thus, by minimizing the sexual

violence that occurred during the massacre, rhetoric about My Lai allows the U.S. public to maintain notions of national virtue, even while condemning the tragic massacre.

Vietnam War Era discourse, however, has never been entirely homogenous. Vietnam veterans who began protesting upon their return to the states counter melodramatic renderings of war through a self-reflexivity that extends healing heroism. These soldiers modeled an alternative masculinity that dissociates power from violence. During the Winter Soldier Investigations, an informal public hearing organized to address crimes committed during the war, veterans confessed to atrocities that they both witnessed and participated in during the conflict. They expose both their own and their military's flaws and vulnerabilities. The performances of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) counter melodramatic forms of heroism by disrupting the notion that soldiers are either inherently virtuous or mindless killing machines. They demonstrated the ways by which gender and racial hierarchy exacerbated violence during the conflict. Through this discourse, the soldiers frame wartime violence during the Vietnam War—and by extension any violence—as indicative not of power, but of chaos. They depict horrific acts like the My Lai Massacre as motivated by a perceived lack of power. Their personal narratives craft a damning portrait of militarized masculinity.

The winter soldier testimonies reveal how a healing heroism may nurture those who have been dehumanized through their indoctrination into military culture. The hearings demonstrate that self-reflexivity may operate as a productive form of both political dissent and collective therapy. In addition to the political impact of the gathering, the hearings served a healing purpose for the soldiers involved. Many participants remarked that it aided in their processes of recuperating from their traumas.

Rather than simply shaming individual soldiers who participated in wartime atrocities, as the media often did with the My Lai Massacre, the hearings revealed the cultural impetus behind these actions. The VVAW testimonies exposed the degree to which collectivity, rather than individualism, guided soldiers and justified violent criminal action. In this way, the hearings nuance the concept of healing heroism, reminding us that while the collective spirit may provide a source of strength, it must reflexively balance identification and division to avoid the snares of polarization. Thus, their rhetoric demonstrates that collectivity does not *inherently* provide a more peaceful counter to melodrama. When coupled with a traditionally heroic frame rather than a comic frame, collectivity can be dangerous. Thus, Winter Soldier protest rhetoric reminds us that collective thinking must be countered with humility to avoid the harmful tendencies of absolutism.

Veterans convened the hearing to directly counter rhetoric that rendered My Lai an anomaly, depicting violence as rare catastrophe rather than the norm during the Vietnam War. It is important, however, to remember that the brutalities the winter soldiers address are not confined solely to the Vietnam War. Though it has received far less discussion, U.S. soldiers committed acts of rape during the Second World War as well. Criminal wartime violence is not rare, but media representation of the wartime atrocities of its own nation is. Currently, too little is known of the degree to which U.S. soldiers have sexually abused non-combatants on the warfronts of Iraq and Afghanistan. Operating in a similar discursive pattern to the My Lai Massacre, more recent conduct at Abu Ghraib provides one of the few glimpses of sexual violence against civilians in the War on Terror in public discourse. Both Abu Ghraib and My Lai were exposed to the

U.S. public only after accidental release of incriminating photographs taken by soldiers. Both cases remind us that sexual assault pervades cultures mired by dehumanization. Both incidents received a plethora of sensationalized media attention at the beginning, but were quickly minimized in public memory. For both, the media focused upon a single scapegoat. Lieutenant Calley became synonymous with the My Lai Massacre and Specialist Lynndie England became synonymous with sexual torture at Abu Ghraib. As Shannon Holland observes, the Bush Administration responded to photographs of the scandal with a “a series of public statements that portrayed the abuses as isolated instances perpetrated by ‘a handful of people,’ and a ‘few bad apples.’”<sup>5</sup> In both situations, the focus on individual deviants inhibited mainstream criticism of the U.S. military system. In short, despite the passage of over three decades, rhetoric surrounding the Abu Ghraib scandal mirrored rhetoric surrounding the My Lai Massacre. Seeing atrocities like My Lai and Abu Ghraib as the norms, rather than the exceptions, to military conflict demonstrates that ideas of a virtuous war is an unattainable ideal that enables violent and destructive international conflict. Sustained critical public reflection on these crimes would mark an important step toward preventing and productively address the sexual abuse of civilians during war.

In chapter four, I draw from the discursive patterns observed in the previous two chapters in order to analyze the melodramatic constructs of heroism in narratives about the contemporary problem of soldier-on-soldier rape in the U.S. military. Extensive advocacy efforts brought the epidemic levels of military rape to the attention of the U.S. public. Yet, the military avoids the full brunt of criticism and escapes radical and more productive cultural and policy changes through narratives with melodramatic

underpinnings. As with the My Lai Massacre, media and politicians tend to present intra-soldier military rapes as isolated scandals. Further, U.S. discourse privatizes sexual violence by depicting the rare soldier convicted of rape as a deviant predator, rather than a manifestation of a deeply entrenched cultural problem. Sexual assaults committed by soldiers who fit the tenets of white hegemonic masculinity receive less public scrutiny. Often allegations against such men are simply denied. In U.S. culture, we too often believe that “hero” simply would not commit such a crime.

Indeed, the same discursive patterns that grant impunity to “heroes” and associate sexual violence only with stereotypical deviants may be found within rape culture as a whole. Both military culture and rape culture mirror the absolutist categories of gender, race, and good and evil exhibited by melodramatically framed narratives. Within melodramatic narratives, the hero’s position as protector grants him dominance over not just the Other but also those coded feminine. This leads to toxic manifestations of masculinity. By revealing that socially accepted presumptions of gender and violence are actually rhetorical constructs that follow a melodramatic narrative structure, I open the possibility for cultural critique. Other feminist scholars confirm that revealing the ideological influences that guide conceptions of gender is essential in combatting rape culture. Because sexual violence results from a gender hierarchy that renders the masculine superior to, and dominant over, the feminine, it is crucial that scholars of gendered violence unsettle this hierarchy. Revealing the performative or rhetorical nature of gender norms enables us to understand that rape is not a consequence of hormones and psychopathic individuals. This opens possibilities for challenging the cultural processes and norms that contribute to gendered violence. When we understand rape as a

consequence of cultural norms and rigid gender socialization, strategies for cultural intervention, as opposed to simply punitive measures, may be conceived.

Many of the advocacy efforts to address military sexual violence advance possibilities for cultural intervention, thus modeling a productive way to engage with rape culture. These efforts, which emphasize survivor testimony in the form of documentaries, Congressional speeches, grassroots activism, and new media outreach, counter the melodramatic tendency to privatize sexual violence by exposing how cultural norms contribute to the military rape epidemic. Rather than blaming the problem on rogue individuals, survivor advocates illuminate that the military as an institution exacerbates sexual violence and fails to support them. However, these efforts remind us that not all systemic critiques of the military, or personal testimonies of rape are inherently transgressive. The documentary, *The Invisible War*, advanced a convincing argument revealing how the systemic flaws of the U.S. military contribute to intra-soldier sexual assault and achieved widespread critical and audience acclaim. However, the film reiterates certain aspects of the melodramatic structure, especially as it genders victimhood by framing military sexual violence as a woman's problem.

If rape culture is inflected with melodrama, then the degree to which rhetoric departs the melodramatic frame offers an effective standard for judging anti-rape activism. In other words, the most productive advocacy efforts against military sexual violence avoid melodramatic patterns of victimhood, villainy, and heroism with the aim of rehumanizing those who have been objectified by sexual violence. This strategy appears most strongly in the series of YouTube clips that comprise the "interactive documentary" created by Protect Our Defenders. As with the Nurses of Bataan and the

Winter Soldiers, the rhetorical practices of these “Survivor Stories” exhibit elements of a healing heroism. As such, they model an effective rhetorical engagement with rape culture that eschews melodrama. In doing so, these personal testimonies serve a therapeutic purpose, offering a source of healing both for those who narrate their traumas and their fellow survivors of sexual violence. Rather than positioning the feminine as inherently vulnerable these videos challenge the gender norms of victimization. The “Survivor Stories” grant equal opportunity for narratives from both male and female survivors. Further disassociating the feminine from weakness, these narratives also elucidate the power of feminine-associated performances and discourse. Sharing personal stories is positioned as a source of empowerment, granting agency to those objectified by gendered violence. These narratives also avoid absolute caricatures. They offer a nuanced critique of the military’s systemic flaws that contribute to the epidemic without reducing the military to a wholly villainous institution. In short, the rhetoric of Protect Our Defenders productively counters melodramatic caricature, polarization, and gendered victimhood.

As such, my analysis of advocacy efforts in this final chapter indicates that new media advocacy might hold special potential for creating resistance that challenges hegemonic discourse without being recuperated by dominant discourses. While the *Invisible War*, certainly captured public attention, it reiterated harmful discourses of feminine vulnerability. It is likely that this repetition of a trope familiar within U.S. culture enabled the documentary to achieve such widespread acclaim. While the interactive documentary, *Survivor’s Stories*, may be lesser known, it more strongly challenges rape culture. Because new media platforms are a lower budget, and are,

therefore, less dependent on external revenue, they may provide a space where more transgressive discourses may flourish. Additionally, because its interactive media platform allows viewers to choose whichever clips they prefer, and likely best identify with, they offer an experience tailored to viewers tastes. This is especially important for those viewers grappling with their own traumas of sexual violence.

In this analysis, then, we are reminded to be skeptical of sexual violence advocacy efforts that reinvokel melodramatic gender norms. The importance of sexual violence advocacy efforts that challenge traditional gender hierarchies cannot be overstated. Researchers of the psychological dynamics of rape note that sexual violence often stems from a perceived hierarchy and distinction between masculinity and femininity. Thus, disrupting certain social norms of gender offers a key rhetorical strategy by which to dispute the harmful myths of rape culture. Studying military sexual assault as melodrama and exposing its incongruence with lived experiences reveals that notions of masculine action and feminine passivity are not byproducts of nature, but rhetorical constructs. The performances of the Nurses of Bataan, the dissent of the Winter Soldiers, and the advocacy of veteran survivors reveal that human relations prove more complicated than melodrama allows. These spaces of dissension develop new patterns for understanding violence, power, and gender.

As Foucault warns, however, even new ways of understanding we unearth by examining counter-discourses may eventually present themselves as coherent, absolute, and necessary. Put simply, spaces of dissension may become stagnant, dominating myths as well. In drawing from humanist myth theory, I do not hold that myths are inherently negative, but when they become calcified, when they hinder new rhetorical possibilities,

myths can become problematic. Given this rhetorical tendency, rearticulations of militarization should be seen as incoherent and complex themselves. My reading of the performances of the Nurses of Bataan establishes a healing heroism, yet, as I allude to in previous paragraphs, the subsequent examples of healing heroism demonstrate potential challenges to this frame. The Winter Soldiers show us that if collective identity is superficially established in opposition to Others it may enable hatred and ethnocentricity. This shows the importance of avoiding reductive tendencies even in spaces of dissension. Survivor testimonies in the contemporary advocacy efforts against military sexual assault reveal that systemic critique may still construct problematic notions of victimhood. The success of the *Survivor Stories* interactive documentary in eschewing the melodramatic frame demonstrates how calcification and caricature may be resisted through emphasis on multi-vocal narratives. Toward this end, I pose healing heroism as a flexible interpretative model.

The melodramatic frame provides a lens for scholars and activists to interpret and critique rhetoric of sexual violence. Melodrama offers a heuristic against which to measure the productivity of discourse about sexual violence. The degree to which a discourse counters the absolutist tendencies of melodramatic rhetoric indicates the health of that discourse. As Burke reminds us, humans are notoriously rotten with perfection, the nature of language guides us to seek perfection, completeness, absolutes. Melodrama is another manifestation of this. Burke's rhetorical project points out the "rottenness" of this tendency, noting that collective life is rarely so simple. Thus, when narratives too closely follow a melodramatic frame, we need to look carefully for the complexities of a

situation. When melodramatic caricatures appear in a narrative, it suggests that that narrative is likely rotten with perfection.

Indeed, public discourse circulating about the epidemic of military sexual assault as I write this conclusion demonstrates tendencies toward melodramatic perfection. In my initial proposal for this project, I planned to examine the ways that melodrama contributed to the silencing of sexual assault. However, due to the productive advocacy of veteran survivors, mainstream news outlets more regularly report on military rape. This is certainly a testament to the success of the advocates fighting the issues, but it does not indicate that U.S. public culture has relinquished melodramatic rhetoric. As discussions about military rape become more normative, they have also become inflected with melodrama. These journalistic narratives almost exclusively feature the “typical” damsel in distress. The media regularly features women in emotional stories of the horror that occurs within the dark hidden corners of military camps and barracks. White, young, heterosexual, cisgendered women receive greater proportions of this media coverage than any other type of service member who has experienced sexual abuse. As a result, the degree to which U.S. soldiers rape civilians on the warfronts in Afghanistan and Iraq is often ignored. If men and women within the U.S. military face epidemic levels sexual assault, it is logical to presume non-combatant civilians on the warfront risk abuse from the same attackers. However, there has been little public exploration as to the degree to which civilians in Iraq and Afghan face sexual violence. A few isolated stories of sexual abuse have percolated into public awareness, such as the 2006 gang rape and murder of a 14-year-old girl in Iraq.<sup>6</sup> However, civilian abuse remains hidden by melodramatic “scandal” rhetoric that frames the incident as a rare occurrence. Stories that follow a

melodramatic frame that focus on individual villains rather than cultural issues should be a warning sign that relations between soldiers and civilians is far more complicated.

I do not wish for my critique of military culture as melodrama to become reductive. It is harmful to characterize *all* military rhetoric as melodramatic. Likewise, it is harmful to see melodrama as operating *exclusively* within military discourse. As veteran survivors and their families indicate, it is simply untrue that every member of the military has committed or is complicit with sexual assault. To think so performs melodrama in reverse. Nor do I wish to confine harmful discourses about rape to the realm of the military. As I will discuss further, melodramatic narratives of rape circulate well beyond military boundaries. The dynamics of sexual assault within the civilian realm and other institutions parallel military rape dynamics. As such, my assessment of the melodramatic nature of rhetoric about military-associated rape should be seen as a heuristic for examining discourse about sexual assault in multiple arenas rather than a prescriptive assessment of the military.

Unfortunately, however, mainstream news outlets, and even researchers of the issue, all too often misrepresent the problem of sexual assault by interpreting the issue as somehow “unique” to the military. Within these narratives, the military itself becomes the caricature of the villain. Male service members lose their individuality, they become the faceless, generic enemies lurking in dark corners. Spokespersons frequently proclaim major differences between rape in the military and civilian realms. News coverage of the epidemic repeatedly sensationalizes the epidemic levels of sexual assault in military. For example, *CNN* quotes J.D. Hamel, a Marine veteran and Yale Law student who asserts that because military rape survivors are connected with their attackers through the

military system, they are less able to find safety and justice. “In the civilian world,” Hamel says, “sexual assault victims can quit their jobs, go to court, go to the media.”<sup>7</sup> Even *Invisible War* producer, Amy Ziering, over-emphasizes the difference between military and civilian rape. “The ramifications and the prosecution of perpetrators is *not* commensurate to what goes on in civilian life. The treatment of survivors is not commensurate to what goes on in civilian life.”<sup>8</sup> However, rape in the military realm shares more commonalities with rape in the civilian realm than not. Ziering’s statement blatantly ignores a harsh reality of sexual assault: that *most* survivors are attacked by someone they know. This is true of gendered violence worldwide. According to statistics compiled by the United Nations, “The most common form of violence experienced by women globally is physical violence inflicted by an *intimate partner*, with women beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused.”<sup>9</sup> Within the U.S. civilian population, 73% of all adult rape survivors were attacked by someone they knew, 35% were committed by an intimate partner or relative.<sup>10</sup> Many civilian women face the same injustices that arise from being abused by someone they thought they could trust, someone they regularly encounter in their daily lives.

I do not mean to say that there are no unique cruelties of military sexual abuse. Rather, in civilian and military realms alike, only the most privileged survivor may file rape allegations without serious negative consequences. Civilian survivors, indeed, may escape the situation without being legally punished for going AWOL. They also have the legal right to sue. However, the differences between the access to justice that survivors of sexual assault have within and outside of the military should not be overstated. Each institution in which rape culture flourishes presents its own unique barriers to justice for

survivors. As someone who has volunteered as an advocate for my local sexual assault crisis center, I have heard countless stories of the structural limitations that prevent civilians from getting support. Indeed, *most* survivors of sexual assault are treated poorly and discouraged from receiving fair legal treatment. Many stay in situations in which they encounter sexual assault at work or by an intimate partner or family member because they lack the financial security to escape. Often, if an abuser occupies a position of power, a survivor of assault in the civilian realm may experience cultural and legal barriers to justice. Many survivors cannot financially afford to hire lawyers. Language barriers prevent immigrants from accessing legal assistance. Many civilian rape cases reveal that any individual who departs from the public's imagination of the ideal victim may face family, friends, communities, and a news media that side with their attackers. Due to the stigma that still surrounds victims of sexual assault, social barriers discourage many survivors from coming forward with their experience of abuse. Therefore, I view this project not as excavation to uncover the dirty melodramatic secret of the military, but as a critique of totalizing rhetoric that rely on caricature and polarization in order to explore the role such rhetoric plays in exacerbating rape culture.

The halo effect demonstrates another arena where the melodramatic frame provides a productive heuristic for discourses about rape. The hero factor that prevents military officials from believing that esteemed officers would participate in rape also appears in civilian rape cases. Allegations against presumably upstanding men and boys are too often discredited or minimized. Throughout the time I have been researching military rape, a number of incidents of sexual violence in the sports realm have permeated public discourse. Jerry Sandusky, an assistant football coach at Pennsylvania

State University, escaped punishment for years because his superiors simply could not contend with the notion that he might be molesting young boys. When two high school football players from Steubenville Ohio were convicted of raping a young high school woman, the melodramatic halo-effect occurred again. Despite sickening behaviors documented via Twitter and YouTube videos, many journalists expressed more sympathy for the young men who committed the crimes than for the woman whose life was disrupted by sexual assault. A rapist may be an otherwise charming, intelligent, and successful individual. Our inability to see the complexity of people's identity, our inability to recognize that a person who may behave positively in one realm may behave violently in another realm, puts blinders on our public discussions and judicial deliberations about sexual violence. The racial privileging evident in the hero factor also warrants further exploration. While numerous "upstanding" white men deemed too heroic to commit sexual violence, too many African American men not only receive harsher punishment when they commit sexual assaults, but throughout history many have been erroneously blamed for sexual violence.

Although I begin to explore the rhetorical dynamics that surround male experiences of sexual abuse in this project, more extensive analysis of the experiences of male servicemen who have been sexually assaulted is necessary. While the number of women raped in military and civilian sectors are relatively consistent, statistics indicate that men in the military experience sexual violence more frequently than their civilian counterparts. One study found that one in fifteen men reported being sexually assaulted in the military, whereas statistics reveal that in U.S. culture at large, one in 33 men are assaulted.<sup>11</sup> Yet, the issue of the sexual assault of male soldiers is discussed less

frequently in the media and more mainstream advocacy efforts, such as the *Invisible War*. It is difficult to know if the statistical differences of male rape in military and civilian spheres reflect a cultural difference or if this difference is because the military's highly controlled environment allows for better records. Nonetheless, due to the fact that male sexual assault challenges the common imagery of the rape victim in the U.S. public imaginary, further study of the particular rhetorical dynamics surrounding the issue in both civilian and military realms is especially important. If melodramatic masculinity is strength and dominance over women, then to be dominated by another man is to lose one's "masculinity" in the traditional sense. As a result, male survivors are blamed for not fighting their attacker off or accused of homosexuality. Because of this, illumination of male survivors' actual material experiences in the public sphere holds the potential to further degender victimization. It may further illuminate feminists' point that rape is motivated by power and control rather than lust. To make clear these motives of rape invites critical intervention into patriarchal culture.

Though the statistics regarding sexual violence against men differ starkly between the military and civilian realms, statistics on sexual violence against women, at least in certain sectors of the civilian life, are alarmingly similar. Rape in the university bears striking similarities to rape in the military. Similar to the estimates that 23% of women in the military are sexually assaulted by their fellow soldiers, research indicates that 1 in 4 women on college campuses are sexually assaulted.<sup>12</sup> As in the military realm, there is little reporting of the issue among university students. Similar to the estimates that only 13.5% of military survivors report being raped, research has shown that only 11.5% of college women who have been sexually assaulted reported their experience to the

authorities.<sup>13</sup> Just as assaulted soldiers fear that reporting their attack will adversely impact their military careers, those raped in university settings worry that reporting will adversely impact their college careers. If, for example, a female freshman were to report being attacked by a prominent member of her university, she could be blacklisted from entering a sorority—an activity that, for some, offers an important opportunity to build both a social support network and connections necessary for successful careers after college. Finally, as the issue of sexual violence in the military has made headlines, primarily as a result of survivor-led activism, sexual violence on college campuses has recently been receiving public attention due to the perseverance of student activists. These similarities inspire several questions. How do institutional structures and rhetoric contribute to rape culture on college campuses? How does university discourse compare to military discourse? In the absence of an obvious external enemy, does university rhetoric still follow a melodramatic frame when discussing sexual violence? What are the similarities and differences between the rhetorical strategies of activists fighting against sexual violence on college campus and those in the military? Does student-led activism advance healing or therapeutic discourses? The issue of sexual assault on college campuses is another issue that warrants future research to address these and other questions.

Reading the melodrama of military narratives performs several crucial functions in addressing rape culture. To envision sexual assault as a problem of patriarchal culture, rather than a private crime of deviants, opens a number of possibilities. For one, this has the potential to eliminate the prevalence of the halo-effect. If we critique the culture that allows men to believe that they are entitled to women's bodies, then we can understand

how an otherwise reputable man might engage in sexual misconduct. We can understand that those who have been sexually assaulted by a “good old boy” may be more likely to have his or her experience believed. Therefore, to view rape as indicative of a cultural flaw rather than as evidence of a particular individual’s evil has the potential to enable social justice. It allows us to adopt a more generous attitude toward those involved in crimes of sexual assault and war, while simultaneously increasing the opportunities for justice for sexual assault survivors. By rejecting privatized conceptions of rape, possibilities for transformation on the state and cultural levels may be illuminated.

Perhaps the greatest trick of melodramatic rhetoric is the fact that although it implies that heroes will naturally protect victims, it is not the “weak” that are protected. Rather, the prominence of melodrama in political rhetoric, instead, preserves and justifies traditional masculine heroism. As evident in the case of My Lai and in the epidemic of soldier-on-soldier rape, absolute notions of heroism often protect sexual attackers from being prosecuted. Because we do not associate U.S. soldiers, presumed “good” men, with sexual deviance, we tend to ignore criminal allegations against them. What these examples indicate is that while the mantra of patriarchal heroism claims to take the interest of those in jeopardy to heart, offering protection to the vulnerable, what this mindset often ends up protecting is the “hero” himself.

Reflecting back upon the stories of Jessica Lynch and Darchelle Williams reveals just who and what the proliferation of melodramatic discourse protects. The exhilarating story of the Lynch rescue and the scandalous rape allegations that followed reinvigorated public support for the Iraq War at a time when confidence in the administration was low. The public rallied behind narratives of patriotism, bravery, and homecoming as soldiers

safely returned Lynch to her pastoral abode in West Virginia. As did Davy's re-awakening upon receiving the deed to her husband's farm once she left the Philippines in *So Proudly We Hail!*, Lynch's repatriation saved the face of the U.S. as a virtuous nation. Swept away by this tale of heroism, public critique of the war was diminished. The Williams story, too, reveals how melodrama serves patriarchal interests. In her case, melodrama provided as a foil that enabled a perpetrator of sex abuse to evade repercussion for his actions. The violation of an African American mother of two at the hands of a U.S. soldier, it appears, is not so seductive as tales of the endangered white virgin. Unlike an encounter between a white woman and brown foreigners, Darchelle's rape was not automatically presumed unwanted, despite her allegations of sexual assault. This "halo effect" impacts thousands of men and women each year who, like Darchelle, are raped by individuals whose presumed heroism invites denial that they would engage in crime.

When read as melodrama, these experiences seem unjust and absurd. The U.S. public, however, regularly absorbs such stories with little critique. Because the notion that young white women require heroes to rescue them from lascivious villains seems so normal, melodramatic rhetoric too often evades critical reflection. It is only when we recognize these narratives as ascribing to a melodramatic frame and by seeking to understand the complexities hidden by this narrative structure that we may expose the hyperbole and hypocrisy of melodramatic heroism. Doing so allows us to realize that melodramatic notions of chivalry do not serve the interest of the feminine or those presumed weak by patriarchal standards. Rather, idealized notions of chivalry actually

protect white men from being punished for their own unjust and violent acts of abuse, dominance, and war.

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<sup>1</sup> Deepa Kumar, "War Propaganda and the (Ab)uses of Women: Media Constructions of the Jessica Lynch Story" *Feminist Media Studies* 4 (2004): 297-98; and Nicholas Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *Politics and Propaganda: Weapons of Mass Seduction* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 59.

<sup>2</sup> Nicola Henry, *War and Rape: Law, Memory and Justice* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 6.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Toward History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 43.

<sup>4</sup> John Bodnar, "Bad Dreams about the Good War: Bataan," in *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials*, ed. Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 140-41.

<sup>5</sup> Shannon L. Holland, "Gendered Explanations for the Crisis at Abu Ghraib" *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 6 (2009): 247.

<sup>6</sup> This AlterNet article is one of the few examples of media that explores this example as potentially indicative of larger cultural trends: Gail McGowan Mellor "Disturbing Account of Wanton Rape and Murder in Iraq Emerges from U.S. Soldier Trials" *AlterNet Women's Media Center* May 20, 2009, [http://www.alternet.org/story/140155/disturbing\\_account\\_of\\_wanton\\_rape\\_and\\_murder\\_in\\_iraq\\_emerges\\_from\\_u.s.\\_soldier\\_trials](http://www.alternet.org/story/140155/disturbing_account_of_wanton_rape_and_murder_in_iraq_emerges_from_u.s._soldier_trials), (accessed February 8, 2014). Instead, most coverage of the rape follows the storyline of the following CNN article, which only examines the individual perpetrators involved: "Ex-Soldier Could Face Death Over Iraq Murders, Rape" *CNN.com World*, May 8, 2009, <http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/05/08/kentucky.iraq.soldier.rape/> (accessed February 8, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> David S. Martin, "Rape Victims Say Military Labels Them 'Crazy,'" *CNN Health* April 14, 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/04/14/health/military-sexual-assaults-personality-disorder/> (accessed February 8, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Alyssa Rosenberg "'The Invisible War' Producer Amy Ziering On Sexual Assault in the Military, Rape's Impact on Men, and Film and Social Change" *ThinkProgress* June 21, 2012, <http://thinkprogress.org/alyssa/2012/06/21/503360/the-invisible-war/> (accessed February 8, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> United Nations, "Ending Violence Against Women and Girls" *Resources for Speakers on Global Issues* <http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/briefingpapers/endviol/index.shtml>

<sup>10</sup> Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) "The Offenders" <http://www.rainn.org/get-information/statistics/sexual-assault-offenders> (accessed February 8, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) "Who Are the Victims," <http://www.rainn.org/get-information/statistics/sexual-assault-victims> (accessed February 8, 2014).

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<sup>12</sup> Kate B. Wolitzky-Taylor, Heidi S. Resnick, Ananda B. Amstadter, Jenna L. McCauley, Kenneth J. Ruggiero, Dean G. Kilpatrick, "Reporting Rape in a National Sample of College Women," *Journal of American College Health*, 59 (2011): 582.

<sup>13</sup> Kate B. Wolitzky-Taylor, Heidi S. Resnick, Ananda B. Amstadter, Jenna L. McCauley, Kenneth J. Ruggiero, and Dean G. Kilpatrick, "Reporting Rape in a National Sample of College Women" *Journal of American College Health* 59 (2011): 582-587. According to the study, only 2.7% of rapes involving drugs and/or alcohol reported, 585. Minority status (i.e., nonwhite race) was associated with lower likelihood of reporting, whereas sustaining injuries during the rape was associated with increased likelihood of reporting, 587.

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Yesil, Bilge. ““Who Said this is a Man’s War?’: Propaganda, Advertising Discourse and the Representation of War Worker Women During the Second World War.” *Media History* 10 no. 2 (2004): 103–17.

Young, Iris Marion. “The Logic of Masculinist Protection: Reflections on the Current Security State.” In *Women and Citizenship* edited by Marilyn Friedman, 15–34. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Zurbriggen, Eileen L. “Rape, War and the Socialization of Masculinity: Why Our Refusal to Give Up War Ensures that Rape Cannot Be Eradicated” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 34 no. 4 (2010): 538–49.

## CURRICULUM VITA

Valerie Wieskamp, PhD

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### Education

*Indiana University, Bloomington*

Ph.D., Department of Communication and Culture: 2015.

Areas of Emphasis: Rhetoric and Public Culture, Gender Studies Minor,  
Certificate in Communication Pedagogy.

*Dissertation:* “Sexual Assault and the Melodramatic Mythos of War.”

Dissertation Director: Robert Terrill; Dissertation Committee Members:  
Robert Ivie, Phaedra Pezzullo, and Purnima Bose.

*DePaul University*

M.A., Multicultural Communication: 2007.

*Thesis:* “Immigrant Crime in the News: Case Studies in the Hmong  
Community”

Thesis Director: John McMurria; Thesis Committee Member:  
Xing (Lucy) Lu.

*Iowa State University*

B.F.A., Graphic Design, English Minor: 2002.

*Graduated with honors and distinction.*

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### Publications

“The Nurses of Bataan: Liberating Wartime Heroes from Melodrama” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 16.1 (2013): 29–58.

“Sexual Assault and the My Lai Massacre: The Erasure of Sexual Violence from Public Memory of the Vietnam War,” in *Mythologizing the Vietnam War: Visual Culture and Mediated Memory*, eds, Jennifer Good, Val Williams, Paul Lowe and Brigitte Lardinois (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 131–47.

*Public Blog*

“My Lai, Sexual Assault and the Black Blouse Girl: Forty-Five Years Later, One of America’s Most Iconic Photos Hides Truth in Plain Sight” *BagNews Notes*, October 29, 2013 (<http://tinyurl.com/BNMyLai>)

### *Encyclopedia Entries*

*Forthcoming: "Seneca Falls Convention" Global Economic History: An Encyclopedia of People, Ideas and Institutions that Created the Modern World Economy* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc).

*Forthcoming: "Suffrage Movement" Global Economic History: An Encyclopedia of People, Ideas and Institutions that Created the Modern World Economy* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc).

### *Reviews*

"Standing in the Intersection: Feminist Voices, Feminist Practices in Communication Studies ed. by Karma R. Chávez, Cindy L. Griffin (Review)" *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 17.1 (2014), 183–86.

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### **Teaching Experience**

*2007–Present:* Indiana University, Associate Instructor

CMCL 121: Public Speaking, Instructor of record – Fall 2007, Spring 2008, Summer 2009

CMCL 122: Interpersonal Communication: A Cultural Approach, Instructor of Record – Fall 2011, Spring 2012, Fall 2013.

CMCL 204: Amazon Rhetoric: Women Warriors in U.S. Culture – Summer 2012

CMCL 205: Introduction to Communication and Culture, Teaching Assistant – Fall 2009 & Fall 2012, Instructor of record – Spring 2010 & Spring 2013

CMCL 222: Democracy and Deliberation, Instructor of record – Fall 2008, Spring 2009

CMCL 323: Speech Composition and New Media Technology – Fall 2014, Spring 2015 (<http://speechcomposition.wordpress.com>)

CMCL 324: Persuasion and Public Advocacy – Fall 2010, Spring 2011

CMCL 340: Rhetoric of Social Movements – Spring 2014

CMCL 497: Independent Study: Discursive Construction of Masculinities – Spring 2010

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## **Fellowships, Grants & Scholarships**

- 2013      Alta Conference on Argumentation Graduate Student Travel Scholarship
- 2010-11    Teagle Fellowship for the Collegium on Inquiry and Action in Teaching
- 2010      Indiana University Department of Communication and Culture Travel Grant
- 2004      DePaul University Richard DeCordova Scholarship
- 2000      Art Directors Association of Iowa Scholarship
- 

## **Peer-Reviewed Conference Presentations & Panels**

“Sexual Assault In the U.S. Military: How Gender Norms of the Past Shape Our Present Rape Culture” National Communication Association, Chicago, IL, November 2014

“The FORCE of Parody: Challenging College Rape Culture with Humor” Southern States Communication Association, New Orleans, LA, April 2014.

“Masculinity, Affect, and War Protest: Counterpublic Testimony and the Winter Soldier Investigation” Southern States Communication Association, New Orleans, LA, April 2014.

Roundtable: “Steubenville’s Teachable Moments: Engendering Feminist Activism in a Rape Culture Through Connection, Critique, and Communication” National Communication Association, Washington, DC, November 2013.

“Argumentation, Testimony and Pain: Personal Narratives of Abuse in the Social Movement to Address Military Sexual Assault” Alta Conference on Argumentation, Alta, UT, August 2013.

“Critiquing the Melodramatic Mythos of War: Examining the Unheard Voices of ‘Victims’” Southern States Communication Association, Louisville, KY, April 2013.

“Melodrama and Sexual Assault in the My Lai Massacre” National Communication Association, Orlando, FL, November 2012.

“Citizenship and the Security State: Lessons in Neo-Liberalism from The Unit” National Communication Association, Orlando, FL, November 2012.

“Critiquing Corporate Feminism in Kabul: A Rhetorical Analysis on How Ironic Juxtaposition Enables the Subaltern to Speak” National Communication Association, New Orleans, LA, November 2011.

Roundtable: "Raise the Draw Bridge?: A Roundtable Discussion on Stanley Fish and the Responsibilities of the University" National Communication Association, San Francisco, CA, November 2010.

"She's Every Woman: How *Time's* Synecdochal Narratives about Women in Politics Functions to Reify Hegemonic Gender Hierarchies" National Communication Association, Chicago, IL, November 2009.

"Using Rhetorical Theories of Cultural Production to Understand Myths Surrounding Beauty, Femininity and Age" National Communication Association Conference, San Diego, CA, November 2008.

"Can Commercial Advertising Transcend Profit Motives to Engage in Successful Critique of the Representation of Women in the Media?" National Communication Association, San Diego, CA, November 2008.

"Bias in News Reporting of Immigrant Crime" Accepted as *Top Three Student Paper*, International Communication Association, San Francisco, CA, May 2007.

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### **Invited Talks & Presentations**

"Melodrama, Narrative and Online Advocacy: Public Discourses of Military Sexual Violence" Indiana University Department of Communication and Culture Colloquium Series, Bloomington, IN, November 2013.

"Gender and the My Lai Massacre: The In/Visibility of Sexual Assault" Indiana University Cultural Studies Conference, Bloomington, IN, April 2012.

"Narratives of Rape and War" *Works In Progress Lunch Series*, Bloomington, IN, February 2012.

"Media Imperialism and Representation of the Hmong Refugee Community," DePaul University, Chicago IL, November 2006.

"Violence and the Hmong Refugee Community: A Case Study in Cross-Cultural Adaptation" DePaul University, Chicago, IL, October 2006.

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### **Honors Seminar**

Seminar Participant: "Affect, Embodiment, and Wartime Sexual Assault," *Affect, the Public Sphere, and Social Movements*, Wayne State University Doctoral Honors Seminar, Detroit, MI, June 2013.

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## **Workshop Organizing**

2013 Co-Organizer, 2013 *Annual Midwest Winter Workshop* for graduate student research in rhetoric, Bloomington, IN.

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## **Editorial Experience**

2008-10 Editing Intern for *Quarterly Journal of Speech*

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## **Public Press**

Michael Shaw, "Everybody Knows the 'Napalm Girl'; but How Come Nobody Knows the 'Black Blouse Girl'? 45 Years Later, My Lai, the Military and Sexual Abuse" *HuffPost Blog* November 13, 2013 (<http://tinyurl.com/HuffBlackBlouse>)

"The Truth Behind Iconic Vietnam Photo" *HuffPost Live* November 13, 2013 (<http://tinyurl.com/HPLiveBlackBlouse>)

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## **Scholarly Workshops**

Workshop Essay: "Sexual Assault and the Melodramatic Mythos of War" Annual Midwest Winter Workshop, Madison, WI, January 2012.

Workshop Essay: "Hero as Healer: Recovering the Nurses of Bataan" Annual Midwest Winter Workshop, Iowa City, IA, January 2011.

Workshop Essay: "(Re)Appropriating the Feminine From War Propaganda to Suffrage Rhetoric" Annual Midwest Winter Workshop, Chicago, IL, January 2010.

Workshop Essay: "Media 'Onslaught': Commercial Advertising and Social Critique in a Neoliberal Context" Annual Midwest Winter Workshop, Bloomington, IN, January 2008.

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## **Conference Service**

2011, 13 Reviewer for the NCA Rhetoric and Communication Theory Division

2013 Reviewer for the NCA Feminist and Women's Studies Division

2010 NCA Rhetoric and Communication Theory Division Nominating Committee

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## **Departmental Service**

- 2011-12 Graduate Student Representative, Communication & Culture Undergraduate Affairs Committee
- 2008-09 Graduate Student Mentor
- 2008-09 Representative for Indiana University Graduate & Professional Student Organization
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## **Community Engagement**

- 2012 –*Present* Middle Way House Rape Crisis Center On Site Advocate, Bloomington, IN
- 2011 –*Present* Middle Way House Domestic Violence Crisis Line Volunteer, Bloomington, IN
- 

## **Professional Memberships**

- 2007 –*Present* National Communication Association
- 2012 –*Present* Southern States Communication Association
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## **Professional Experience in Communication Field**

- 2007 –*Present* Communication Manager, EVALCORP Research & Consulting.  
Duties include: Part-time consulting for EVALCORP and its clients on web design, digital media strategy, public advocacy, graphic design, copy writing, and general communication strategy.
- 2004-07 Communication Associate, *Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities*, Chicago, IL.  
Duties included: Political advocacy, media outreach, graphic design, event planning, web design, and public relations.
- 2003-04 Designer, *Grove Communications*, Prospect Heights, IL. Duties included: graphic design, marketing, and copy writing.
- 2002 Designer, *Iowa State University M-Shop*, Ames, IA. Duties included: graphic design.