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**IMAGES OF AMERICAN WOMEN IN WAR:
PROTECTOR OR PROTECTED?**

by

Cynthia Lynn Nantais

A Thesis

**Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through the Department of Political Science
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts at the
University of Windsor**

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

1995

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the prevalent historic and contemporary images of American women in war. Evidence suggests that while men have been endowed with the responsibilities of the protector, women have been more comfortably considered as society's protected.

Chapter One provides a review of the relevant literature. It assesses the construction, endurance and implications of gender images, as well as the protector-protected relationship, in the American Military. Chapters Two and Three analyze the images of women over the history of American conflicts. It reveals that the images and roles of women as protected are subject to a process of expansion and contraction.

In Chapter Four, this framework is applied to the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Despite an expanded military role, women both on the homefront, and on the battle front, were portrayed by the media as the protected. This finding was reinforced by the case study of Gulf War POW, Melissa Rathbun-Nealy, which includes a content analysis and personal interview.

The Persian Gulf War failed to yield significant changes in the role or perception of women in the military. It could be argued that this is the result of the endurance of the image of women as protected. Thus, the Gulf War conformed to the historical pattern set out in Chapters Two and Three in that after its conclusion there was a significant contraction in the role of women. Further, the image of women as protected reasserted itself in postwar discourse. This conclusion is a departure from many popular and scholarly assessments.

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Chapter One Introduction

John Stuart Mill argues that citizenship and defense of the state are linked. The United States was founded upon Mill's liberal ideas that demand that "every one who receives the protection of society owes a return for the benefit." Each citizen of the state should accept a "share of the labours and sacrifices incurred for defending the society or its members from injury and molestation."¹ Historically, men have been endowed with full citizenship, bearing full responsibility for the defense of the state. Women have been excluded from this construction of American citizenship. While in principle the military has the potential to endow American women with full citizenship, the endurance of traditional images of women has made change difficult. The cultural ideals of man as "warrior" and woman as "nurturer" have created a link between man and war that is powerful and distinct. It is a link that, thus far, women have been unable to completely sever. Traditionally women have been most comfortably considered and understood as the protected, rather than as the protectors, of the state.

This chapter will examine the literature that helps to explain the role of gender images within the United States military; a relationship that Sharon Macdonald suggests is particularly "entrenched" and "unchallengeable."² To this end, it will first look at the construction and preservation of images within culture. The case of images of race will then be examined as a parallel to images of women. The specific case of African-

¹ John Stuart Mill, On Liberty(1859) (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1955), 132.

² Sharon Macdonald, "Drawing the Lines - Gender, Peace and War: An Introduction," in Images of Women in Peace and War, ed. Sharon Macdonald, Pat Holden and Shirley Ardener (London: Macmillan Education, 1987), 3.

American images offers a strong basis for comparison, because both gender and racial images have had significant social implications, particularly in the realms of politics and the military. The chapter then discusses various aspects of gender images, their foundation in the ideals of masculinity and femininity, their relation to military culture, their manifestations in the reality of the protector-protected dichotomy, and their implications for the roles of men and women within that culture.

Images and Their Import

C. Wheedon argues that culture consists of "structures and practices that uphold a particular order by legitimizing certain values, expectations, meanings and patterns of behaviour."³ She points out that discourse, or communication, structures society by creating and perpetuating images of various aspects of culture. These images endorse and maintain a particular version of reality. In essence, the creation and interpretation of images is important to what John Fiske sees as the principal function of culture; "the struggle for meanings."⁴ While there may be "an objective, empiricist reality out there," there is "no universal, objective way of perceiving and making sense of it" because "the only way we can perceive and make sense of reality is by the codes of our culture."⁵ The media are instruments in this process, perpetuating, interpreting and amplifying these images.

³ C. Wheedon in Julia Wood's Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender and Culture (California: Wadsworth, Ltd., 1994), 26.

⁴ John Fiske, Television Culture (London: Methuen, 1987) as cited in Robert Hanke, "Redesigning Men," in Men, Masculinity and the Media (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1992), 185.

⁵ John Fiske, Television Culture (London: Methuen, 1987), 4-5.

According to Julia T. Wood, the media are “the gatekeepers of information and images,” controlling what we “see and know by deciding ... how to represent issues and events” including “how to depict women and men.”⁶ Media’s influence in cultural life is substantial and pervasive. Social images of both race and gender are principally constructed and sustained through popular culture, political culture and military culture.

Macdonald argues that “imagery, like myth, ‘transforms history into nature’,” creating a reality that is vulnerable only to challenges that confront “the whole understanding of the way things are,” rather than just the status quo.⁸ Images involve “references to culturally assigned meanings.”⁹ Images ascribe meaning and create knowledge, yet they do not necessarily reflect objective reality. They are, instead, “shorthand representations of reality.” Kenneth Boulding argues that such images are significant because they “largely govern behaviour.”¹⁰

Boulding concludes that images are fundamentally resistant to change. They rarely undergo revolutionary transformation, or “conversion,” because the first impulse is to ignore or discredit deviations from the norm.¹¹ Generally, new information will at most be assimilated into the dominant image without fundamental change. Change in light of such resilience demands that the imagery itself be “subverted”, a difficult and prolonged process. It is particularly difficult where those images are deemed necessary to the preservation of the culture in which they have flourished.

⁶ Wood, Gendered Lives, 231.

⁷ R. Barthes, as cited in Macdonald, “Drawing the Lines,” 3.

⁸ Macdonald, “Drawing the Lines,” 3.

⁹ Jeff Hearn and Antonio Melechi, “The Transatlantic Gaze,” in Men, Masculinity and the Media (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1992), 217.

¹⁰ Kenneth Boulding, The Image (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1956), 6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

The consistency of prevailing images over time reveals the greatest parallel between the racial and gender images. Each of these socially constructed conceptions has found expression in popular, political and military cultures such that there has been institutional entrenchment and thus, great resistance to change.

Images of African-Americans

African-Americans have an embattled history in the American state. The images of African-Americans that have emerged over time reflect this history. These images and their manifestations in popular culture have had implications for political outcomes. A struggle against prevailing cultural images, therefore, has accompanied the fight for equality. These images have changed only gradually, and have slowed the progress of African-Americans as a group in social and political life. Despite this resilience, it is in the military that one may uncover the greatest evidence of an evolution in that image, and thus positive gains within the military culture.

American culture creates and sustains images of race, particularly those of African-Americans. Jannette L. Dates and William Barlow argue that the mass media “help to legitimate the inequalities in class and race relations” by perpetuating the “ideological hegemony of the dominant white culture.”¹² In the case of African-Americans, early depictions in popular theatre and literature created “standardized images of slaves and their masters.” For example, Dates and Barlow argue that the introduction as early as 1781 of the black character of Sambo and the “subsequent popularity of the ‘comic

¹² Jannette L. Dates and William Barlow, Split Image: African Americans in the Mass Media (Washington: Howard University Press, 1990), 4-6.

Negro' stereotype had profound social implications."¹³ They cite historian Joseph Boskin, who asserts that the use of Sambo, whose "dress was gaudy... manners pretentious ... [and] speech riddled with malapropisms," was "an extraordinary type of social control, at once extremely subtle, devious and encompassing." He further contends that the "objective for whites was to effect mastery, to render the black male powerless as a potential warrior, as a sexual competitor, as an economic adversary."¹⁴

Dates and Barlow find that these "initial representations were used to rationalize the enslavement of African people and to justify the institution of slavery in the South."¹⁵ As the issue of slavery grew in importance, the representation of minstrelsy in the entertainment genre, for example, tended to provide a reinforcing foundation for racism. These popular culture representations did not create a political climate supportive of emancipation among their working class white male audiences.

It was through the introduction of competing racial images that abolitionists were able to challenge the prevailing perception of the contented slave. For instance, powerful alternate perspectives were offered by Uncle Tom's Cabin. Dates and Barlow argue that the "contested image of the slave in the ante-bellum era" was in the "eye of an ideological storm that shattered the hegemony of the dominant white culture,"¹⁶ eventually resulting in a profound political result: the Civil War.

Images of African-Americans remained distorted after the elimination of slavery. The old stereotypes of the contented slave evolved into those of the faithful servant and

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 7.

¹⁶ Ibid., 9.

the domestic mammy, which reinforced a particular race-based power structure. This coincided with the emergence of the “bestial, brutish Negro” figure, menacing in his lust for white women.¹⁷ African-Americans were subject to the image-making processes of others, specifically white male Americans, and as such, the portraits painted failed to reflect reality.

Patricia A. Turner’s research suggests that the images of African-Americans are still distorted in mainstream popular culture. She argues that it is not the blatant caricatures, easily identified and dismissed, that are dangerous, but the “subtle distortions that have emerged and continue to dominate all genres of popular culture.”¹⁸ While these images are not traditionally thought of as “anti-black”, they are often the most influential and pervasive. Through her study of popular culture artifacts and visual media, she establishes possible links between prevalent images and the treatment of African-Americans in contemporary society. Turner suggests that objects, such as “black-boy” cast-iron lawn ornaments, may at first glance appear harmless. These “contemptible collectibles”, however, are material artifacts of the culture in which they are produced. The portrayal of the black image in these objects “establishes an insidious pattern -- a pattern that reinforces a limited range of social and political possibilities for blacks.”¹⁹ While these ornaments are products of the pre-civil rights era, the current reproduction and popularity of these items suggest that they continue to influence cultural norms. Turner argues that the overall joviality that is conveyed in these images implies a

¹⁷ Ibid., 11.

¹⁸ Patricia Turner, Ceramic Uncles & Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and their Influence on Culture (New York: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1994), xv.

¹⁹ Ibid., 7.

contentment with the past, including the years of slavery and servitude, allowing consumers to buy products that reinforce these images, comfortably "contradicting the harsh and uncomfortable realities"²⁰ of deprivation and denial.

According to bell hooks, the mass media are presently guilty of portraying African-American men, "as more violent than other men, (and) super-masculine," in images that "appeal to white audiences, who simultaneously fear them and are fascinated by them."²¹ Turner concurs, offering the image of Willie Horton as evidence. The image of Horton, an African-American male felon who had been released from prison ahead of schedule under Michael Dukakis, was effectively used in the 1988 Presidential election campaign to suggest a common, aggressive nature. The Bush campaign manipulated this image of an aggressive black male to its advantage. Turner thus concludes that "popular culture's tenacious affinity for uniformed, smiling black oldsters and gaudily dressed black youngsters has left many segments of the public ill-prepared for the emergence of black men who cannot be pigeonholed into these niches."²² Traditional negative images of African-Americans, therefore, can have powerful political repercussions.

The use of these images in a political context has repercussions for the role and success of African-Americans who challenge them as participants in the political arena. Jeffrey Prager argues that African-Americans in the United States are "neither integrated as equal members of the political community nor ignored or excluded as outsiders."²³

²⁰ Ibid., 16.

²¹ bell hooks, Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1990), 71.

²² Turner, Ceramic, 23.

²³ Jeffrey Prager, "American Political Culture and the Shifting Meaning of Race," in Ethnic and Racial Studies 10:1 (January 1987): 63.

Turner suggests that Americans are more comfortable with black entertainers and sports figures than with political and social activists and that the characteristics of the performer are often expected of the black politician.²⁴ African-American politicians are confronted with the duality of these images and the need to satisfy two often incongruent cultures to achieve greater success. Charles P. Henry argues that the themes that Jesse Jackson embraced during the 1984 and 1988 presidential campaigns had “deep roots in the black religious tradition” and he was therefore unable to attract a significant number of white voters whose ideas were born of white American culture.²⁵

The case of African-Americans and their history of military participation offers an interesting parallel to that of women in the armed services. Cynthia Enloe argues that it was anxieties over available manpower, not preoccupations with equality, that motivated the use of minorities in the Civil and First World Wars and that this has also been the case with the use of women in subsequent conflicts.²⁶ Enloe further argues that the military may be perceived by minority groups as a means of gaining “legitimacy and leverage”²⁷ in society. Demobilization, however, becomes “the state strategy for ‘normalizing’ ethnic relations so that the pre-war ethnic security design can prevail once again and the group least trusted is returned to the outer rim.”²⁸ Removing these groups compromises their

²⁴ Turner, *Ceramic*, 144.

²⁵ Charles P. Henry, *Culture and African American Politics* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 92.

²⁶ The Report of the Presidential Commission on Women in the Military cited Retired Army General Norman Schwarzkopf, who asserted that “Decisions on what roles women should play in war must be based on military standards, not women’s rights,” as reflective of its own perspective on the case against women in combat. They concluded that there had been “no compelling evidence that the military *needs* women to fight its wars.” (1992)

²⁷ Cynthia Enloe, *Ethnic Soldiers* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 83.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

ability to realize the post-war benefits of service, thereby undermining efforts to reorder the pre-war power dynamic. Women have also been casualties of this process, as their contributions are often made invisible or trivial in the post-war reconstruction. It is, in essence, a return to “normalcy”. (A process that will be discussed further below.)

Edwin Dorn contends that there are “instructive similarities”²⁹ between the integration of African-Americans and women into the American military. Following President Truman’s 1948 Executive Order 9981 calling for “equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed forces regardless of race,” a slow process of integration began in the face of “resistance and ignorance,” as racial myths prevailed.³⁰ One such myth contended that blacks had poorer night vision and therefore were precluded from flight training. This misconception, Dorn speculates, could be traced to films of the time that depicted black men as irrationally afraid of the dark.³¹ Dorn further points out that many recent arguments over women in the services and particularly over their exclusion from combat, are “reminiscent of arguments four decades ago over the role of blacks in an integrated military.”³² Such arguments were and are based on concerns over the inhibition of bonding and unit cohesion, as well as over their perceived “natural” differences in capability. Incidents of racial tensions in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s brought the realization to military officials that with respect to African Americans,

²⁹ Edwin Dorn, Statement before the Military Personnel and Compensation Subcommittee and the Defense Policy Panel of the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, Gender Discrimination in the Military, 29 and 30 July 1992, 21.

³⁰ Edwin Dorn, “Integrating Women into the Military,” in Brookings Review (Fall 1992): 5.

³¹ Dorn, Statement, 22.

³² Ibid.

“tolerance must be taught.”³³

The instruction of tolerance was accomplished through a “vigorous human relations campaign designed to attack racial prejudice itself,” by undermining its elemental images and perceptions. It was necessary to go further than the platitude, “The only colour that matters is green,” to include substantive and integral training in black history and racial dynamics.³⁴ In effect, the military undertook a program aimed at achieving Boulding’s “conversion,” in that it was a sustained initiative designed to transform the negative expectations and limitations attributed to African Americans in American culture. Clarence Page argues that while the military is not perfect, there are more African-Americans in its management ranks than in comparable civilian realms.

It is possible that the images of African-Americans that have been perpetuated in mainstream popular and political culture have been reconstructed within the military to support a necessary and more rapid integration. Dorn concludes that the “command commitment and accountability,” characteristic of the successful process of racial integration, has been absent in the pursuit of fair treatment for women. He suggests that eliminating the combat exclusion policy may improve the “status and regard of women” in the military, as Executive Order 9981 did for African Americans. He argues that women may not be “regarded as ‘real’ soldiers until they are able to do what ‘real’ soldiers do, which is to kill and die in battle.”³⁵

³³ Ibid. These arguments, related to women, and how they relate to images, will be discussed further in Chapter Four. Extending this comparison would suggest that tolerance of women in the military must also be taught; a realization that may be provoked by high profile incidents of sexual harassment, including the Tailhook Convention.

³⁴ Clarence Page, “The Military and Black America,” in Military Leadership: In Pursuit of Excellence (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984), 185.

³⁵ Ibid.

Images of Gender

Just as images of race are embedded in culture, so too are images of gender. The exclusion of women from aspects of the defense of the state and the consistency of the images of women with respect to war over time have had significant political and social implications. Military culture reveals particularly entrenched constructions of womanhood, such that the presence of women as both feminine symbols and soldiers within that culture is problematic, creating ambiguity regarding their role and value.

Sex is the biological division of organisms between male and female. It is genetically determined. Gender is defined by Carol Cohn as "the constellation of meanings that a given culture assigns to biological sex differences." It is learned. Cohn further argues that gender is a:

central organizing discourse of culture, one that not only shapes how we experience and understand ourselves as men and women, but that also interweaves with other discourses and shapes *them* - and therefore shapes other aspects of our world.³⁶

The ideas that constitute gender are expressed in many facets of culture, and they act to shape perception and prescribe action in these realms.

Gender is expressed as masculinity and femininity, each of which prescribes assumptions and expectations based upon a cultural ideal. These constructs influence culture, and culture in turn perpetuates the images they prescribe. Sharon Macdonald argues that gender's influence is always present, although this is "often demonstrated at

³⁶ Carol Cohn, "Wars, Wimps and Women: Talking Gender and Thinking War," in Gendering War Talk, Miriam Cooke and Angela Woollacott, eds. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 228.

the level of symbol and ritual rather than spoken statements."³⁷ Wood argues that although there has been some relaxation of each definition over time as the role of women in society has evolved, their essence has remained the same: "For all of the changes in our views of women and men, the basic blueprint remains relatively constant."³⁸ M.S. Kimmel argues that "masculinity and femininity are relational constructs, [as] the definition of either depends upon the definition of the other." Further, one cannot comprehend the "social construction of either ... without reference to the other."³⁹ Masculinity is strength, ambition, success, rationality, and control. Femininity is beauty, deference, passivity, emotion, nurturance and empathy.⁴⁰

Nira Yuval-Davis argues that in the political realm, women were traditionally excluded by virtue of the cultural construction of their identity. The works of Rousseau and Hobbes depict the "transition from the imagined state of nature into orderly society exclusively on what they both assume to be natural male characteristics":⁴¹ aggression and reason. Rebecca Grant notes that because women are believed not to possess these traits, they "do not constitute part of [the political] process."⁴² The necessarily dichotomous relationship between masculinity and femininity demands that female gender be defined against male gender. Women are the "other." They are therefore confined to that which is perceived to be close to their nature.

³⁷ Macdonald, 3.

³⁸ Wood, Gendered Lives, 21.

³⁹ M.S. Kimmel as cited in Stan Denski and David Scholle's "Metal Men and Glamour Boys," in Men, Masculinity and the Media (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1992), 46.

⁴⁰ Wood, Gendered Lives, 20.

⁴¹ Nira Yuval-Davis, "Gender and Nation," in Ethnic and Racial Studies 16:4 (October 1993), 623.

⁴² Rebecca Grant, in Yuval, 622.

Within the political realm, there is still evidence of a preoccupation with women and their perceived nature, particularly as it relates to the war experience. The relationship between politics and the military is particularly strong in the United States giving men what Sheila Tobias considers an “insurmountable advantage”⁴³ in American politics. The vice presidential candidacy of Geraldine Ferraro, for example, raised concerns over the ability of a woman to fill the position of Commander-In-Chief. As one reporter questioned during a televised debate: “Do you think in any way that the Soviets might be tempted to try to take advantage of you simply because you are a woman?” Although her tough response was “clearly planned to eliminate any notion that the lady was a wimp,” there were still questions only three days later concerning whether she was “‘strong enough’ to push the button.” The controversy, Ferraro later stated, was never about “should” she engage nuclear weapons and which measures she should undertake to avoid their use. The issue was always could she, implying that a woman did not have the requisite psychological make-up to make the decision to launch a nuclear assault. After all, it has been argued that women are by nature nurturers, consumed by creating and preserving life, not destroying it.⁴⁴ Tobias concludes that in retrospect, “it appears to have been the absence of *experience* in war rather than any lack of toughness that took the greater toll on the Ferraro candidacy.”⁴⁵

In the American military the prevalent cultural gender images form an integral part

⁴³ Sheila Tobias, “Shifting Heroisms: The Uses of Military Service in Politics,” in Women, Militarism and War (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1990), 164.

⁴⁴ General Robert Barrow in Kate Muir’s Arms and the Woman (London: Sinclair-Stevenson Ltd., 1992), 3.

⁴⁵ Tobias, “Shifting Heroisms,” 182.

of the system's foundation.⁴⁶ Bernice Carroll and Barbara Welling Hall argue that a male monopoly of the use of force is rooted in "what simultaneously makes women feminine and men masculine." Gender is not "a biological determinism that makes males aggressive and females passive," but a socially constructed interpretation of reality.⁴⁷

Judith Hicks Stiehm proposes a framework for analyzing this protector-protected relationship. Typically, American culture perceives men as the protectors and women as the protected; the protector "protects the protected from a threat."⁴⁸ There exists a strong and definable association between masculinity and the military. The role of the protector cannot be easily isolated from the context of masculinity. This link is reinforced both explicitly and implicitly. The military is a "male-defining institution"⁴⁹ and according to Cynthia Enloe, it "remains as society's bastion of male identity."⁵⁰ From this perspective, the military can be seen as relying on the institutionalization of an unequal power relationship.⁵¹

Abouali Farmanfarmaian expands on these ideas and argues that "the military embodies the virility of a nation."⁵² Challenging a state, she says, is tantamount to

⁴⁶ Wendy Chapkis, "Sexuality and Militarism," in Women and the Military System, Eva Isaksson, ed. (Hertfordshire: Simon & Schuster International Group, 1988), 111.

⁴⁷ Bernice Carroll and Barbara Welling Hall, "Feminist Perspectives on Women and the Use of Force," in Women and the Use of Military Force, Ruth H. Howes and Michael R. Stevenson, eds. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), 20.

⁴⁸ Judith Hicks Stiehm, "The Protected, The Protector, The Defender," in Women and Men's Wars (Oxford: Paragon, 1993), 368.

⁴⁹ Stiehm, as cited in Eva Isaksson's Women and the Military System (Hertfordshire: Simon & Schuster International Group, 1988), 3.

⁵⁰ Enloe as cited in Isaksson, 3.

⁵¹ Cynthia Enloe, "Feminists Thinking About War, Militarism and Peace," Analyzing Gender, 526-547. (Sage: Newbury Park, 1987), 531.

⁵² Abouali Farmanfarmaian, "Did You Measure Up," Collateral Damage: The New World Order At Home and Abroad, 113-135. (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 127.

challenging its male ego. She further argues that President Bush's frequent and nearly exclusive appearances with male advisors during the Gulf War can be interpreted as part of an effort to create an image of a male community, "impenetrable, inviolable, and virile." According to Farmanfarmaian, the media reinforced this image by providing examples of the soldiers' collective virility. Rituals that manifested collective brotherhood, such as one captured by cameramen in the Gulf involving "hands lightly gripped on their crotches which were then thrust forward from their waists in a motion of penetration -- towards Iraq?"⁵³ were in marked contrast to the pain, sorrow, loss and support of the wives, mothers, sisters and girlfriends on the homefront. These gendered portrayals will be examined in more detail in Chapter Four.

If an explicit link between war and masculinity persists in society, so too then will fears of emasculation in that culture. Farmanfarmaian argues that this fear is illustrated in discussions of Vietnam, "the largest symbol of impotence for a relatively new White colonial power." She cites one woman's observations of the images of Vietnam: "...dying men, reeking with mud and foul green-stained bandages, shrieking and writhing in a grotesque travesty of manhood..."⁵⁴ Moreover, many subsequent military actions undertaken by the United States, including those in Grenada and Panama, were escalating attempts to restore lost potency, climaxing in the Gulf War. Susan Jeffords argues that the male Vietnam veteran is the "emblem for a fallen and emasculated American man."⁵⁵

Jeffords further argues that the 1980s marked the "beginning of a general

⁵³ Ibid., 128-129.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Susan Jeffords, The Remasculinization of America (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 169

remasculinization of American culture” to coincide with these military endeavours. She examines the production of the 1987 film Full Metal Jacket in this context, arguing that the movie is a product of such masculine reconstructions. The film, in contrast to The Short-Timers, the book upon which it is based, “shuts down the novel’s ambiguity and reinstates a clarified rejection of the feminine and a restitution of the masculine”⁵⁶ She argues that the transformation from the novel’s “ambivalent gender construction to a reaffirmed and confident masculinity,” illustrated in several corresponding scenes, parallels the shift that occurred in American culture between 1979 to 1987. Weak characters, for example, are portrayed as homosexuals to highlight the maleness of the other, strong recruits. The film becomes a “gendered opposition between masculine and feminine, a battle that the masculine must win in order to survive the war.”⁵⁷ Jeffords highlights the prevalence of this new “maleness” by quoting an advertisement for the movie Missing in Action: “It ain’t over until the last *man* [emphasis added] comes home,”⁵⁸ a gendered image that echoes throughout American culture.

The application of lethal force has also had a traditionally strong association with practical masculine ideals.⁵⁹ According to Mady Wechsler Segal, combat “has long been regarded as a test of one’s manhood,” where the “military in general and combat in particular, is a masculine proving ground.”⁶⁰ Consequently, the exclusion of women from

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 174.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 186.

⁵⁹ Ruth H. Howes and Michael R. Stevenson, “The Impact of Women’s Use of Military Force,” in Women and the Use of Military Force (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), 209.

⁶⁰ Mady Wechsler Segal, “Women in the Armed Forces,” in Women and the Use of Military Force, Ruth H. Howes and Michael R. Stevenson, ed. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), 283.

combat perpetuates the myth that “even military women require the protection of men.”⁶¹ The problem is not that women lack the requisite courage or minimum strength, it is that the task of combat is rooted in masculinity and is tied to the image of the protector.

According to Stiehm, combat is the “defining activity” of the military. The navy defines combat based on locality, while the army also considers activity and physical strength.⁶² Yet Stiehm points out that these classifications are arbitrary and problematic. For example, when the army designed strict combat restrictions based on strength in order to eliminate all women, a significant number of men (between 10 and 20 per cent) were also excluded. The standards were then altered such that virtually all men were eligible. The exclusion of “so many men from a sex role their gender required of them”⁶³ suggests that the connection between men and combat is based not on strength, but on masculinity. Stiehm points out that the inconsistency in the “strength argument” is even more apparent when America's military allies are considered. The United States military trains Vietnamese and Jordanian men, for example, despite their lesser strength and size as compared to American men. Stiehm thus concludes that “clearly correct gender confers possibility; incorrect gender precludes it.” This gender-based exclusion reflects a “profound division of labour by sex, a division which serves to entrap men because their sex is ... virtually unalterable.”⁶⁴

The weapons of war also invoke masculine connotations. Nyla Branscombe and

⁶¹ Judith Hicks Stiehm, “The Effect of Myths about Military Women on the Waging of War,” in Women and the Military System, Eva Isaksson, Ed. (Hertfordshire: Simon & Schuster International Group, 1988), 103.

⁶² Ibid., 103.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 102.

Susan Owen state that "guns have come to be identified symbolically as the essence of masculinity."⁶⁵ Their study of the implications of handgun ownership for perceptions of women concluded that women who owned guns were "masculinized". They postulate that this finding is the result of social expectations based upon the traditional male responsibility for protection. They question whether a study of military women would yield similar results, or whether "role expectancies" would exceed "gender expectancies.

Masculinity can also play a part in military recruitment. Michael Rustad argues that when the military recruits, "the cult of manliness is emphasized."⁶⁶ Stiehm concurs, and points out that media recruitment campaigns depicting women training for war can be a way of mobilizing men. The "implicit message of such pictures is 'even women'....," unencumbered by the expectations of male genitalia, are actively engaged in the protection of the state. For a man to refuse service would be to invite shame. A woman's presence, therefore, "blackmails men into service." Women are, intentionally or not, used "by men to manipulate other men."⁶⁷

Stiehm further argues that once in the service, young soldiers remain vulnerable to assaults on their masculinity. They are thus subject to coercion that exploits their anxieties about sexual identity. Femininity becomes the antithesis of all that is necessary for "manhood", as traditionally positive feminine terms are used derisively. Name-calling, such as "ladies" and "girls" is particularly effective on young recruits as a means of

⁶⁵ Ny'a R. Branscombe and Susan Owen, "Handgun Ownership and Its Consequence for Social Judgment," Women and the Use of Military Force, Ruth H. Howes and Michael R. Stevenson, eds. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), 59-65.

⁶⁶ Michael Rustad, Women in Khaki: The American Enlisted Woman (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982), 181.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.

motivating them to prove their manhood on the battlefield.⁶⁸ In effect, Michael Rustad argues, “the swaggering and sartorial masculinity reinforced by enlisted male culture is openly disdainful of women.”⁶⁹ The presence of women in that service, therefore, is problematic.

In its acknowledgment of the primacy of masculinity, the military also embraces a set of assumptions regarding the male soldier’s sexual needs. Enloe argues that it “may be the construction of militarized masculinity that is most responsible for American enlisted men’s belief that one of the prerogatives due American male GI overseas is the sexual services of local women.”⁷⁰ For example, Enloe points out that American military officials in Vietnam “militarized local prostitution by degrees,” moving from bar girls to the welcoming of prostitutes on military bases. The exact number of prostitutes is impossible to calculate, yet *all local women* were “vulnerable to the label ‘prostitute’ because they were at the bottom of the racial hierarchy that structured all relations in the Vietnam War.”⁷¹ These practices continued on other Asian bases in the post-Vietnam era, including those in Thailand and the Philippines.⁷² It is difficult to comprehend how and to what extent male soldiers are able to distinguish between the women they view as fellow

⁶⁸ Stiehm, “Protected,” 371.

⁶⁹ Rustad, 181.

⁷⁰ Cynthia Enloe, “Bananas, Bases and Patriarchy,” in Women, Militarism and War (Savage, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1990), 201.

⁷¹ Cynthia Enloe, Does Khaki Become You? (London: Pandora Press, 1988), 33.

⁷² Evidence of such military behaviour can be observed as recently as 1992-3. There have been reports of an increase in prostitution since the arrival of United Nations UNTAC forces in Cambodia. The UNTAC leader, Yosushi Akashi, commented that his peacekeeping forces as “18 year old hot blooded soldiers” deserved to enjoy “young, beautiful beings of the opposite sex.” According to Joy Woolfrey, this attitude is “indicative of an age-old military assumption that the occupier has the right to exploit the local women.” Information obtained from correspondence from Woolfrey to Carolyn Langdon, March 17, 1993 and from an article by Sara Colm, “U.N. Agrees to Address Sexual Harassment Issue,” Phnom Pehn Post, November 10, 1992.

combatants and those they view as reward.

Incidents of sexual harassment in the military demonstrate the ambiguous role and image of military women. A Pentagon survey published in 1990 found that “about two-thirds of women claimed they had been sexually harassed, either directly or in more subtle ways such as by catcalls, dirty looks or teasing.”⁷³ This figure is significantly higher than the civilian average of 30-40%. While military women have always been targets of sexual harassment,⁷⁴ more women are choosing to file official reports, reflecting both societal trends and a “manifestation of the deep-seated resentment of some men at women’s expanded role in the armed forces.”⁷⁵ Jeanne Holm points out that servicewomen in World War II, for example, were subject to varying degrees of harassment. As one soldier cited commented, “You can’t even go into the chow hall without running the gauntlet.”⁷⁶ This behaviour parallels events at the Tailhook Convention in 1992, where women were once again forced to navigate the gauntlet.⁷⁷ Wood points out that incidents like the Tailhook scandal, where female personnel were “mauled, violated, and verbally harassed” by male personnel, illustrate “long-standing norms that allow or encourage treating women as sex objects.”⁷⁸ Representative Patricia Schroeder has commented that while “we often hear women can’t be in combat because the men will focus more on protecting

⁷³ Kate Muir, Arms and the Woman, 158.

⁷⁴ Anne Hoiberg, “Military Psychology and Women’s Role in the Military,” Handbook of Military Psychology, R. Gal and A.D. Mangelsdorff, eds. (John Wiley and Sons, Ltd., 1991), 734.

⁷⁵ Jeanne Holm, “Tailhook: A Defining Event for Reform,” Aviation Week and Space Technology (August 10, 1992): 11.

⁷⁶ Holm, Unfinished Revolution, 70.

⁷⁷ Holm, “Tailhook,” 11.

⁷⁸ Wood, Gendered Lives, 263.

them,”⁷⁹ this overwhelming need to protect was obviously absent during the Tailhook events. Further examination may reveal, however, that the soldiers’ actions are consistent with the protector-protected relationship, as the men are behaving as protectors seeking reward from the realm of the protected.

Naturally, this male protector would not accept such treatment of his own dependents by the enemy. His responsibility for those dependents, by definition, creates “both a burden and an expanded vulnerability.”⁸⁰ A successful attack by the enemy on these dependents is evidence of his failure. In this context, the act of rape can be interpreted as an attack not only on the victim, but on the man entrusted with her protection. Ruth Seifert argues that in the context of war, “rape can be considered the final symbolic expression of the humiliation of the male opponent.” It is a blatant message that the men are not able to protect “their” women. These men are “thus wounded in their masculinity and marked as incompetent.”⁸¹ Images of the protected are thus tightly bound to the defining maleness of the military. Because rape in war implies a symbolic loss of masculinity, Farmanfarmaian argues that, “when the threat of rape is evoked, it is inevitably accompanied by a similar sexual anxiety which necessitates a display of virility.”⁸² Rape, therefore, has little to do with the female victim; rather, its importance and effectiveness in war is derived from its threat to male potency.

⁷⁹ Patricia Schroeder, Testimony before the Military Personnel and Compensation Subcommittee and the Defense Policy Panel of the Committee on Armed Services House of Representatives, Gender Discrimination and the Military (29 and 30 July 1992).

⁸⁰ Stiehm, “Protected,” 372.

⁸¹ Ruth Seifert, “War and Rape: A Preliminary Analysis” in Mass Rape: The War Against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Alexandra Stiglmayer, ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 59.

⁸² Farmanfarmaian, 126.

The prewar campaign by the United States to justify military intervention in the Gulf can be understood in this context. Iraq became the moral enemy, as supporting evidence focused “particularly on *sexual* atrocities.”⁸³ Descriptions of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait were thick with imagery that mixed violence with sexuality, a tendency Seifert argues is characteristic of Western culture. She points to language to reveal this link, as a “‘conquest’ is made both on the battlefield and in the bedroom.”⁸⁴ Images and fears of rape were present from the outset, as the invasion became known as the “rape of Kuwait.” The capture of Army Specialist Melissa Rathbun-Nealy further invoked these fears, as in the words of one American official, “a woman POW is the ultimate nightmare.”⁸⁵ This consensus reflected media-exploited fears that if the Iraqis treated their own and Kuwaiti women appallingly, the odds were significant that Gulf War POW Specialist Melissa Rathbun-Nealy would be abused or raped.⁸⁶ This further reflected long-standing military belief that female POWs would be particularly unacceptable because of their ‘natural’ vulnerability to sexual assault. Such behaviour fit easily into the constructed image of the Iraqi soldier. Media coverage depicting the “looting, torture and rape” of Kuwait as “an assault on the soul of [the] nation” repeatedly showed that “the concepts of sovereignty and violation in the international arena were linked to sexual counterparts of integrity and rape.”⁸⁷ The protected became the symbolic victims of the invasion, making territorial penetration personal through physical violation.

⁸³ Ibid., 113.

⁸⁴ Seifert, 60.

⁸⁵ As cited in Julie Wheelwright, “The Media’s Use of the Feminine in Gulf War,” in Women Soldiers: Images and Realities. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 124.

⁸⁶ Example cited by Wheelwright from the Sun, n.d., 124.

⁸⁷ Farmanfarmaian, 113.

The protected are all those who do not protect. Stiehm argues that while there are certain groups that are generally excluded from military service, such as the young and the old, the case of the exclusion of women is unique. Where men have some control over their assignment to the class of the protected (in that their age, position, sexual orientation and political disposition affect their desirability), women are "all so assigned and all are so assigned solely because of their sex." It is men, as protectors, who have a "near monopoly on the means of destruction" while women are isolated from the duty of hurting or killing for their country. Women, as the protected, merely give the service they are permitted to give. Stiehm points out that women may serve a variety of functions in war: "in uniform, they serve in the 'rear with the gear' or they care for the wounded and the files"; as "civilians, they produce for the war or keep the 'home fires burning'." While these contributions are important, they are limited and "feminized".⁸⁸ In World War II, for example, military women fought the paper war to release men to the important real war. Whether on the battlefield or on the homefront, the roles adopted by women free men to fight.

The military has expanded the role of women in its forces. Women are now permitted to serve in most capacities short of ground combat. Change has been implemented slowly, however. Further, this growth has been accomplished without fundamentally challenging the primacy of masculinity. The preservation of male stereotypical images demands a parallel retention of the other, specifically images of women as the protected. Segal argues that there is a process of "cultural amnesia" that

⁸⁸ Stiehm, "Protected, 369.

occurs where the contributions made by women during emergency situations are “reconstructed as minor (or even nonexistent),” enabling the “culture to maintain the myth of men in arms and women at home.”⁸⁹ When a new situation arises, previous performance is recalled and ‘glorified’ to demonstrate that they can perform effectively. This pattern will be explored in Chapters Two and Three. Preserving women as a protected class with respect to war and militarism, in spite of civilian growth and change, has become an important, if unspoken, component of military policy. It helps to preserve the prevailing gender based power dynamic. The protection of women extends even to those serving in the military, as women have traditionally been excluded from the male role of ‘warrior’ or combatant.

Historically, women have struggled to find a place within a society where many of the demands and privileges of membership are derived from concepts of citizenship that appear to exclude them. In the United States, this exclusion was articulated early on, during a toast on the first anniversary of the Declaration of Independence: “May only those Americans enjoy freedom who are ready to die for its defense.”⁹⁰ This conception of citizenship ultimately leaves little room for women, particularly in a state where the right to bear arms is a valued privilege women have been forbidden to exercise outside of its borders.

In Enloe’s view, “the military defines citizenship.”⁹¹ She points out that such

⁸⁹ Mady Wechsler Segal, “The Social Construction of Women’s Military Roles: Past, Present and Future,” 8. Manuscript used by permission of author.

⁹⁰ Linda Kerber, “May All Our Citizens Be Soldiers and All Our Soldiers Citizens: The Ambiguities Of Female Citizenship in the New Nation,” in Women, Militarism and War (Savage: Rowman and Littlefield, 1990), 92.

⁹¹ Cynthia Enloe, “The Gendered Gulf,” in Collateral Damage: The New World Order At Home Abroad (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 100.

citizenship reward derived from military service is “the basic requirement for belonging and for access to political influence,”⁹² as the earlier example of Geraldine Ferraro suggests. Excluding women from the defining realm of combat conveys the message that they, like minority groups kept in lower ranks, have “no place in the political life of that country as that political life is currently constituted.”⁹³ Segal contends that “public discourse and other forms of social life are socially constructed to support a perception that women are not combatants. The steadfastness of this belief demonstrates the social construction of reality.”⁹⁴ Deviations from this norm are undertaken carefully and framed in such a way as to minimize disruptions to the status quo. Regardless of how they are perceived by their fellow soldiers and the public, women in the military remain tied to the image of a “protected, exempt-from-combat underclass.”⁹⁵

Segal argues that the “rights of citizenship in our society are viewed as connected to civic responsibilities, including military service.”⁹⁶ Further, the “opportunity to serve in combat branches” is “associated with the notion of civic and personal fulfillment.”⁹⁷ Thus, the exclusion of women from combat impedes their ability to achieve full status as citizens. Kathleen Jones concurs, stating that the “elimination of women from the draft is an

⁹² Enloe, Ethnic, 73.

⁹³ Cynthia Enloe, “Lessons From Other Times, Other Places,” in Who Defends America? Race Sex and Class in the Armed Forces (Washington: Joint Center for Political Studies Press, 1989), 146.

⁹⁴ Mary Wechsler Segal, “Women in the Armed Forces,” in Women and the Use of Military Force (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), 83.

⁹⁵ Stiehm, “Protected,” 369.

⁹⁶ Mady Whechsler Segal, “The Argument for Female Combatants,” in Female Soldiers: Combatants or Noncombatants? Nancy Loring Goldman, ed. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1982), 269.

⁹⁷ M.D. Feld, as cited in Segal, “The Argument for Female Combatants,” 269.

arbitrary restriction of their citizenship."⁹⁸ Enloe further argues that it was the growing association between full citizenship and military service by African Americans after the Second World War that undermined the racial return to "normalcy".⁹⁹ Women, too, have articulated this association. Assignment to the ranks of the protected, therefore, means that women are not created as fully equal citizens.

The Relationship Between the Protector and the Protected

The protector and the protected are inextricably linked; neither image can exist alone. As Stiehm elaborates, "the protected are essential to the protector" for the former "(ignorantly) endorse and justify"¹⁰⁰ the actions of the latter. The existence of the protected theoretically lends substance to the rhetoric of war and gives reason to the fight. This relationship, as it is currently constituted, divides primarily on the basis of sex, making the realms of the protector and the protected subject to the gender constructions that accompany the division. In other words, the realm of the protected becomes imbued with the characteristics of the feminine and that of the protector with those of masculinity. As a result, the divisions and the beliefs built upon them become entrenched and hence are difficult to challenge; alternatives seem impossible to conjure.

One way the relationship between the protector and the protected is important is in its capacity to justify war. Enloe argues that media coverage often makes women visible as "symbols, victims or dependents ... 'womenandchildren' rolls so easily off network

⁹⁸ Kathleen Jones, "Dividing the Ranks: Women and the Draft," in Women, Militarism and War (Savage: Rowman and Littlefield, 1990), 126.

⁹⁹ Enloe, Ethnic, 68.

¹⁰⁰ Stiehm, "Protected," 370.

tongues because ... women are family members rather than independent actors." She argues it would be very difficult to justify any intervention, but particularly that of the Gulf War, without a 'feminized victim', for the protected female embodies the reason for such intervention.¹⁰¹ This will be discussed further below.

The tacit endorsement from the protected on the homefront comes in the form of "tying a yellow ribbon 'round an old oak tree -- or car antenna, porch pillar or shop signs....," as women's expressions of moral support are interpreted by the United States national security elite as the voluntary construction of a "feminized homefront to complement... a masculinized battlefield."¹⁰² Segal argues that after engaging in the horrors of combat, soldiers can rely upon the image of the protected so as to return to an "intact world" of which a major part is "'our women', who are warm, nurturant, ultra-feminine, and objects of sexual fantasy." Further, one of the reasons for fighting is to "protect our women and the rest of what is in that image of the world back home."¹⁰³ Women, as the protected, become part of a "mental picture" that serves as a psychological defense. This role is not limited exclusively to war for it is an ideal that has persisted in peace time as well. It is in the "pin-up" that the "idealized white women to fight for" are embodied. They provide justification for the role of protector, as illustrated in one soldier's assertion: "your picture is a constant reminder of why we are here."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Enloe, "Gendered," 102.

¹⁰² Ibid., 96.

¹⁰³ Segal, "Female Combatants," 278.

¹⁰⁴ Farmanfarmaian, 131.

Conclusion

The literature implies that in spite of the expanding roles of women in war, that in spite of the growing social, political and military responsibilities that challenge traditional perceptions, women are still predominantly portrayed as the protected in society and in the military. Moreover, it is suggested that the endurance of these images has had implications for women's equality not only in military culture, but in political culture as well. It would be unreasonable to assume, however, that these images have been deliberately manipulated by the military, but it could be argued that the rigid, gendered images of the protector and the protected serve the interests of military strategy in terms of the important functions served by this relationship. Thus, the military certainly has an interest in perpetuating these images and the roles they prescribe not only through policy action, but also through inaction. This study will isolate the images of women with respect to war and attempt to assess the validity of these statements.

In order to establish a baseline from which to evaluate more current images of women and war, an historical examination of the prevalent images of American women in war both on the homefront and on the battlefield in conflicts prior to the Gulf War will be undertaken in Chapters Two and Three. Chapter Four will then examine in detail the images of women depicted in the Gulf War, and their implications as expressed in part through the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Military.

Chapter Five will present a case study of Melissa Rathbun-Nealy. The literature suggests that even women within the military are perceived as needing of protection. If this is the case, media coverage of her incarceration should reflect this preoccupation with

the protected image. To evaluate the accuracy of this statement, a content analysis of coverage in The Detroit News, The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today, and The Los Angeles Times will be undertaken and the results will be assessed based on the protector/protected dichotomy. This analysis will be further supported by information obtained during a personal interview with Rathbun-Nealy, as well as through an examination of relevant portions of the report of the Presidential Commission on Women in the Military.

Chapter Two
An Historical Analysis of the Images of Women In War: Part One

As in society generally, over time the roles women have served in war have expanded. Women have gone from service exclusively on the homefront to near-combat overseas. Yet, these contributions are too often forgotten and too frequently inadequately rewarded. Mady Wechsler Segal calls this a process of “cultural amnesia,” whereby the service given by women during emergency situations is minimized until a new situation arises. She argues that “when circumstances change, the effects of what actually happened on women’s subsequent military roles are overshadowed by the influence of cultural definitions and redefinitions of their roles.”¹⁰⁵ This process helps to explain why “revolutionary” roles have failed to yield significant changes to “normal” social rules. It is the preservation of images of women as the protected that enable their use to “restore the balance and protect our faith in the social order.”¹⁰⁶

In addition to this, Jean Bethke Elshtain suggests that “the image of woman as Other, as the Goddess of Peace” retains its power in spite of women’s active military involvement because it “symbolizes qualities that fend off the barbarism implicit in war.”¹⁰⁷ The activities of women are rarely portrayed as outside the realm of the protected. The presence of these images, therefore, limits the social implications of war and enables a return to prewar gender roles, in essence, a return to normalcy. Each section in this

¹⁰⁵ Mady Wechsler Segal, “The Social Construction of Women’s Military Roles: Past, Present and Future,” manuscript used by permission of the author, 1995, 1.

¹⁰⁶ Margaret Randolph Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel and Margaret Collins Weitz, Behind The Lines: Gender Divisions and the Two World Wars (New Haven: Yale University, 1987), 1.

¹⁰⁷ Jean Bethke Elshtain, “Women as Mirror and Other: Towards a Theory of Women, War and Feminism,”; cited in Higonnet, et. al., Behind the Lines, 1.

chapter and in that following examines how these processes were repeated during significant American military conflicts. The actions of women on the homefront and within the military demonstrate their ability and importance. Nevertheless, the military has been slow to grant women the equality that they have earned. Thus, the basic gender hierarchy in society and in the military remains unchanged, as men remain the protectors and women, the protected.

The American Revolution

The American Revolution was consistent with other wars of liberation in that it sought and required the support of women. It briefly transformed many women from political observers into actors. According to Linda Kerber, this involvement was not so much “a radical challenge to the mores of the time,” but, rather, “the commonsensical response to the reality that surrounded them all,”¹⁰⁸ as the Revolutionary War was in many ways a guerrilla war.

Women were encouraged to demonstrate their patriotism by happily encouraging their husbands and sons -- their protectors -- to fulfill their duty and go to war. A woman’s patriotism was framed by her sacrifice as the protected. Kerber argues that “women’s behaviour was expected to ease the problems of general mobilization.”¹⁰⁹ As the rebels had no standing army, a swift and cooperative mobilization was necessary. Women were thus essential to the successful execution of the Revolution. Women served

¹⁰⁸ Linda Kerber, “May All Our Citizens Be Soldiers and All Our Soldiers Citizens: The Ambiguities of Female Citizenship in the New Nation,” in Women, Militarism and War (Savage: Rowman and Littlefield, 1990), 93.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

as nurses, cooks, laundresses, and as inspirations for the war effort.

Kerber points out that while their presence was essential to American victory, revolutionary women have received relatively little scholarly attention. The war, however, created “many occasions for direct displays of political will”¹¹⁰ where women had previously had little voice. Notably, women served in the informal “Women of the Army” corps. Thousands of women and children, predominantly members of soldiers’ and support personnel’s families, traveled with the army during the revolution. For many, accompanying the soldiers was the only practical solution to the financial hardship caused by separation. While their location was unconventional, however, their activities were not. The women were caretakers, much as they had been in the household. They were nurses, laundresses and cooks, drawing rations in return for their work. Each company was allowed only a limited number of women, generally six.¹¹¹

The military also employed women as nurses in field hospitals, and paid them a regular monetary wage. Each hospital was allowed one matron and ten nurses per one hundred wounded. These nurses were paid as soldiers. Barton Hacker thus argues that “the very rules that denied a place in the army to all women, sanctioned a place for some.”¹¹² The “constant notorious manpower shortages”¹¹³ would have made the successful completion of the war impossible without women to fill the support roles.

The functions that these women served all required what were considered to be “female skills.” One observer concluded that the unkempt look of American soldiers was

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Jeanne Holm, Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution (California: Presidio Press, 1992), 4.

¹¹² Barton Hacker, as cited in Kerber, 96.

¹¹³ Holm, 4.

attributable to an insufficient number of women doing their washing and mending.¹¹⁴

Kerber states that Washington himself was shocked at the look of his troops at Bunker Hill, some of whom “were so sure that washing clothes was women’s work that they wore what they had until it crusted over and fell apart.”¹¹⁵ Women were therefore doing in a military setting what was expected of them domestically.

Of course, the “luxuries” of home life were absent as women were subject to the same hardships as men, and in spite of their classification as noncombatants, they were exposed to the same dangers. The lack of regular military training or official status “did not shield them from the horrors of war and personal risk.”¹¹⁶ Despite this shared risk, however, both the Women of the Army corps and Army nurses were denied military status. They were therefore denied the full rights of citizenship. Holm argues that “the colonial mind would never have thought to militarize these women even when the army was in the most desperate straits.”¹¹⁷ Such an action would not be consistent with the prevailing gender order of the time and it would have compromised the postwar return to normalcy.

There were occasions where women actively defended the company by replacing a fallen soldier. Other women defied the army by masquerading as men or boys. Some passed undetected while others were unmasked. Women like Deborah Samson, who served as Robert Shirliffe, served valiantly as common soldiers and officers both, often being detected only when wounded or killed. Samson, for example, was quietly

¹¹⁴ Cited in Kerber, 96.

¹¹⁵ Cited in Kerber, 96.

¹¹⁶ Holm, 4.

¹¹⁷ Holm, 5.

discharged after falling ill, perhaps so as not to undermine the prevailing conceptions of women.¹¹⁸ It is impossible, however, to ascertain how many women served, for in general the data is unreliable.¹¹⁹

While women's "self perception had changed" by the end of the war, they lacked the "mechanisms for collective action."¹²⁰ Their achievements in the revolution had been as individuals and their gains were constrained by the patriarchal political structure of the new republic. Women as a group were not perceived as having interests of their own, nor had they "begun to grapple with the implications of variants of citizenship" that indicated for women "only limited responsibilities and obligations."¹²¹ In the postwar reconstruction, the contribution of women in the revolution was not seen as equal to that of men.

A woman's value as a citizen was further discounted in a postwar court case, *Martin v. Massachusetts* (1801), that involved "the property claims of the son of an absentee Tory."¹²² The case publicly questioned the nature of the relationship of women

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ This is in part due to the transient nature of the participation of women at the front. While in general there were always women in the camps, the individual women changed frequently as their stay was often brief.

¹²⁰ Kerber, 97.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., 98. "In 1779, the General Court of Massachusetts had passed a confiscation law to govern the property left behind by fleeing loyalists. The statute explicitly encouraged wives of Tory absentees to break from their husbands, declare their own loyalty to the revolutionary state, to set themselves at risk for the republic, and in so doing to protect their property from confiscation." In effect, the statute endowed women with a measure of independent political will. The son of an absentee loyalist tested the statute. The solicitor-general for the Commonwealth argued that a woman could declare her own political allegiance. While protecting the Commonwealth, he also reiterated her individual political will and thereby asserted her individual citizenship. The plaintiff, on the other hand, argued that as a married woman, the mother had had "no political relation to the state any more than an alien." She was an "inhabitant" of the state, not

to the new republic. The claimant's attorney asked a compelling series of rhetorical questions that sought to undermine the independent political will and formal citizenship of women in the state. He argued:

How much physical force is retained by retaining married women? What are the personal services they are to render in opposing by force an actual invasion? What aid can they give to an enemy?¹²³

The court was moved by the demonstrated liabilities for the state in full female citizenship. It ruled that married women did not act independently. Women were not only perceived as ill-suited to the defense of the state, but as a detriment to that defense. Mill's link between citizenship and defense was therefore severed for women. Thus, Mady Wechsler Segal's "cultural amnesia" emerged in the postwar era. Women's wartime contributions were trivialized and they were legally relegated to the realm of the protected. The relationship between men and women as that of protector and protected, present at the birth of the nation, would have enduring implications for the role of women in society and in the military.

The Civil War

Like the American Revolution, the Civil War (1861-1865) provided women with expanded roles and responsibilities; they filled a range of jobs that were vacated by men. This was particularly the case in the North, as the industrialized economy demanded a workforce. Women were active on an unprecedented scale, as many restrictions and

a "member." Consequently, she lacked the requisite autonomy to remain and thereby prevent confiscation. Thus, her son would have the right to the property.

¹²³ Ibid.

social conventions with respect to their activities were set aside or ignored. The Civil War had erupted in an era of American history perhaps unprecedented in its gender rigidity. Definitions of manhood and womanhood were entrenched. Men assumed the responsibilities of the demanding public realm, while women had the responsibility for the home.¹²⁴ It could be argued, therefore, that the gendered role expectations in the protector-protected relationship would also be entrenched (for example, women would be particularly effective motivators). Jean V. Berlin argues that the Civil War was as much a “watershed in the history of American women as it was in the history of the nation.”¹²⁵ Again rigid divisions of labour based on sex were undermined by the necessity of war and again, the institutionalization of this involvement was minimized such that it did not endure in the postwar period. Despite the scope of women’s activities, however, their roles were largely consistent with the constructed role of the protected, as women in both the North and the South continued to leave the protection of the state overwhelmingly to men.

The Civil War was fought at the doorsteps of many Americans. Consequently, there were significant disruptions to the everyday lives of all citizens. Thus, women were often required to behave in extraordinary ways. For example, George C. Rable points out that in the South, leaders dealt with the seemingly contradictory demands on women to be at once “soft and gentle” and devoted and courageous by invoking the memory of the American Revolution. The women of that period were said to embody both “classical and

¹²⁴ Elizabeth Leonard, xxi.

¹²⁵ Jean V. Berlin in Mary Elizabeth Massey’s Women in the Civil War. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966, viii.

modern virtues: stoicism, self-sacrifice, daring, determination.”¹²⁶ In spite of the new challenges presented by the Civil War, both men and women continued to “describe female roles in conventional language.” Women’s activities, although expanded, remained those of the protected.

The women of the Civil War were called upon to compel men to enlist. Many northern observers of the time stressed the role played by Confederate women in getting men to join the rebellion. As one Chicago paper cited by Elizabeth Massey points out, these women promised to favour those who went to war upon their return, reserving “their charms” for those who went into battle, “while denying them to men” who failed to join.¹²⁷ A northern nurse and spy, Sarah Edmunds, commented at the time that southern women were the best recruiting officers as they refused to “tolerate or admit to their society any young man who refuses to enlist.”¹²⁸ An extension of this function was popularized by the northern press that claimed “many of the most diabolical acts of these men” were the result of southern women’s “vehemence, vindictiveness and unlady-like behaviour.”¹²⁹ According to Massey, examples of southern women’s zeal were used to rouse their northern counterparts. In the North, while young women also exerted pressure, it did not so often utilize the penalty of social ostracism. Hence, the favour bestowed by women was a motivating factor for going to war. This is consistent with Linda Boose’s argument that it is women, as the protected, who confer heroism on the

¹²⁶ George C. Rable, Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism. (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 137.

¹²⁷ Massey, 30.

¹²⁸ As cited in Massey, 30.

¹²⁹ As cited in Massey, 40.

protectors.¹³⁰

Women also directly served the war effort on the homefront. They worked at home to gather provisions for soldiers at the front (as neither side was adequately prepared for the realities of war),¹³¹ and they cooked, sewed and knitted. They also worked through social organizations to mobilize and coordinate their efforts. In the North, for example, there was the Women's Central Association of Relief. Participation in these collective activities gave women a practical education, particularly in the area of fundraising, including fairs and raffles.¹³² Although these events sought the moral and financial endorsement of men, they were chiefly planned and organized by women.

On or near the battlefield, women functioned in capacities similar to those they had in the American Revolution. In both the North and the South, families again joined officers and enlisted men and provided the essential services of cooking and washing. In the words of one observer, the place was "teeming with women."¹³³ This was particularly the case in the South, where a larger proportion of women stayed in and around camp for longer periods of time.¹³⁴ Some wives, according to Hall, tended to be "mother figures" who also pitched in as nurses and helped with camp chores. These women, he further argues "sought to play a supporting role to help the cause."¹³⁵ Others took on a more active posture, training with weapons and adopting semi-military dress. All women were

¹³⁰ Lynda E. Boose, "Techno-Muscularity and the "Boy Eternal": From the Quagmire to the Gulf," in Gendering War Talk (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 86.

¹³¹ Massey, 31.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 32.

¹³³ Princess Agnes Salm-Salm, as cited in Massey, 65.

¹³⁴ Massey, 68.

¹³⁵ Richard Hall, Patriots in Disguise: Women Warriors of the Civil War. (New York: Paragon House, 1993), 3.

originally thought of as “regimental ornaments, guardian angels, nurses, water carriers, cooks and laundresses; whatever circumstances required.”¹³⁶ They were denied full military status, but they gave the service they were permitted to give. They were the protected. They justified the role of the protector by acting as symbols of what he must fight to protect..

Both northern and southern women were given official, yet still civilian, roles within the units. These included the “*vivandieres*” and the “Daughters of the Regiment”; two concepts borrowed from European armies.¹³⁷ A *vivandiere* supplied food and water to soldiers. A Daughter of the Regiment was generally a young woman whose purpose was to inspire the unit. Her role was primarily ornamental; she led the soldiers in parades. She was most often accompanied by a chaperone. She was also expected to be a nurse and all-purpose support person. In effect, she was the quintessential protected, doing what was necessary to free her protector to fight.

Generally, all women stayed behind when battle began, with the exception of some nurses and Daughters of the Regiment who followed soldiers to the edge of battle lines. In the heat of combat, however, “artificial distinctions tended to vanish and nurses, daughters of the Regiment and officers’ wives sometimes ended up caught in battle.”¹³⁸

During the Civil War, there were women (as in the Revolution), who served in unconventional ways. Their activities, however, were generally covert. Women not only served as men, but worked as “spies, couriers, guides, scouts, saboteurs, smugglers and

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid., xiii.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

informers.”¹³⁹ Massey suggests that these women believed that their “sex would make them immune to punishment.”¹⁴⁰ Women serving in these capacities received little protection from the media and were accused of being prostitutes and portrayed as having questionable morals. Even the respectability generally accorded women in the upper classes was cast aside when they were suspected of or caught in activities beyond the scope of the protected.¹⁴¹

Women who were brought into the war unintentionally (particularly in the South, where they were needed to protect the homestead), also expected their sex to afford them a conventional measure of “respect and gentle treatment that had been theirs in peacetime.”¹⁴² Massey points out that these women were “perpetually outraged by the behaviour of Yankees and Confederates.”¹⁴³ Berlin says that it is possible to conclude that the reactions of governments and armies to women’s “direct and indirect participation in the conflict made it clear they must accept the consequences when they were taken seriously as enemies.”¹⁴⁴ When women ventured outside of their conventional roles, “civil and military authorities no longer treated them as ladies.”¹⁴⁵ At the same time, however, women were precluded from entering the institutional world of the protector.

Women served in the greatest numbers as nurses. Approximately 3200 women held paid nursing positions in the North and South over the period of the war.¹⁴⁶ This was

¹³⁹ Massey, 84.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., ix.

¹⁴¹ Jean B. Berlin, in Massey, x.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Massey, 52.

significant, according to Massey, because it represented a departure from United States tradition.¹⁴⁷ Women were perceived to have an aptitude for nursing; to nurture and support the protector was within the responsibilities of the protected and thus within a woman's nature. Still, public opinion "doubted the propriety of their nursing in army hospitals."¹⁴⁸ Critics pointed out that "refined, modest ladies had no business caring for strange men and certainly not rough, crude soldiers from all walks of life."¹⁴⁹

Many families restrained potential female recruits. Opposition was especially pronounced in the South, where there was a strong "prejudice against the nursing of soldiers by young, unmarried women."¹⁵⁰ As the war wore on, some barriers began to fall and some opponents were won over. In the aggregate, however, Massey argues that they were unable to "overcome in only four years the long standing, deep seated prejudice of the general public and the military officials."¹⁵¹ On the homefront, the public had little concept of these women's hardships and sacrifices. They were too willing to "retain preconceived ideas, to accept as fact malicious rumor and to draw unjustified conclusions."¹⁵² Publicity often highlighted those nurses who were "untrained, inefficient, careless, and uninspired and ... of doubtful reputation,"¹⁵³ undermining support for those who were dedicated and efficient. Nurses as a group, therefore, did not immediately receive the acclaim they deserved.

In spite of these difficulties, Holm argues that the most enduring and significant

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 43.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ As cited in Massey, 43.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 45.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid., 64.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

contribution made to the war effort by women was in the area of health care.¹⁵⁴ Under pressure from the Women's Central Association of Relief, the Union army established the first official agency to devise and enforce sanitary regulations in the army. Through this organization, northern women planned patient care, collected and distributed hospital supplies and equipment and enforced sanitary standards. They received permission to create the first primitive hospital ships by converting transport ships. On them, women worked under difficult circumstances.

While women serving as nurses enormously improved patient care, Holm argues that military leaders were not ready to accept women as a "necessary and integral part of effective medical service."¹⁵⁵ In the postwar period, "true to tradition," the army reverted to its old practice of using enlisted men for patient care. Even in the Spanish-American War, it was only an outbreak of typhoid fever that prompted the recruitment of women under civilian contract. In fact, Holm attributes confusion in patient care in these early wars to the absence of a "single uniformed nursing corps with official status under military control."¹⁵⁶ Despite the contribution of women, opposition to granting military status "in any form to nurses remained strong simply and only because they were women."¹⁵⁷ This observation is consistent with the gender order of the time that perceived official military responsibilities as exclusively the domain of men. It was only in 1901 that the Nurse Corps was granted quasi-military status as an auxiliary to the army, without military rank and without equal pay.

¹⁵⁴ Holm, 6.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Throughout the Civil War, women tested the boundaries of their roles in civil society. The press celebrated hardworking women, while at the same time becoming increasingly critical of women as the war went on. The significant attention given to women involved in crimes and scandals “served to weaken the pedestals on which ladies had been placed.”¹⁵⁸ Critics feared that women were sacrificing their femininity by demonstrating too great an interest in the weapons of war. Officers’ wives in the camps were able to preserve their reputations, but the motives and conduct of most others were questioned. Massey argues that by publicizing the weaknesses and “sins” of women, the press acted to modify their image, helping ultimately to emancipate them by dispelling the myth of gentility and making women more human.¹⁵⁹ Yet this image was still within the realm of the protected.

Northern women resisted postwar efforts to restore the ante-bellum boundaries of gendered relationships. They challenged conventional roles and made claims on the public realm by manipulating the traditional definitions of womanhood. A woman’s selfless and caring ‘nature’, for instance, justified her entrance into the profession of nursing. These expanded activities resulted in positive changes in popular images of women, which in turn created opportunities in professional and in public life. While the definition of acceptable female behaviour was relaxed, the prevailing gender system in the end demonstrated “remarkable rigidity and stability at its core.”¹⁶⁰ Elizabeth D. Leonard concludes that an adjustment to this definition did not imply that its conventional boundaries could be

¹⁵⁸ Massey, 243.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 265.

¹⁶⁰ Leonard, 199.

eliminated.

In the South, the war made women's lives less exclusively domestic because it obscured the division between public and private life. By the end of the war, however, southern women grew tired of the "often frenzied scramble for survival"¹⁶¹ that accompanied a war fought largely at their doorsteps. Consequently, southern housewives embraced a return to "conservative ideals of womanhood" that helped to restore the economic and psychological security that had been denied them. Rable argues that the wartime social upheaval was temporary, as "fashion and frivolity made an early return to the conquered South."¹⁶² Although there were certain cosmetic changes to convention, overall, "expectations concerning female roles and destiny remained largely unaffected."¹⁶³ Southern women ultimately seemed largely unaffected by the feminist activism of the North. The traditional definitions of womanhood remained and her future was closely tied to the home.

Prior to the Civil War, early feminists began efforts to remake the social order. The Jacksonian movement for equality born in the late 1820s and 1830s was "the most important direct cause of the upsurge of women's liberation activity that occurred in the 1830s and 1840s."¹⁶⁴ The movement's most prominent leaders were Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone and Susan B. Anthony. Women often came to the movement via other political involvement such as through work for temperance and abolitionist causes. In 1848, the first Women's Rights Convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York.

¹⁶¹ Rable, 266.

¹⁶² Ibid., 267.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 268.

¹⁶⁴ Barbara Sinclair Deckard, The Women's Movement: Political, Socioeconomic, and Psychological Issues, (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc.:1983), 250-255.

There, the forms of social, economic and legal discrimination against women were listed and pledges were made to combat them. Suffrage, however, remained a contentious issue. Between 1839 and 1869, one of the most concrete benefits was realized in that most states passed legislation that enabled married women to own property. Feminist campaigns were largely confined to the North and the West, as southern women did not embrace the movement. Even women in the more progressive regions, however, were subject to harassment. Furthermore, while women became more involved in public life over this period, overall women remained largely confined to the private sphere.

During the Civil War, the expanded role of women “under the cloak of patriotism”¹⁶⁵ inspired action and promised many women postwar economic and political opportunities. Berlin demonstrates, however, that many of these opportunities disappeared in the spring and summer of 1865. As in past (and future) conflicts, “returning men, victorious or defeated, expected their women to resume their ante-bellum lives without a murmur.”¹⁶⁶ Women’s challenge to rigid gender divisions did not succeed. Although they perceived their actions as consistent with those of citizens and patriots,¹⁶⁷ they remained the protected. Their role was ultimately limited and defined by the male protectors. Their service was understood by society as merely an extension of their traditional role. While women failed to gain specific political or military status, however, this loss of opportunity led to their “unintentional and unexpected politicization.”¹⁶⁸ The

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 242.

¹⁶⁶ Jean B. Berlin’s interpretation of Massey, xi

¹⁶⁷ Leonard, 198.

¹⁶⁸ Berlin’s interpretation of Massey, xi-xii. The war increased the strength of the suffrage and temperance movements.

war, Massey argues, precipitated changes because women expanded the realm of the protected.

World War I

World War I was a transitional period for American society, and for American women in particular. The pressure for social reform was growing, as women were achieving a greater level of politicization through the suffrage and ultimately through the pacifist movements. Although the link between women and peace was firmly established during this period, American women, like Europeans in the years before, would largely abandon the cause to support the war effort. Many hoped that patriotic support, particularly in the military, would translate into political gains, including suffrage. Once again, women were reluctantly called to service out of necessity and their roles were only minimally formalized. The actions of both the government and the military contracted the anticipated gains for women, keeping their activities predominantly within a narrow definition of the protected.

According to Anne Wiltsher, the United States in 1914 was a country eager for change and social reform. Americans perceived their country as modern. The suffrage movement, in action since the middle of the nineteenth century, was gaining strength. American women in general had greater freedom and this freedom was expressed in many ways. Wiltsher remarks of clothing, for example, that women “disregarded the restricting corsetry of the early 1900s,”¹⁶⁹ and wore shorter skirts. More women wanted information

¹⁶⁹ Wiltsher, 44.

on birth control and took jobs outside the home as in offices and shops. Women smoked and consumed alcohol in public, and the middle classes were driving cars in growing numbers.

The outbreak of war in Europe was perceived by these “modern” Americans as a “horrifying anachronism,” particularly in light of the movement for social reform. Wiltsher argues that American women in particular had a significant interest in abolishing war. Thus, the war in Europe offered an opportunity for women in the United States to mobilize for peace. One action took place on January 10th, 1915 when 3000 women met at the New Williard Hotel in Washington, D.C. where the Women’s Peace Congress was organized by the newly-formed Women’s Peace Party. Eighty-six delegates participated, representing a number of prominent women’s organizations, including the National American Woman’s Suffrage Association, the Federal Suffrage Association, the Women’s Political Union, the Congressional Union, and all the women’s peace groups that had formed around the country. The women were determined to present a united front of women in protest against the war. To this end, they developed a “Program for Constructive Peace.” Wiltsher argues that this was significant because it “foreshadowed -- more than any other programme from a peace organisation -- President Wilson’s Fourteen Points,”¹⁷⁰ which were presented as a foundation for future peace. Despite the number of women participating and their combined influence, however, the conference received virtually no press attention. Nevertheless, the WPP continued to grow, recruiting mainly on the east coast.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 54.

As America's entry into war became imminent in 1917, women intensified their efforts. One move involved the formation of the Emergency Peace Federation using money raised from individual women. Together with other groups, including the WPP, they held a mass rally on February 5th. During February and March of 1917, the women pacifists worked tirelessly to keep America neutral.¹⁷¹

According to Wiltsher, pacifists had different perspectives on what the American public wanted. Leila Secor, for example, found that the growth of the EPF across the country indicated that "There could be no doubt that at that time the American people were opposed to war."¹⁷² On the other hand, respected women's suffrage and pacifism leader, Jane Addams, found that people changed as

The long established peace societies ... quickly fell into line expounding the doctrine that the world's greatest war was to make an end to all wars... [this idea] was taken up and endlessly repeated with an entire absence of the critical spirit.¹⁷³

Joyce Berkman argues that peace activism enjoyed some popular support before America entered the war. Once America joined, however, "that support crumbled and, crumbling, sundered the American women's movement just as the issue had divided British and European feminists three years before." It was, she concluded, "far easier for the feminist to row with the patriotic tide than to set her oars against it."¹⁷⁴

Berkman points out that by far, the majority of women advocating peace abandoned their antiwar agitation once the country declared war. This caused divisions

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 167.

¹⁷² Leila Secor, as cited in Wiltsher, 171.

¹⁷³ Jane Addams, as cited in Wiltsher, 172.

¹⁷⁴ Joyce Berkman, "Feminism, War and Peace Politics: The Case of World War I," in Women, Militarism and War., 147.

within and among women's groups. For example, the National American Women's Suffrage Association, the leading suffrage group, voted to offer its services to Wilson. Support of the war, it was argued, was consistent with the desire to gain national suffrage by proving themselves worthy of first class citizenship, as well as giving women economic equality. Women could serve their community beyond the family and protect the nation from its enemies by supporting their sons and creating good soldiers.

While these activities are all consistent with the role of women in the protector-protected relationship, they also expand the role of the protected in society. As will be demonstrated below, expanding that domain does not necessarily yield change in the image. Yet these pro-war feminists saw the war as an opportunity to shatter the rigid role stereotypes associated with war. By taking an active role in the defense of the state, women could undermine their second-class citizenship. By sharing in the "tasks and risks of wartime, they might demonstrate their courage, loyalty and moral conviction to be as vigorous as that of men."¹⁷⁵ Because they had been supporters of the WPP from its inception, their action led to a split within the WPP, as its leadership opposed to NAWSA's decision. Membership in the WPP consequently declined.

Economically, the objective gains that were perceived and anticipated during the war were largely an illusion. Women's employment in the war was limited and brief. About one million women engaged in war work, and of those, only "a handful were 'first time' hires."¹⁷⁶ Most were single women who had moved up from lower paying jobs to

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 151.

¹⁷⁶ David M. Kennedy, Over Here: The First World War and American Society (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 285.

which they returned, or previously employed women, now married, who temporarily reentered the workforce to help their families keep pace with inflation. There were few who took up positions in heavy industry, and of those who did, “nearly half had abandoned them by 1919.”¹⁷⁷ In fact, the Central Federated Union of New York “bluntly demanded in 1919 that the same patriotism which induced women to enter industry during the war should induce them to vacate their positions after the war.”¹⁷⁸ Many women complied. By 1920, women made up a smaller percentage of the labour force that they had in 1910. This foreshadowed similar events in World War II.

The government acted slowly to institutionalize women’s role in the war. Under pressure from women’s volunteer organizations, it created a Women’s Committee of the Council of National Defense in April 1917. Headed by prominent suffragist Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, it was viewed as a vehicle for a significant contribution to the war effort. In reality, however, it had “to content itself ... with organizing traditional middle-class women’s ‘volunteer’ activities -- helping to establish children’s health care programs, rolling Red Cross bandages, and distributing food conservation pamphlets.” Over time, “it became evident that the government viewed the Women’s Committee as a device for occupying women in harmless activities while men got on with the business of war.” Women remained confined to their traditional roles.

The military also acted slowly to capitalize on female labour. Despite the significant military manpower shortages that developed during the war, military and

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

especially government officials were reluctant to make women part of the regular army.¹⁷⁹ The Civil Service alone, however, could not meet the growing administrative needs of both the government and the military. Further, the Navy Department, for example, lacked the necessary appropriations to pay civilians.¹⁸⁰ Thus, the Navy, the Marines, and the Coast Guard, enlisted women to perform these essential duties. In March, 1917, the Navy authorized the enlistment of women - "yoemen (F)". They performed clerical duties, as well as those of "draftsmen, translators, camouflage designers, and recruiters."¹⁸¹ In all, 12,800 women served in this capacity. The Marine Corps began recruiting in August, 1918, only three months before hostilities ended. The 300 "marinettes" were recruited to alleviate acute shortages of combat personnel.

Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall report that the Navy's decision to recruit women received little public attention. While major papers noted the Secretary of the Navy's announcement and the enrollment figures, they rarely appeared on the front page and there were no editorials, nor letters from readers. Ebbert and Hall speculate that this lack of "fanfare" may have been prompted by the desire to minimize public outcry. Still, women responded to the quiet announcement. According to Ebbert and Hall, they were prompted principally by patriotism. For some women, this patriotism was "deeply personal" as they had loved ones who were already serving. Women were also motivated by political considerations. Some "well understood that women serving in Navy uniform would heighten the demand for women's suffrage,"¹⁸² identifying the link between military

¹⁷⁹ Holm, 12.

¹⁸⁰ Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall, Crossed Currents: Navy Women From WWI to Tailhook. (Washington: Brassey), 5.

¹⁸¹ Holm, 12.

¹⁸² Ebbert and Hall, pp. 7-8.

service and full citizenship. Finally, a few women saw it as a chance for steady employment at good wages.

Despite the action of the other services, as well as the successful implementation of a similar program in Britain, the War Department refused to allow the Army to follow suit. Holm argues that this entrenchment grew out of its “deep hang-ups about women employees in general and military women in particular.”¹⁸³ Unless in situations of direst need, the Army and National Guard were forbidden even to employ civilian women. Even when they were hired, they were to be under careful supervision so as to prevent moral injury. With such “paranoia” about civilian women, military women would have been “viewed as pariahs.”¹⁸⁴ Holm speculates that had the war continued longer, manpower demands would have forced the government to take action to enlist women, much like they did during World War II.

Women’s service in World War I was always seen as temporary, for in “the early 1920s, the concept of women serving permanently with the military was an outlandish one.”¹⁸⁵ The end of the war thus prompted a rapid demobilization of women in the services. This demobilization took place in spite of the obvious skill with which women performed their tasks and their relative desirability when compared to civilian workers. Holm argues that one of the impediments faced by women was the “prevalence of the masculine mystique,” the idea that the military is a man’s world and warfare is a man’s business, not a fit or proper place for a woman.¹⁸⁶ The use of 34,000 women thus had no

¹⁸³ Holm, 13.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 16.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

effect on this link between masculinity and warfare. Women remained the protected.

The only women who were retained were nurses, who were reduced to their peacetime strength. According Holm, nurses offered little challenge to the dominance of man as protector because nursing was perceived as a female skill. In 1920, the nurses were granted quasi-military status which allowed them to wear insignias of officer rank. They were, however, denied the full rights and privileges of rank, such as equal pay. Holm argues that their lack of full status kept them “safely isolated from the military mainstream, somewhat like members of a ladies’ auxiliary.”¹⁸⁷ Navy and Marine women, however, did have full status and acted during the war to replace men. They, therefore, “could have been perceived as a threat to the male status quo.”¹⁸⁸ In fact, in 1925, the wording of the Naval Reserve Act was amended to make only “male citizens” eligible for service. Navy and Marine women were thus demobilized.

The war did result in certain benefits for women as a group. Wilson did not disappoint women, as he “unequivocally harnessed the spirit of the war for democracy to the cause of woman suffrage,” arguing that giving women the vote was “vital to the winning of the war.”¹⁸⁹ In 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment was passed and represented the culmination of nearly a hundred years of struggle. David M. Kennedy argues that the war “appeared to provide the final push over the top.”¹⁹⁰

In the economic field, women did not realize as many benefits. Kennedy points out that women, like many other groups in American society, “harbored extravagant hopes for

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Kennedy, 284.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

the gains that might be wrought out of the plastic environment of war.”¹⁹¹ While women had the wartime “Women in Industry Service” institutionalized in the “Woman’s Bureau in the Department of Labor,” industry remained largely closed to women. The opportunities that had presented themselves were removed after the war. Kennedy concludes that the Woman’s Bureau oversaw a “decidedly static and definitely unrevolutionalized world of women’s work.” He further points out that the postwar position of women was “perhaps better symbolized by the 1921 Sheppard-Towner Act” which provided for federally funded maternal and infant health care. This act was aggressively sought after by feminists, “aimed not to breach the walls of industry for women, but to make women more secure in their traditional environs, the home and the nursery.”¹⁹²

World War I, therefore, had a limited impact on the lives of individual women. While the war may have precipitated the granting of national suffrage, it did not improve the relative position of women in either economic or military spheres. The rise of the peace movement and its association with femininity likely served to further distance women from the powerful link between men and war. Thus, the image of women as the protected was reinforced, and it facilitated the return to normalcy that followed.

Conclusion

The use of women in these early American wars was undertaken carefully. There was little challenge to the role of man as protector and thus, women failed to realize the social benefits they had anticipated. Further, there was little institutionalization of their

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 285.

¹⁹² Ibid., 287.

role in society and in the military. Women ultimately remained confined within the traditional parameters of the protected.

Chapter Three
An Historical Analysis of the Images of Women in War: Part Two

Beginning with World War II, women experienced a slow yet steady expansion of their role within society and the military. These gains, however, consistently fell short of expectations. The experiences of women in the conflicts examined in this chapter further illustrate the process of cultural amnesia and the need for normalcy in the postwar period. The image of women as the protected therefore remained intact, despite their incorporation into the military's formal structure.

World War II

Women in World War II were called upon to fill traditional as well as unconventional roles. War demanded the recruitment of women in order to alleviate manpower shortages at home and abroad, in both civilian and military functions. Women benefitted as family members through greater economic gains; as workers, through unprecedented opportunities for employment; and as soldiers, through their service as regular members of the armed forces. Women's service, however, was manipulated by government and media propaganda to reflect the traditional nature of femininity and duty: to family, to country and to man. Thus, women's work in military and in industry was portrayed as an extension of their customary civilian and domestic work. This helped the postwar return to normalcy.

Women on the homefront assisted in the war effort in a variety of capacities. The two thirds of adult women who were not employed during the war served both in the

home and as volunteers. Canning, saving fats, and budgeting were all important, as “traditional domestic tasks [were] infused with larger public purpose.”¹⁹³ Women also volunteered at the Red Cross and USO canteen, and at selling bonds. Overall, the demands of rationing during the war increased the responsibilities of homemakers.

The manpower shortages that were created by the expansion of the wartime economy and the loss of men to the military, necessitated the recruitment of women into paying jobs.¹⁹⁴ While women had been in the workforce to a limited extent prior to the war, the Depression had contracted the number of positions for them. They worked predominantly in clerical and administrative positions. Those who did work in factories were concentrated in the production of clothing, food and other goods formerly made by women in the home. Women in fields like health care, education and clerical work were seen as “performing wifely and motherly functions.”¹⁹⁵

Women who joined the war effort as workers were often motivated by patriotism, as well as by financial necessity, excitement, loneliness, and a desire for independence.¹⁹⁶ According to Karen Anderson, for some women, the “war provided an opportunity for a socially sanctioned respite from full-time housework.”¹⁹⁷ Employment reached its highest level in July 1944 at 19 million women, an increase of 47 % over the March 1940 level.¹⁹⁸ The war offered women unprecedented employment opportunities not only in the

¹⁹³ Susan M Hartmann, The Homefront and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 22.

¹⁹⁴ Karen Anderson, Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations and the Status of Women During World War II. (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981), 6.

¹⁹⁵ Hartmann, 19.

¹⁹⁶ Anderson, 29. For example, financial needs ranged from the desire to pay off the family home to the opportunity to pay off debts accumulated during less prosperous times.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4-6.

traditional clerical and administration areas, but in the unconventional yet essential manufacturing sector. Between 1940 and 1944, the number of women employed in manufacturing increased by 141%, while those in domestic service decreased by 20%.

By 1943, the more conventional unmarried female workforce was supplemented more heavily by the active recruitment of married women. Women over 35 made up over 60% of the rise in the female labour force.¹⁹⁹ For the first time in history, married women outnumbered single women in the female work force. Yet public resistance to the idea of working mothers, as well as higher marriage and birth rates, limited the participation of women aged twenty-five to thirty-four. Further, women whose husbands were serving in the war, were “three times more likely to work as wives with their husbands present.” Thus, Anderson finds that although there was a significant expansion of the female labour force, “it was women whose housekeeping and child care responsibilities were lightest who contributed most to that expansion.” William Chafe argues that Americans could accept women in the work force as long as the “changes could not be interpreted as a threat to traditional sex role divisions.”²⁰⁰ During the war, women’s involvement was “justified as a patriotic necessity” and so, “it coincided with other values important to Americans,”²⁰¹ thereby undermining public opposition.

According to Susan Hartmann, public discourse on women’s new wartime roles set up three conditions that limited the potential social change that could have accompanied these deviations.²⁰² The media was an important instrument in this process,

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁰⁰ William Chafe, as cited in Anderson, 8.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² Hartmann, 23-24.

influencing both the substance and character of these conditions, thereby playing an essential role in constructing the image of the wartime woman. First, there was an understanding in society that the use of women to replace men was only “for the duration” of the conflict. It was commonly believed that women would welcome the opportunity to return to the home and give their jobs to veterans. Second, women retained their femininity even as they performed masculine duties. Photographs of women war workers highlighted glamour, and advertisements during the period emphasized the preservation of the feminine ideal beneath the overalls. Finally, the media emphasized “eternal feminine motivations behind women’s willingness to step outside customary roles.” Women were depicted as demonstrating their patriotism and serving their families in novel ways; they took war jobs to bring their men home more quickly and to help make the world more secure for their children. Social acceptance of women taking war jobs was clearly conditional. Individual women engaged in new roles without necessitating a significant restructuring of societal gender roles.

Women war workers were, therefore, often subject to contradictory images of who they were supposed to be. They were told to be physically strong and mechanically competent while working, and “feminine and attractive, weak and dependent on men during their free time.”²⁰³ Anderson argues that these conflicting images of working women created “perplexity and facilitated an anachronistic retreat into the ‘feminine mystique’ of the postwar period”²⁰⁴ where women were encouraged to seek fulfillment through homemaking. Betty Friedan argues that the image of women that was

²⁰³ Anderson, 64.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

perpetuated in the postwar era is as “young and frivolous, almost childlike, fluffy and feminine; passive; gaily content in a world of bedroom and kitchen, sex, babies and home.”²⁰⁵

World War II, however, offered women new opportunities within the military. In 1942 and 1943, Congress sanctioned the creation of Navy and Army women’s corps with full military status. As in the civilian sphere, the recruitment of women was prompted by the serious manpower shortages created by the war. The domestication of many military duties, as well as the “feminization” of these jobs, also helped make it possible to utilize women within the military.²⁰⁶ Use of women in these support roles released men for combat.

The desire early in the war to establish these women under the military umbrella was prompted by different interests. Military leaders saw military control as necessary for reasons of “security, permanence and flexibility.”²⁰⁷ They explained this to government and to the public in terms of manpower shortages and by affirming that “all women were by nature better suited for a specific and limited set of duties.”²⁰⁸

Women in power, like Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers, “combined appeals to expediency and justice.”²⁰⁹ They asserted all women’s rights to full participation in all the responsibilities of citizenship. As well, they wished to ensure that women in the World War II military would have the guarantee of benefits denied the women of World War I.

²⁰⁵ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*. (New York: Dell, 1963), 36.

²⁰⁶ D’Ann Campbell, “The Regimented Women of World War II,” in *Women, Militarism and War* (Savage: Rowman and Littlefield, 1990), 113.

²⁰⁷ Hartmann, 35.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

Opposition to the proposals was weak, as few wanted to undermine the capability of the military.²¹⁰ Those who did dissent predominantly argued that women should not be distracted from their domestic duties. They further suggested that women in the military would compromise the image of American men. In the words of one congressman, “What has become of the manhood of America, that we have to call on our women to do what has ever been the duty of men?”²¹¹

In all, 140 000 women served in the Women’s Army Corps (WACs), 100 000 in the Navy’s WAVES; 23 000 in the Marine Corps’ Women’s Reserve; and 13 000 in the Coast Guard’s SPARs.²¹² The majority of these women were assigned to clerical and supply duties.²¹³ Few were trained in ‘masculine’ activities, because the “primary interest in the military was in maximum procurement and utilization.”²¹⁴ To use women in ways consistent with their civilian roles, such as in reception and secretarial capacities, was an economical and “natural” alternative to training men.

Even during the post war reconversion, assumptions about “innate” feminine characteristics played a significant part in shaping women’s roles. Military leaders wanted to retain a nucleus of women for clerical, cryptography and hospital work “because of [their] manual dexterity, patience, attention to detail and enthusiasm for monotonous

²¹⁰ The House passed the WAAC bill 249-86 in March, 1942. The Senate passed it in May, 1942, 38-27. This was followed by a navy bill to establish the WAVES with little debate. In November, the coast guard’s women’s corps, the SPARS, was formed. The Marine Corps had its women’s reserve in February, 1943. The WAAC became the WAC in June, 1943 to grant full military status to its members.

²¹¹ As cited in Hartmann, 36.

²¹² Hartmann, 31-32.

²¹³ Campbell, 113.

²¹⁴ Hartmann, 37.

work.”²¹⁵ In May 1948, Congress responded to the services requirements through the Women’s Armed Services Integration Act, giving women permanent, regular status in defense. They were limited to 2% of total strength, could not ascend beyond the rank of Lieutenant Colonel or Commander and could not join if married. Further, the range of occupations narrowed “because officials believed that ‘unfeminine’ work was not acceptable to public opinion in peace time.”²¹⁶ This postwar service was still envisioned as temporary. As Dwight Eisenhower said, “after an enlistment or two enlistments, women will ordinarily - and thank God - they will get married.”²¹⁷

As discussed above, during the period following the Civil War, nursing in the United States military gradually became a feminine pursuit. Consequently, there was little opposition to using women in that capacity. During World War II, 74 000 American women served as nurses, principally in the Army,²¹⁸ and they were awarded full benefits by the end of the war. Although nurses lived under field conditions, digging their own foxholes and caring for men under fire, hospital duty was still associated with femininity. Military propaganda emphasized that “there is a need in a man for comfort and attention that only a woman can fill.”²¹⁹

According to D’Ann Campbell, women entering the military underwent, a “cultural shock.”²²⁰ As Holm points out, they “were forced to adapt to institutional social values, rules and modes of life.”²²¹ Holm argues that all of the services “tended to treat enlisted

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ As cited in Hartmann, 43.

²¹⁸ Hartmann, 32.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 43.

²²⁰ Campbell, 108.

²²¹ Holm, 68.

women like immature girls in a boarding school, away from home for the first time.” She argues that this attitude reflected two elements. First, the military’s attitudes toward enlisted personnel in general was “by habit paternalistic.” Demographically, however, women were not average enlisted personnel. In contrast to male recruits who were generally under the age of 20, women were on average older and more mature. Many were married, with children or grandchildren. Nevertheless, the military continued to think of these mature women as girls. Second, women were subjected to a cultural value system rooted in the norms of the 1930s that was largely Victorian. There was an “ever present almost prudish concern for protecting military women’s virtue, chastity and reputation individually and collectively.”²²² Women were responsible for their own behaviour as well as that of others.

Although the recruitment of women was framed within the traditional conception of women, there was an “especially marked concern”²²³ about femininity in the armed forces. This led to problems with recruitment. The army, for example, was unable to fill the 150,000 spots in the WACs.²²⁴ According to Hartmann, the principal deterrent to enlistment was women’s fear of losing their femininity.²²⁵ According to Maureen Honey, this fear was articulated in a memo from the Office of Emergency Management concerning WAVES and SPAR recruitment. It indicated the conflict between military service and conventional notions of femininity:

There is an unwholesomely large number of girls who refrain from even contemplating enlistment because of

²²² Ibid., 69-70.

²²³ Maureen Honey, Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda During World War II (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 113.

²²⁴ Hartmann, 39.

²²⁵ Ibid.

male opinion. An educative program needs to be done among the male population to overcome this problem. Men -- both civilian and military personnel -- should be more specifically informed that it is fitting for women to be in service. This would call for copy ... which shows that the services increase, rather than detract from, desirable feminine characteristics.²²⁶

WAC advertisements, therefore, asserted that women were “just as feminine as before they enlisted” and had developed a “new poise and charm.” Further, women’s service was portrayed in terms of “their traditional feminine relationships and responsibilities.” Advertisements emphasized that by “performing the duties that women would ordinarily do in civilian life,” women could hasten the return of their loved ones.²²⁷ The navy reassured women that they would “be as likely as other women to make marriage their profession”²²⁸ after the war. Men and women were assured that “The girls in the WAVES are real American women -- the kind who love parties and pretty clothes and who are good at cooking and sewing too. They’re very feminine and proud of it.”²²⁹ According to Hartmann, this type of recruitment reflected the “need to appeal to prevailing public attitudes” as well as the military’s desire to “encourage a larger yet still limited view of women’s capabilities.”²³⁰ In spite of women’s untraditional activities, films and advertisements emphasized that women were relatives of men, acting on their behalf. They were still the protected and their activities were thus socially acceptable. This social acceptance was critical to successful recruitment.

Women in the service tried to discourage the use of “cheesecake” publicity with its

²²⁶ As cited in Honey, 113.

²²⁷ Ibid., 41-42.

²²⁸ Ibid., 43.

²²⁹ As cited in Honey, 114.

²³⁰ Hartmann, 42.

emphasis on romantic appeal, excitement and adventure because the reality of service fell short of these expectations. Yet, when private enterprise “dictate[d] the images of servicewomen, these guidelines often did not prevail.”²³¹ Newsreels made frequent mention of women as “girls or gals (and) stressed the most dramatic and most frivolous aspects of the experience” such as undergarments and trips to the beauty shop.

In 1943, recruitment and morale suffered a serious blow. There were numerous rumours circulating about WAC immorality. According to Campbell, it was a slander campaign that was spread by rank and file men, but which reached officers and civilians.²³² These rumours suggested that “women’s military contribution could only take the form of sexual favors,”²³³ and that all military women were whores. Rumours of drunkenness, promiscuity and pregnancy were so widespread that the President and Secretary of War publicly refuted them. This perception spread despite military precautions, and the imposition of a higher standard of behaviour for women. These rumours made recruitment difficult and demonstrated the extent to which women in uniform violated long-standing norms. Most men “simply could not shed their preconceptions about women’s capabilities and their appropriate roles.”²³⁴ Campbell cites one WAC leader who contended that the underlying motive for the campaign was that “men have for centuries used slander against morals as a weapon to keep women out of public life.”²³⁵

The construction and impact of images in World War II is of particular interest to this study. It is generally conceded that after World War II, there were many forces that

²³¹ Ibid., 41.

²³² Campbell, 115.

²³³ Hartmann, 39.

²³⁴ Ibid., 40.

²³⁵ As cited in Campbell, 115.

discouraged the retention of the progressive changes that encouraged women's entry into nontraditional fields. Among the most important was the manipulation of images. A critical problem for analysts has been to

unravel the mystery of how those images could expand and contract public conceptions of woman's place within such a short period of time without confusing or alienating the population and without more seriously challenging the conservative ideology behind the sexual division of labour.²³⁶

The media and government officials were able to frame women's activities within the traditional responsibilities of the protected. Women were only doing what was necessary to facilitate their protection for the duration of the war. This image was rooted in the traditional image of women as the protected and thus, Honey contends that in the postwar reconversion, the traditional image of women was not supplanted by their wartime role. In fact, a reactionary postwar feminine mystique was spawned by "a crisis that necessitated radical revision of traditional views." Leila Rupp concurs, finding that the new image of 'Rosie the Riveter' that emerged during the war did not mean that the "ideal American woman had changed beyond recognition."²³⁷ World War II, therefore, while offering women new opportunities in the short term, failed to provide the conversion of images necessary to support long-term radical changes in gender-based power dynamics.

Housewives had served a symbolic function throughout the war; they were "vital defenders of the nation's homes."²³⁸ According to Honey, this glorification of the housewife is best understood in the "context of an ideology that placed the home at the

²³⁶ Honey, 3.

²³⁷ Leila Rupp, as cited in Honey, 4.

²³⁸ Honey, 135.

center of American values.” The servicewoman stood for “civilian patriotism” but the housewife stood for “what made America strong: the family.” In a time of social and civil upheaval, “the ideal of the family served as a national unifier, becoming a symbol of what the American system was all about.” Hartmann contends that the war increased social dislocation and consequently, the “institution of the family with wife and mother at its core took on more significance.”²³⁹

During the postwar era, public concern over family stability increased. Higher incidences of delinquency, divorce, and illegitimacy gained attention and were blamed on working mothers. According to Hartmann, social stability then replaced military victory as a national goal. Women were “needed as wives and mothers rather than as workers.”²⁴⁰ She concludes that what is noteworthy is that “American society managed a temporary disruption of traditional social norms within a larger context of continuity in the sexual order.” The popular ideology that a woman’s primary function was in the home thus survived the war both in public discourse and in the private beliefs of most women.

Women were the enduring symbols and justification of the war. The preservation of the traditional home was equated with normalcy. Thus, the image persisted in the postwar period. Women were needed after the war not as “models of autonomy and achievement” but as “figures of mercy, tenderness, and innocence who had remained unscathed by the brutal realities of combat.”²⁴¹ The military crisis did, however, create an “ideological climate supportive of the women’s movement in the public realm.”²⁴² It gave

²³⁹ Hartmann, 39.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 24-25.

²⁴¹ Honey, 137.

²⁴² Hartmann, 21.

women symbols in Rosie the Riveter, and increased their importance as citizens. Nevertheless, they remained the protected both in the military and in society. In the postwar period, most women returned to pre-war roles, facilitating the return to normalcy the media had promised since women were first recruited.

The Vietnam War

During the Vietnam War, women were virtually invisible, despite the importance of their military role. The official emphasis, both during and after the war, was on “combat, tactics and men.”²⁴³ Although nurses, who held officer rank, were used extensively, the military demonstrated a reluctance to fully use enlisted women in Southeast Asia. The presence of women in the war zone was undesirable and inconsistent with prevailing military policy and attitudes. This invisibility persisted and deepened in the postwar public recollections and reconstructions of the war. Thus, women were unable to challenge their presence as the protected.

Approximately 7500 of the more than three million American soldiers who served in Vietnam between 1962 and 1973 were women.²⁴⁴ Of those women, 80% were nurses serving in the Navy, the Air Force and the Army Nurse Corps.²⁴⁵ Nurses were thus a small but essential minority of the total American contingent. All nurses were officers and

²⁴³ Elizabeth Norman, Women at War: The Story of Fifty Military Nurses Who Served in Vietnam (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 65.

²⁴⁴ According to Kathryn Marshall, the Veteran’s Administration puts the number of military women at more than 11,000. Kathryn Marshall, In The Combat Zone: Vivid Personal Recollections of the Vietnam War from the Women Who Served There (New York: Penguin Books, 1987).

²⁴⁵ Anne Hoiberg, “Military Psychology and Women’s Role in the Military,” in Handbook of Military Psychology (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Ltd., 1991).

had to be 21 years old to serve in the combat zone. Their tour of duty was generally one year. As nurses were expected to be deployed in an emergency, their background included some survival training, including rudimentary instruction in field assignments.²⁴⁶ Nevertheless, they were still designated as noncombatants.

Women's motivation for joining the nursing corps was often rooted in patriotism and duty. As one nurse stated, she volunteered to go to show people "A little town girl can serve her country and be a hero."²⁴⁷ The war provided the "opportunity to fulfill the basic, traditional feminine roles; to care and to feel needed" helping "our men fighting and dying."²⁴⁸ Women wanting to volunteer encountered resistance from family members used to sending their sons off to war, but not their daughters. While nursing was a "good female profession," joining the military and going to Vietnam did not "fit the picture."²⁴⁹

Norman found that the treatment of nurses by American men overseas fell within traditional parameters. The men believed that women (many of whom outranked them), were in need of protection. The unwritten rule was "Men protected women: women in turn comforted the men."²⁵⁰ Men expected women to "become surrogate mothers, sisters, wives, and girl friends"²⁵¹ in return for their protection.

The women themselves also recognized the value of female nurses. Their presence

²⁴⁶ Holm, 225.

²⁴⁷ As cited in Norman, 8.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Norman, 11.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 67. Norman interviewed fifty female military nurses who served in Vietnam from 1965 to 1973. The majority of the women were in the Army Nursing Corps, reflecting their proportion in Vietnam. A preliminary list of candidates (122) was generated using a "snowball sampling" technique whereby she obtained further names from those she had interviewed. All women were either residents of the East Coast or visiting.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

seemed “to give the men a sense of security and a tie-in with a more pleasant, normal way of life than they have just experienced.”²⁵² According to Navy Commander Mary Cannon, the nurse’s biggest job in Vietnam was “to influence the morale of the patients.”²⁵³ Norman concurs. She found that “the nurses took their role as a symbol of home very seriously.”²⁵⁴ For example, nurses would take particular care to ensure that they were well groomed whenever possible: “They reported to work with their hair brushed and make-up in place.” Norman points out that while these efforts may at first glance appear “superficial and demeaning,” the nurses saw themselves as being able “to provide temporary refuge from the brutal war.”²⁵⁵

Despite women’s important role, the military establishment neglected their needs. Military stores failed to carry essential feminine products, yet carried nylon stockings, which one nurse interviewed in Norman’s book remarked, “were probably there for the soldiers to buy for their local girlfriends.”²⁵⁶ There were also occasions when this type of oversight proved potentially dangerous. Often the military seemed more interested in protecting women from fellow soldiers than the enemy. One camp modified procedures for women during an attack. It was deemed “probably dangerous” to have the thirty women stationed at the base “run out in their pajamas and nightgowns into the bunkers.”²⁵⁷ The danger was not physical, but that the American soldiers would see them. The alternate plan involved women crawling under their bunks wearing protective jackets.

²⁵² Holm, 227.

²⁵³ As cited in Holm, 227.

²⁵⁴ Norman, 69.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

It failed to work in practice, however, as the female shape did not fit in the limited space. This lack of concern for women's needs was at odds with the great demand for their skills.

Another example involves women's uniforms and their role in the perception of femininity. Female nurses and non-medical personnel arrived in Vietnam in dress uniforms, while men arrived in fatigues.²⁵⁸ Their issued clothing was not designed for the climate and conditions in Southeast Asia. Once the Tet Offensive began and Saigon became the target of direct attacks, all personnel were ordered to wear jungle fatigues or field uniforms: "Neat, feminine and attractive this ensemble was not."²⁵⁹ This initiated a campaign by the WAC director to force women to wear their two-piece, green cord uniform with skirt and pumps. Clothing took on greater significance as the media published photographs of women "roughing it". The director found this image inconsistent with the goals of the WAC. She felt that the "parents of young girls did not like to envision their daughters in the rough, tough environment conveyed by the field uniforms."²⁶⁰ She believed that these portrayals would in turn decrease the relative desirability of the Army, whose uniforms were less feminine than those of the other services. Her campaign met resistance among the women serving in Vietnam who felt that the uniform would compromise their effectiveness. This debate over the public image of servicewomen reveals once again the ambiguity of the role of women in the military. It is unclear whether they were valued by their own leadership more as soldiers or as symbols.

While the use of women as nurses in war had become commonplace, resistance to

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 18.

²⁵⁹ Holm, 238.

²⁶⁰ As cited in Holm, 239.

extending their role persisted. Their use in Vietnam, as in other conflicts, “was generated by [the] military manpower crisis precipitated by a war.”²⁶¹ The approach of the military in the recruitment of women, however, was “symptomatic of the military mind-set that the decision to use more women came after all other options had been considered.”²⁶² For example, in 1967, when the military was faced with a lack of suitable male volunteers, the Secretary of Defense ordered the conversion of more than 114,000 military support positions into civilian assignments and implemented “Project 100,000” by lowering admission standards to improve enlistment. While these measures were undertaken without consulting the services, it was only after exhaustive study and negotiation that the Department of Defense announced plans to increase the number of military women to just over 6500. Holm argues that this behaviour is reminiscent of a 1941 observation that military and government leaders would have probably preferred “dogs, ducks or monkeys to women if they could have used them.”²⁶³

The armed forces did, however, undergo changes during the period that raised enlistment ceilings and eliminated many legislated barriers to women’s advancement. These changes did not, for the most part, alter the basic conception of the role of women in the military. The Armed Services Committee argued “there cannot be complete equality between men and women in the matter of military careers. The stern demands of combat, sea duty, and other types of assignments directly related to combat are not placed upon women in our society.”²⁶⁴ Thus, women remained a “protected, exempt from combat

²⁶¹ Holm, 186.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 187.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ On November 8, 1967 Lyndon B. Johnson signed Public Law 90-130 which was in part designed to remove restrictions on the careers of female officers. It was the first major policy

underclass.”²⁶⁵

Approximately 1300 military women (most of whom were members of the Women’s Army Corps and over half of them were enlisted women)²⁶⁶ performed non-medical work in Vietnam. Holm argues that far more women could have served in support capacities “had the services adopted more realistic policies and made the necessary arrangements earlier.” Women were needed and preferred, for example, to fight the “paper war”²⁶⁷ that had begun in earnest in Vietnam. Despite this need, however, the military failed to fully mobilize women.

One key reason for keeping women out of Vietnam stemmed from military leaders’ “stereotypical attitudes toward servicewomen, which bordered on paternalism.”²⁶⁸ These attitudes endured despite the strong performance of women in previous wars. Leaders wished to limit women’s exposure to the harsh realities of the combat arena. The military programs of the time were designed not “to send women to war [but] ... to release *men* for duty in the combat area.”²⁶⁹ Basically, women did not have the “training, conditioning, clothing or equipment” necessary for deployment to a combat theater. For example, the WAC training program stopped its weapons familiarization course in the early sixties because it did not contribute to what WAC director Col. Elizabeth P. Hoisington

change affecting servicewomen since the Army-Navy Nurse Act in 1947 and the Women’s Armed Services Integration Act in 1948. The law removed rank ceilings, permitting promotion to general and admiral, and also eliminated the 2% of total force limit. This became important after the implementation of the All-Volunteer Force, as women then became important alternatives to draftees. Holm, 192-203.

²⁶⁵ Judith Hicks Stiehm, “Protected,” 369.

²⁶⁶ Holm, 206.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 209.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 212.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 211.

considered to be “the image [the WACs] want to project.”²⁷⁰ Later, she balked at giving women in Vietnam weapons, for “the possibilities for unfavourable publicity about our WACs over there are sufficient without adding this to them.”²⁷¹ Policy-makers were thus wary of compromising the feminine image of servicewomen.

Implicit in the reluctance to deploy women to the combat area was the “services’ habit of overprotectiveness, based on the notion that the women would not be able to cope with the slightest inconvenience.”²⁷² Women were often excluded because of the perceived problems of accommodating them on base and the lack of suitable recreational facilities. Women who were deployed served principally as secretaries and clerks in Saigon and on larger bases. They also worked as air traffic controllers, photographers, cartographers, intelligence officers and cryptographers.²⁷³

In addition to military women, there were many American civilian women in Vietnam working as secretaries and receptionists at the US embassy and at government offices and as journalists, teachers, and photographers for both local and international organizations. They worked directly with the military under civilian contract when military women were unavailable or undesirable. College-educated women in their twenties were hired to “boost the morale” of the troops. They provided services such as refreshments and entertainment not only at base camps, but in the field. They were flown in on military helicopters to areas where few enlisted women had access. The Army Special Services also used civilian women in a recreational capacity, although in smaller

²⁷⁰ Elizabeth P. Hoisington, as cited in Holm, 211.

²⁷¹ Letter from the Director, WAC to WAC Staff Advisor, HQ USAPAC, 20 March 1967, as cited in Holm, 211.

²⁷² Holm, 224.

²⁷³ Marshall, 7.

numbers through organizations like the USO. The use of these non-military women in the combat arena while at the same time prohibiting trained military personnel from the same locations reveals a fundamental inconsistency in military treatment of servicewomen. They were perceived as needing protection. This notion is established, according to Stiehm, by "law, policy and, for many, belief."²⁷⁴ It justifies military policy that precludes women from combat positions based on gender.

Women's work in Vietnam did not receive media coverage, thus women in Vietnam were virtually invisible. As Kathryn Marshall argues, "in the popular imagination, Vietnam remained a zone where no woman had been."²⁷⁵ She questions whether this is because it was "inconceivable that women had gone to such a dirty, confused war."²⁷⁶ Rather, she postulates that their invisibility may be the result of the fact that the women serving in Vietnam were principally filling the traditional roles of nurturer and caregiver. This exclusion of women is demonstrated, according to Holm, in a speech given by President Reagan on March 15, 1981:

Several years ago, we brought home a group of American fighting men who had obeyed their country's call and who had fought as bravely and as well as any Americans in our history. They came home without a victory, not because they had been defeated, but because they'd been denied permission to win. They were greeted by no parades, no bands, no waving of the flag they had so nobly served. There's been no thank-you for their sacrifice. There's been no effort to honor and, thus, give pride to families of more than 57,000 young men who gave their lives in that faraway war There's been little or no recognition of the gratitude we owe to the more than 300,000 men who suffered wounds in that war.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴ Stiehm, "Myths," 104.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁷⁷ Ronald Reagan, as cited in Holm, 242.

Reagan, by virtue of his omission of women, rendered their contributions insignificant. In so doing, he helped to exclude women from popular and political representations of the Vietnam War during the 1980s and 1990s.

Thus, the female veteran was generally ignored. The war was simply not about her. This exclusion had repercussions for women upon their return to the United States. Many had difficulty readjusting to daily life. According to Marshall, the military women soon learned that “the Veterans’ Administration had a history of ignoring women.”²⁷⁸ Those who tried to join veterans’ organizations were often denied membership or were forced to join ladies’ auxiliaries. She further points out that the “force behind the organization of Vietnam veterans was all-male and combat was the central issue.” Thus, women were excluded by the limits of their experience. Although there were many studies done on the problems of the veteran, “nothing was done to ascertain the war’s effect on women.”²⁷⁹ Holm speculates that the omission was based on the assumption that either male and female reactions did not differ, or that “because they were noncombatants, their reactions were not important enough to warrant study.”

This exclusion was further evidenced by the case of the Vietnam Veterans Women’s Memorial. The Vietnam War Memorial was dedicated in 1982 in Washington, D.C. as a monument to the men and women who died there. In 1984, a statue by Frederick Hart of three fighting men was added at the West entrance, taking only two

²⁷⁸ Kathryn Marshall, *In the Combat Zone: Vivid Personal Recollections of the Vietnam War from the Women Who Served There* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 11.

²⁷⁹ Holm, 241.

years to conceive, approve, finance and erect. According to Diane Carlson Evans (veteran and leader in the fight to erect the women's memorial), the addition of this statue "changed things" through its traditional exclusion of women. And so, the women's memorial became a way of reminding the country that women were there too. This was a long process, taking from 1983 until the memorial dedication in February, 1993. Perseverance in the face of great resistance was motivated by the desire for recognition of women's contributions, which female veterans felt had been overlooked: "We wanted people to know what we looked like, what we wore, what we felt, what we did. For history's sake."²⁸⁰ These women wished to remedy their invisibility.

The women who served during the war proved that "contrary to popular mythology and the image so carefully cultivated for them during the post-World War II period, the modern American woman is fully capable of functioning effectively in a military role in a combat environment."²⁸¹ In spite of their performance, however, the Vietnam War did little to restructure the image of women as warriors. In fact, the Vietnam War was used in the 1980s as a gauge for masculinity, fueling efforts to reclaim what was lost in the war. In this enterprise, women had little place. It is not surprising, therefore, that in spite of the objective advances made by women in the military in the

²⁸⁰ Diane Carlson Evans, in Terrie Clafin, "Monumental Achievement: Twenty Years after Vietnam Invisible Vets Get Their Memorial," *Ms.* (November/December, 1993): 88.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 207.

1970s (as a result of the all-volunteer force),²⁸² the public was unprepared for the drastic changes that occurred in the 1980s and 1990s.

Grenada and Panama

The military operations in Grenada in 1983, and Panama in 1989, offered the public its first look at the new role of women in the military. Although women remained as support personnel, the responsibilities of that classification had expanded. The number of women serving had also increased due to altered enrollment ceilings that accompanied the adoption of the all-volunteer army in the early 1970s. As discussed above, women have always been a part of war. Miriam Cooke and Angela Woollacott argue that it was only after the invasion of Panama that they were explicitly recognized as participants.²⁸³

Cynthia Enloe maintains that the invasion of Panama, as well as the earlier action in Grenada in 1983, were “gendered precursors” to Operation Desert Storm.²⁸⁴ During this period, she argues, the construction of the image of the female soldier was accomplished in a fragmented manner by government, the military and the media.²⁸⁵ As

²⁸² The creation of the All Volunteer Force in 1973 led to the first major overhaul of service laws and regulations since the creation of the WAAC in World War II. It eliminated the majority of those rules that prevented women from being assimilated into the military mainstream. “Gradually, the selection criteria was equalized, most all female procurement/training programs were combined with previously all-male programs; assignments to most non-combat and many combat units were handled on an interchangeable basis; promotion lists and career monitoring for women were incorporated with men’s; family policies were revised and the women’s support systems were abolished.” Women became full members of the regular forces. These changes were prompted by the need to recruit more people and incorporate them quickly.

²⁸³ Miriam Cooke and Angela Woollacott, Gendering War Talk (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 320.

²⁸⁴ Cynthia Enloe, “The Politics of Constructing the American Woman Soldier” in Women Soldiers: Images and Realities (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 97.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 87-89.

the number of women within the military increased, there developed a greater tension between two notions of militarized femininity: one that embraced women on the homefront as mothers and wives, and one that addressed women training for the battlefield as soldiers. Enloe argues that the images created in these two arenas may be perceived as contradictory at times, for they may not reflect common gendered trends. The woman wearing an apron may not appear to represent the same femininity as the one in fatigues. It could be argued, however, that these images do have similarities, as they are each part of the image of the protected. Women both on the homefront and on the battlefield serve functions consistent with the role of the protected.

It was not until the invasion of Grenada that the “regendered military” was exposed to wide public view. The Defense Department did its best to “limit the mainstream media’s coverage of women’s roles in the invasion”²⁸⁶ so as not to compromise the image of the American female soldier that the military and government had constructed. Overall, 170 American servicewomen took part as “MP’s, helicopter pilots, interrogators, signal corps specialists, truck drivers, and as members of bomb teams.”²⁸⁷ Enloe points out that women were “closer to the masculinized inner sanctum of ‘combat’” as a result of the successful lobbying of women officers²⁸⁸ than was widely believed.

During the Panama invasion, the press and media “refused to be kept so safely at a

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 97.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ According to Cynthia Enloe, many female officers who saw that they were going to be separated from their assigned units and deprived of the opportunity to participate, called officials in Washington insisting that the policy was unfair and threatened to undermine the morale of the units.

distance."²⁸⁹ Consequently, there was more significant coverage of the use of women and thus greater debate over their proper place. According to Enloe, the character of these debates was "affected by the overall cultural politics of the Panama invasion."²⁹⁰ While women were portrayed as closer to combat, it was in a war that had "broad American public support" and in contrast to Vietnam, was portrayed as "short and clean." Thus, she concludes "it seemed less threatening to respectable femininity."²⁹¹

One incident in Panama came to represent the artificial nature of women's combat exclusion and threatened to undermine the presumed safety of support personnel. Captain Linda Bray's unit came under fire at a dog kennel that had been presumed to be lightly guarded. According to Holm, Bray's activities were a revelation to an "American public raised on the myth that women were excluded from military combat."²⁹² In response, the Department of Defense explicitly asserted that Bray's assignment was not combat, for that would be inconsistent with military policy and beliefs.²⁹³ Holm finds that the "question of whether women should be in harm's way as a matter of public policy was seldom

²⁸⁹ Enloe, "Politics," 97.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 98.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² Holm, 435.

²⁹³ Enloe, "Politics," 98. Women in 1989 were barred from combat positions in all services. Combat, as defined by each of the services, was examined in Chapter One. As of February 2, 1988 the assignment of women to non-combat duty in the Armed Forces was done using the Department of Defense's "Risk Rule" which was designed to reduce servicewomen's risk of injury, death or capture. It states: "Risks of direct combat, exposure to hostile fire, or capture are proper criteria for closing non-combat positions or units to women, when the type, degree, and duration of such risk are equal to or greater than the combat units with which they are normally associated within a given theater of operations. If the risk of non-combat units or positions is less than comparable to land, air or sea combat units with which they are associated, they should be open to women. Non-combat land units should be compared to combat land units, air to air and so forth." Report of the Presidential Commission on Women in the Military (November 14, 1992), 36.

raised."²⁹⁴ Discussion tended to focus instead on the apparent inconsistency of military policy.

This new public awareness sparked activism on the part of Congressional Representatives Patricia Schroeder, Beverly Byron and Barbara Boxer to capitalize on the effects of Panama by revealing the artificial nature of combat exclusion and to maximize public support. Yet, as in previous Congressional hearings on Women in the Military in the 1970s and 1980s, those dealing with Panama also failed to receive significant media attention. An evaluation of the legislative construction of women soldiers again yielded disappointing results.

Grenada and Panama illustrated that women's place in the military had grown since Vietnam. Women were actively used in each operation, although not without some reluctance. While the expectations of servicewomen, as well as those of congressional and public advocates, were raised for revolutionary change in the military's treatment of women, reality fell short of those hopes. Little modification of the status quo occurred. Holm argues that had the Persian Gulf war not occurred, it is likely that the issues surrounding women's participation in the military would have been put on hold.²⁹⁵

The media's portrayal of military women was seemingly positive. At the same time, however, the effect on the general public was not significant enough to provoke a strong and sustained demand for closure of the image-reality gap. Possibly, neither intervention lasted long enough to create the image-reality dissonance necessary to prompt

²⁹⁴ Holm, 435.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 436.

a conversion. The image of women with respect to war was in flux; it was riddled with inconsistencies and the public seemed prepared to live with them.

Conclusion

In all American conflicts, women have been called to service out of necessity, but their role has been institutionalized slowly. The retention of the primacy of man as protector has facilitated the postwar return to normalcy and has compromised enduring challenges to the constructed image of women as the protected. The socially sanctioned roles of women have generally been portrayed as within traditional feminine parameters. Thus, in spite of successful and valued wartime contributions, there has been little change in the image of women in war.

Chapter Four
Images of Women in the Persian Gulf War

The image conveyed of the unprecedented number of women serving as soldiers in the American military during the Gulf War had important consequences for the construction of femininity in popular, political and military cultures. According to Elisabetta Addis, Valeria E. Russo and Lorenza Sebesta, there are implications for the “collective image of what a woman is and what it is appropriate for her to be and for the image that each woman have of herself.”²⁹⁶ The Gulf War, like World War II, had the potential to permanently sever the exclusive link between men and war, as the public discovered that the “US soldier, in full desert battle gear, loaded with equipment, [was not only] a ‘he’ but a ‘she’.”²⁹⁷ The Gulf War was unique in that “many of the soldiers’ faces on the TV screens in the morning newspapers, and in the magazines were the faces of women --wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, sweethearts, the girl next door.”²⁹⁸ Despite their presence, however, there was still evidence in Gulf War imagery of a sharp division between a masculinized battlefield and a feminized homefront that was reinforced by strict media supervision. Women on the homefront and the battlefield were once again portrayed as operating within their customary feminine roles; each of these roles was a component of the image of the protected.

²⁹⁶ Elisabetta Addis, Valeria E. Russo and Lorenza Sebesta. “Introduction” in Image and Reality (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), xv.

²⁹⁷ Jeanne Holm, Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution, 441.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

Image and The Gulf War

Images played an important part in the successful execution of the Gulf War. It was necessary for the United States government to shape American society's perception of the enemy (Iraq), the victim (Kuwait), the homefront and its own armed forces to create a domestic environment supportive of the war. This was the case particularly in light of the legacy of Vietnam. There, a disintegration of public support, in part due to the proliferation of negative media images, was cited as an important factor in the loss of the war.

After the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, "the Bush Administration's task was to sell two images - an ugly one of Hussein and a handsome one of Kuwait"²⁹⁹ to the American media. Kuwaitis felt that in order to generate necessary support, a "real horror story would have to be written to arouse the wrath of America,"³⁰⁰ where there exists, according to Hassan al-Ebraheem, "a popular psychology [of] standing for the underdog and trying to stand for justice."³⁰¹ In all wars, exaggerated or manufactured enemy atrocities play an important part in boosting war fever at home. The image of the protected is an integral part of this process.

As was discussed in Chapter One, the imagery of rape played an important part in the construction of the Iraqis in general, and Saddam Hussein in particular, as the enemy. Ella Shohat points out that the metaphors of "the rape of Kuwait" were used to frame "Hussein as the villain, Bush as the hero and the U.S. rescuing the victim."³⁰² Even

²⁹⁹ John R. MacArthur, Second Front (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 43.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

³⁰¹ Dr. Hassan al-Ebraheem as cited in Second Front, 51.

³⁰² Shohat, 153.

Bush's and network anchors' pronunciation of the leader's name evoked sexual imagery, as "saad'm" was reminiscent of "sodom."³⁰³ Shohat further argues that entertainment magazines and television shows:

produced numerous voyeuristic projections about Hussein's sexual perversions, including still photos of his bunker bedroom and his harem and stories about his tendency to kill his lovers, especially those who could testify to his failures in bed.³⁰⁴

Bush portrayed Hussein as committing "outrageous acts of barbarism that even Adolf Hitler never committed."³⁰⁵ The Kuwaitis too, became actively involved in the process, using prominent public relations firm Hill and Knowlton to build a positive and sympathetic image. They were responsible for circulating the story concerning the infants, the ultimate protected, who were said to be ripped from their incubators and left to die on the floor by invading soldiers. While this story was proven false in postwar investigations, there was little wartime challenge to the negative construction of the enemy.

As in Panama, the government restricted access to pictures that might undermine the American public's "fighting spirit." Government control over the dissemination of images was aided by the pool system of reporting. Officials had a significant amount of control over the images that were used. From the outset, "both print and television journalists were encouraged to file reports which conformed to the military's expectations

³⁰³ Ella Shohat, "The Media's War," in Seeing Through the Media, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 149. She argues that the public make a series of associations with this pronunciation, including Satan, Damn, and Sodom.

³⁰⁴ Ibid, 148.

³⁰⁵ George Bush, as cited in Second Front, 64.

about appropriate subjects.”³⁰⁶ Such restrictions may have had implications for portrayals of both the men and women in the Gulf, in that the coverage was then more likely to reflect prevailing social images, rather than challenging them. This military control, therefore, limited in part the scope and depth of the potential change in the images of American women in war.

Images of Women on the Homefront

Despite the participation of women on the battlefield, the sharp contrast between the masculinized battlefield and the feminized homefront of past wars remained. The reduction of public opposition was particularly important to Americans after the negative experience of the Vietnam War. To that end, Dana L. Cloud argues that the domestication of the homefront helped to contain dissent over the war. She goes on to argue that this strategy “depended on a particularly gendered mapping of the homefront.”³⁰⁷ The image that sustained this process was that of “military families quietly coping with the threat of war.”³⁰⁸ As in previous conflicts, women represented the family’s enduring support for the war and its soldiers on the homefront. Women and their families were shown primarily in support roles, and thus fulfilled the responsibilities of the protected in the protector-protected relationship.

As evidence of the domestication and feminization of the homefront, Cloud points out that the United States at war was portrayed as a family united in its support for the

³⁰⁶ Julie Wheelwright, “The Media Use of the Feminine in the Gulf War,” in Image and Reality: Women in the Gulf War, 112.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 155.

³⁰⁸ Dana L. Cloud, “Operation Desert Comfort,” in Seeing Through the Media, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 156.

war. Media stories that profiled individual families and focused particularly on military wives and children, created the image of the national family. Thus, the war was “repetitively defined as a melodrama of family life,”³⁰⁹ the traditionally feminine domain. This analysis reinforces Enloe’s assertion that “Governments encourage women to imagine that being a loyal female member of a family is synonymous with being a patriot.” Enloe concludes that the Gulf War “made this myth of the wartime family even more potent.”³¹⁰ Conventional images were thereby reinforced.

Cloud further argues that in television broadcasts, stories highlighting the nation as family often ended the news, illustrating the appropriate response to the details and anxieties of the war. Family members were seen as going in a short time from ambivalence and confusion to resignation and coping. Thus, this type of “yellow ribbon journalism,” which detailed the work of support groups and the pain of family crisis “served to console the nation as a whole.”³¹¹ This coverage evidenced two patterns: stories that predominantly dealt with “stressed out women (military wives) and children,”³¹² and to a lesser extent, stories wherein the crises of profiled individuals were resolved. A Tyndall Report study found that television networks spent more time on “yellow ribbon stories (focusing on domestic support for the troops) than any other war-related news stories in a ratio of almost two to one.”³¹³ Thus, Operation Desert Storm was “answered c.. the homefront by ‘Operation Desert Comfort’”³¹⁴ and women in

³⁰⁹ Rabinowitz, 191.

³¹⁰ Cynthia Enloe, The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 175.

³¹¹ Cloud, 158.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Ibid., 161.

³¹⁴ A phrase coined by Noam Neusner, as cited in Cloud, 158.

traditional roles were given prominence as supporters of the effort.

During the Gulf War, Lauren Rabinowitz examined television genres such as soap operas, talk shows and sitcoms whose viewership is traditionally female. Talk shows that were taped during the operation featured individuals who had relatives in the Persian Gulf. She points out that these shows, specifically The Oprah Winfrey Show, Donahue, and Sally Jessy Raphael, did allow and solicit antiwar statements in January and February of 1991. These expressions were repositioned, however, such that the importance of “supporting the troops on an emotional level,”³¹⁵ despite political opposition, was asserted by an audience member, a guest or the host. Rabinowitz concludes that “public debate and discussion became reconfigured within the limits of the personal, the emotional and the ideal of a woman’s nurturing role in the family.”³¹⁶

According to Rabinowitz, the 1991 Superbowl can be interpreted as a gendered portrait of American culture at war, as it coincided with the first days of the bombings and contained parallels to the military experience. She argues that the players running on the field to the cheers of flag-waving patriots became the “male warrior heroes” whose audience was “marked by a chorus line of scantily clad female beauties [cheerleaders].”³¹⁷ Thus, this “otherwise all-male spectacle also incorporated an idealized white, youthful female sexuality.”³¹⁸ Men on the football field can be perceived as symbolic of those on the battlefield in the Gulf, while women stood out as the symbolic patriotic homefront. Thus, the image conveyed was consistent with the protector-protected relationship.

³¹⁵ Lauren Rabinowitz, “Soap Opera Woes: Genre, Gender, and The Persian Gulf War,” in Seeing Through the Media, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 190.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 191.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 193.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

Based on this analysis, Rabinowitz argues that this display “defined structural relations between masculinity, femininity and patriotism while simultaneously identifying gender as the sole division along which role should be separated and differentiated.”³¹⁹

Susan Jeffords further finds that these popular representations “re-establish the social value of masculinity and restabilize the patriarchal system of which it is a part”³²⁰ at a time women through their greater role in the military, threatened the connection between masculinity and war. Thus women are again relegated to the realm of the protected.

The tying of yellow ribbons became a physical manifestation of support for the war. Lynda Boose argues that the display of ribbons and flags created a tangible and forceful expression of support for “our boys,” in effect defying anyone to dissent.³²¹ She goes on to point out that “the capacity of the ribbons to signify the feminine ... enabled the construction of a rigid binary of gender [through which] ... all potential responses to the war could be contained.”³²² Enloe comments that

in tying a yellow ribbon ‘round an old oak tree -- or car antenna, porch pillar, or shop sign -- most women probably do not see themselves as endorsing something so grandiose as a new world order. They probably see themselves as providing moral support to particular sons, daughters, neighbors, and friends. But for the US national security elite, they are voluntarily constructing a feminized “homefront” to complement --- 28,000[sic] American women soldiers notwithstanding -- a masculinized battlefield.³²³

³¹⁹ Ibid., 193.

³²⁰ Susan Jeffords, as cited in Rabinowitz, 193.

³²¹ Lynda E. Boose, “Techno-Muscularity and the ‘Boy Eternal’: From the Quagmire to the Gulf,” in Gendering War Talk (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 76.

³²² Ibid., 77.

³²³ Enloe, “The Gendered Gulf,” 102.

In the months leading up to the war, public opinion polls revealed that support for American involvement was subject to a gender gap with women far less supportive than men. Once the war began, however, that gap closed from 24 points five days before the bombing of Iraq, to 10 points four days after.³²⁴ As in World War I, the need to create a supportive homefront overcame the interest in peace and the majority of women came to support the effort.

An examination of media representations of and attention to feminine expressions of love and support on the homefront provides further evidence a strict gender binary. For example, a February “human interest” story in Time presented among those detailing the reality of war, offered a look at the “American Scene.” It profiled a group of military wives stationed in Hawaii. They were rehearsing for their annual variety show and hoping that their husbands would return home in time for the performance. The first line highlighted the protector-protected relationship: “As their husbands battle in the gulf, wives and dependents at a Marine air base find solace in a Vegas-quality charity show.”³²⁵ According to the women, the show on the homefront was not frivolous, but “a needed diversion.” There was almost a military feel to the words used by the show’s dance instructor and choreographer: The women were “drilled” and “pushed to their limits.” They were doing their part to facilitate their own protection, a gendered idea that was invoked by the author in the conclusion of the article: “They also serve who only sing and dance.”³²⁶ Women were again the protected, serving as they were supposed -- or allowed -- to serve.

³²⁴ Boose, 77.

³²⁵ Teresa Sullivan, “Dancing on the Homefront,” Time, (February 18 1991): 8.

³²⁶ Ibid., 9.

The Gulf War also provided examples of the role of women as motivators in the protector-protected relationship. According to Abouali Farmanfarmaian, American troops, in spite of Saudi censorship, “imported their share of idealized white women to fight for.”³²⁷ There was an “endless number of T-shirts and posters picturing over-sexualized, exclusively blond women over the inscription ‘Desert Storm.’”³²⁸ Further, wives on the homefront provided “Operation Desert Cheer,” sending half-nude photographs of themselves to their husbands in the Gulf. Family men were therefore provided with “constant reminders of why [they] are here.”³²⁹ It could be argued that these women were the “psychological aphrodisiacs of war” in the Gulf War, in much the same way posters and pinups were in World War II.

The image of women as the traditional protected on the homefront is theoretically symbolic of the American family at war. Acting as nurturers and as supporters, they motivate and honour those who protect them. In so doing, they create a largely feminized homefront. This appears to have been the case in the Gulf War. At the same time, military women on the battle field serve an apparently different role, and thus appear to generate a different image. The servicewoman’s presence, therefore, may at first glance suggest a challenge to the traditional masculine character of the protector. Closer examination of the apparent tension between the image of women on the homefront and on the battlefield, however, reveals that these images are not necessarily opposed in the context of the Gulf War. Women remain the protected, regardless of their proximity to, and their role in, the war theatre.

³²⁷ Farmanfarmaian, 131.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 130.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 133.

Images of Women as Soldiers

Women participated in unprecedented numbers in the 1990-1991 Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. The level of participation, as well as the media attention, further exposed military women to public view. While servicewomen were portrayed as serving in what were perceived as revolutionary ways, the public was encouraged to view them as women first. This exposure created the opportunity to significantly challenge the traditional relationship of women to war. Nevertheless, the conflict failed to generate an image of women that was distinct from that of the protected.

The Persian Gulf War represented the first large-scale United States military operation since the implementation of the All-Volunteer Force, in which women had an increasing presence. Women comprised 6.8% of the soldiers stationed in the Persian Gulf region.³³⁰ Of these, 26 000 women served with the Army. They were assigned to forward support units in numerous specialties, including transport, military police, air defense artillery, medical search and rescue and intelligence. The Navy sent 3 700 women to the region. They served on hospital, supply and repair ships and as Naval pilots, flying helicopters and reconnaissance aircraft. Marine Corps women numbered 2 200, and represented the first deployment to a conflict since Vietnam. The Air Force sent 5 300 women to serve in a wide variety of support positions similar to those in the Army, as well as in duties such as military airlift and aerial refueling. The Coast Guard assigned their 13 women in the Gulf to post security positions. This participation, although the largest in American history, was significantly less than their 11% representation in the regular

³³⁰ United States Department of Defense, "Conduct of the Persian Gulf War, Final Report To Congress," April 1992, Appendix R.

forces. They were still officially prevented from serving on the front lines or in direct combat units (a distinction that has become blurred with the current capability and structure of the military).

The American female soldier was used as a weapon in the image war with Iraq. Enloe argues that American media coverage was “framed by a contrast between the liberated American woman soldier and the veiled Arab woman.”³³¹ This assertion appears to be supported by available evidence. Wheelwright concurs, pointing out that this technique was consistent with the “still pervasive ideology [that if] all Arab women are dehumanized within Arab culture, [then] American women are ‘liberated’ to a ridiculous degree.”³³² The “United States is the advanced, civilized country,” in contrast to its Arab counterparts. This contrast was convincingly articulated by comparing the lives and images of women from both countries. Therese Saliba argues that this rhetoric of the Gulf War “mirrored ‘colonial feminist’ strategies in its attempt to discredit Arab culture as universally oppressive to women.”³³³ (This is not to say that there were no legitimate differences in social status between Western and Arab women). This process parallels World’s Fairs where American women were encouraged to compare their civilized lives with those of native women in poorer nations.³³⁴ American culture thus celebrated its own progress by negating another culture. While western women are given the privilege of superiority, they enjoy this position only in exchange for inequality at home. Thus, while

³³¹ Cynthia Enloe, “The Gendered Gulf,” 99.

³³² Julie Wheelwright, “The Media’s Use of the Feminine in Gulf War,” 116.

³³³ Theresa Saliba, “Military Presences and Absences,” in Seeing Through the Media: The Persian Gulf War (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 265.

³³⁴ Cynthia Enloe, Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Relations (California: University of California, 1987).

American women could not serve fully in the defense of the state, they could at least drive a car (unlike their Kuwaiti counterparts).

In spite of this apparent glorification of the American female soldier as a progressive figure, the coverage of women in the Gulf often fell within the traditional parameters of the protected. (This will be discussed further below). As in past wars, women served in innovative ways, but this service did not undermine their presence as women. Images, although framed by a new environment, were largely consistent with those of earlier conflicts. The femininity of those who challenged the conventional construction of the warrior was preserved.

Enloe argues that the American image that came out of the Gulf War was that of the “professionalized woman militarized patriot,”³³⁵ an image that had been quietly cultivated in the years prior to the war by interested members of Congress, in the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS)³³⁶, in the officer corps and in Washington lobbying organizations. While the ideal woman soldier of the 1990s still wears lipstick, she “isn’t smiling” -- “she’s a pro.”³³⁷ She suggests that by being considered professionals by the public, “women soldiers’ own femininity... could be sustained even close to the front lines.”³³⁸ She further argues that professionalism also “provided a protective shield, a new form of guaranteed respectability.”³³⁹ This professional female soldier was “neither morally loose nor suspiciously manly.” The media

³³⁵ Ibid, 102.

³³⁶ DACOWITS is a 38-member civilian body that advises the Secretary of Defense on issues related to the assignment of women in the military.

³³⁷ Ibid, 106.

³³⁸ Enloe, “The Politics of Constructing the American Woman Soldier,” *Image and Reality* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 98.

³³⁹ Ibid, 98.

addressed a concern for the latter by emphasizing the families left behind. Addis, Russo and Sebesta concur, observing that the “ideology of professionalism” allows the traditional image of femininity to coexist with the image that has emerged from the media since Panama: women “wearing fatigues like a man, and wielding a gun like a man, ready to kill on command, like a soldier, if need be.”³⁴⁰ Thus, a new, distinct image has evolved that coexists and contrasts with the traditional image of women in war.

It could be argued, however, that this same soldier, while certainly different from that of earlier conflicts, was often portrayed differently from her male counterparts. The prevalent image during the Gulf War is not a radical departure from the traditional image of women in war. Both the image of women on the homefront and on the battlefield remain aspects of the same image of the protected. The media was preoccupied with femininity and masculinity.

Although Enloe finds that the image of professionalization answered many of the traditional concerns surrounding the woman soldier, an examination of media reports indicates that there was a persistent preoccupation with stereotypical conceptions of femininity and masculinity. The media consistently raised questions and offered opinions about femininity and the nature of women with respect to war. Jean Bethke Elshtain makes anecdotal reference to one article during the war that highlighted the utility of having women in the Gulf. In addition to completing essential military support tasks, women were “also useful in the war effort because they provided a ‘shoulder to cry on’ for the men.”³⁴¹ Thus, women were shown as behaving in ways consistent with their role

³⁴⁰ Addis, Russo and Sebesta, “Introduction,” xv.

³⁴¹ Jean Bethke Elshtain, “Feminism and War,” *The Progressive* (September, 1991): 15.

as the nurturing protected on the homefront. Time, for example, featured the women serving in the Gulf in its February 1991 issue. After describing the activities of Lt. Lynn Bifora and her commitment to equal opportunity, the article concluded with: "She admits that it would be nice to put on a dress again, and clings to what femininity she can."³⁴² This final impression undermines her presence as a soldier. She is a woman -- the protected -- first.

The media also gave attention to the sexual needs of male soldiers, in terms of the perceived nature of masculinity. Consequently, they also addressed the implications for the women serving with these men. For example, Knight-Ridder Newspapers circulated a story entitled "Female Troops Feel the Stress of New Roles." Women in the article were described as fearing being around men who were in the desert for extended periods of time. One enlisted woman commented that: "When men are living in the desert, their loins start tingling. They see a female and their heads aren't clear. They want to go into combat with a clear head."³⁴³ This attitude further objectifies the role of military women. They are apparently perceived not as fellow combatants, but as sexual objects. Men are the protectors, whose nature is, by convention, tied to masculinity. There was rarely the suggestion in the wartime popular media, however, that any American woman could be raped by an American man.

Media reports also exaggerated problems of fraternization and pregnancy, constructing incidents as exclusively the responsibility of women. The Navy destroyer, Acadia was portrayed as indicative of this 'baby boom'. It became known as the "Love

³⁴² citation to follow.

³⁴³ Patricia Perez, as cited in Larry Copeland's "Female Troops Feel the Stress of New Roles," in The Detroit Free Press, February 17 1991, 6F.

Boat” after 36 female crew members became pregnant.³⁴⁴ Further, such incidents have been used as evidence that women should be precluded from combat units, as their presence would, for example, “distract from the totality of the effort required by a fighting unit.”³⁴⁵ While more men were incapacitated due to sports injuries, than women due to pregnancy, the media gave the impression that this was a widespread problem.³⁴⁶ The Department of Defense stated that while detailed figures were not meaningful, the overall early return rates were approximately 2% for men and 2-1/2% for women.³⁴⁷ These exaggerated media reports gave anti-women-in-combat groups ‘evidence’ that women did not belong at the front, thereby creating political repercussions.³⁴⁸ In this way, Julie Wheelwright concludes that the “new focus on servicewomen did not counter the equation between militarism and masculinity.”³⁴⁹

The United States military has traditionally operated as if prostitution were a necessary and integral part of its military operations.³⁵⁰ This relationship was explored in Chapter One, where military acceptance of the soldier’s need for sexual release was explored. The Gulf War, however, was the first fought without prostitutes. The impact of these lessons for the revision of enduring beliefs concerning the sexual needs of fighting men is undermined not only by the brevity of the conflict, but also by the presence of women in the Gulf as soldiers. Further, the Associated Press and the Washington Post

³⁴⁴ Col. David H. Hackworth, “War and The Second Sex” in Newsweek, (5 August 1991): 26.

³⁴⁵ Such comments were found, for example, in National Review, (April 26, 1993): 62. and in David Horowitz, “The Feminist Assault on the Military,” National Review, (October 5, 1992): 48.

³⁴⁶ Col. Hackworth’s reported that “Three Pentagon sources report that as of mid-February of 1991, more than 1,200 pregnant women had been evacuated from the gulf.”

³⁴⁷ Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Military, 1992, C-48.

³⁴⁸ This type of evidence persisted despite the fact that the higher rate of female non-deployability at the outset of the crisis was determined to have had minimal impact on the overall effectiveness of the force.

³⁴⁹ Wheelwright, 124.

³⁵⁰ Enloe, “The Gendered Gulf,” 109.

reported that Navy pilots screened pornographic films before a bombing mission into Iraq,³⁵¹ demonstrating that while the prostitutes were absent, the link between sexuality and war was not. Media, public and official attention to male soldiers' need for "objectified sexuality" strengthened "notions of masculine privilege."³⁵² Reports of sexual harassment and high levels of fraternization may indicate the blurring of the line between those whom military men view as colleagues and those whom they view as reward.

In Women, Men and Media, a study of gendered coverage during the Gulf War, M. Junior Bridge found that coverage in February was predominantly focused on "men, their jobs, their weaponry, their opinions."³⁵³ This finding supports Enloe's observation that once the fighting had begun, women became invisible, losing even their value as human interest stories. Thus, when "the serious business of combat" began, women "slid further off the page."³⁵⁴ This observation will be further reinforced by evidence presented in Chapter Five. It should be noted, however, that their reduced numbers (only 6% of the total force) would warrant less coverage.

A significant proportion of coverage of women in the Gulf instead focused on the "Mommy War." Images of mothers of young children and their prolonged separation

³⁵¹ As cited in Ms. (March-April, 1991): 87.

³⁵² Wheelwright, 123.

³⁵³ April 8, 1991 News Release, Women, Men and Media study conducted by M. Junior Bridge. Copy obtained from Unabridged Communications, Alexandria, Virginia. The study was conducted in February 1991 and was sponsored by the University of Southern California's Women, Men and Media Project. Included in the study were major newspapers: Atlanta Journal and Constitution, Chicago Tribune, Houston Chronicle, Los Angeles Times, The Miami Herald, The New York Times, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, The Seattle Times, USA TODAY, The Washington Post. Also included were newspapers representing smaller markets (from 20,000 to 50,000 in circulation): Albuquerque (NM) Tribune/Journal, The Beacon-News (Aurora, IL), The Courier (Findlay, OH), Daily Camera (Boulder, CO), Enid (OK) News and Eagle, The Joplin (MO) Globe, The News-Times (Danbury, CT), Pine Bluff (AR) Commercial, Sun-Journal (Lewiston, ME), and The Tuscaloosa (AL) News. The study examined the front page and the op-ed (or equivalent) pages for content and for bylines to assess the frequency and character of coverage of and by women.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

questioned the acceptability of mothers as soldiers. According to Muir, the use of “Soldier-mothers went against every cultural stereotype: women as giver, women as nurturer, women as peacemaker.”³⁵⁵ This role was incongruent with the traditional realm of the protected as a product of conventional social norms and thus resulted in significant public negative response. The Bridge study uncovered that while there was demonstrated concern over mothers leaving their children, “there was not one article or editorial on the impact of a father leaving his children.”³⁵⁶ Muir concurs, finding that it was “the mothers that took all the flak.”³⁵⁷ Elaine Donnelly, for example, commented in a syndicated editorial,

The sight of a male soldier leaving his baby behind has always tugged at the heart, but there is an extra dimension of profound uneasiness when a young mother is involved. In all of our nation’s wars, we have never asked so much of the children left behind.³⁵⁸

This perception is reinforced by public opinion polls which confirmed public concern over the issue of mothers at war. For example, an Associated Press poll published on February 21, 1991 demonstrated that two of every three Americans felt that “sending women with young children to a war zone was unacceptable.”³⁵⁹ A Newsweek poll published August 5, 1991 found that 54% of Americans questioned thought mothers on active duty should be able to refuse assignments.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁵ Muir, 115.

³⁵⁶ Bridge’s Women, Men and Media study, April 8, 1991.

³⁵⁷ Muir, 115.

³⁵⁸ Elaine Donnelly, “Children suffer when Mommy goes to war,” in The Detroit News, February 17 1991, 3B.

³⁵⁹ Data cited in Martin Binkin, “The New Face of the American Military: The Volunteer Force and The Persian Gulf War,” The Brookings Review (Summer 1991): 12.

³⁶⁰ Newsweek Poll, Newsweek, (5 August 1991): 27.

In part as a result of these images and the public response they provoked, there were defeated proposals in Congress to limit the impact of war on children. For example, there was the "Military Orphans Prevention Bill," which would have allowed single parents and members of the armed forces who have a spouse assigned to a combat theater to seek waivers from assignment to a combat zone. While the Bill did not specify that it would be the mother that would stay home, there was a fear that this type of plan, when combined with social convention, would prove detrimental to women's equality in the military.

The government, through Defense Secretary Dick Cheney, had an interesting response to the proposed congressional bill. He said in a letter opposing the changes that they would "weaken our combat capability by removing key personnel from our deployed units and by undermining unit cohesion and *esprit de corps*."³⁶¹ This is ironic because in questions of combat, the notions of cohesion and spirit are used as arguments against the use of women.³⁶² Again, this illustrates that women are subject to ambiguous military definitions of their role, and this allows them to remain the protected. It further suggests that the image is important only insofar as it compromises military strategy.

Symbolic of gendered media coverage was the focus on the personal items women and men brought with them to the front. Bridge found that a series of articles examined focused on what male soldiers carried to the front to remind them of home. There were several mentions of female undergarments, which supports the previously elaborated

³⁶¹ Dick Cheney, in Dana Priest's "Military Reluctant to Alter Its Rules," in Detroit Free Press, February 9, 1991.

³⁶² Evidence of these arguments are found in media sources, such as Col. David H. Hackworth, "War and the Second Sex," Newsweek (August 5, 1991); National Review (April 26, 1993): 62.

argument that protectors view women as both symbol and reward. There were fewer women interviewed and they were portrayed as carrying pictures of loved ones, conforming to their social feminine construction. For example, there was the widely circulated photo of Captain JoAnn Conley, who was shown with a button picture of her daughter pinned to her helmet.³⁶³ Once again, women behave in ways consistent with the expectations of the protected.

The Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Military

The Gulf War generated expectations among military women and their advocates for movement for a more equitable division of labour in the military. These expectations were accompanied by public debate concerning the role of women in the postwar military, particularly with respect to the use of women in combat positions.

After the Gulf War, Congress debated the repeal of existing combat exclusion laws in the Air Force and Navy.³⁶⁴ The Defense Authorization Act (Public Law 102-190), passed on December 5, 1991, repealed the combat exclusionary provision relating to female Naval aviation officers and to female Air Force officers for duty in aircraft engaged in combat missions. The Senate passed a further amendment that created the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Military to evaluate military policy and to determine whether there was a basis for revision with respect to the role and assignment of women in the military. Defense Secretary Richard Cheney announced that no decision regarding modification of existing military policy would be made until the Commission's

³⁶³ Photo was cited in the Bridge study.

³⁶⁴ The ban against women in combat in these services was set by statute first. Army policy prohibited the use of women in combat in its ranks.

findings were reviewed. The Report was issued on November 15, 1992 and was made up of several parts: Issues and Recommendations; Alternative Views; Commissioners' Statements; Appendices including excerpts from specific testimony and reports. Sources of testimony included current and retired military personnel and leaders, as well as representatives of interest and research groups, including the Family Research Council and the Women's Research and Education Institute. Senator John McCain (R-AZ), concluded that the Commission would enable "the kind of judgment which [would] give the American people what they want." His concern for American public opinion on the use of women in the military is consistent with evidence from historical analysis. Traditionally, the military has sought support for its policies while at the same time minimizing external demands for change.

The Commission addressed a series of issues related to the assignment of women in the military, including that of the use of women in various types of combat, women and the draft, military policy regarding pregnancy, and gender norming. Its overview of testimony and polls (to be discussed further below) found that there was no common thread in American social and cultural values from which a definitive position could be drawn that would preclude roles for women in combat.³⁶⁵ It was determined that under certain circumstances, American society would not only allow, but would actually encourage and approve the further integration of women into combat roles. While there was no definite change mandated, this approach allows for the future use of women under controlled circumstances should the need arise. The "circumstances," however, were not

³⁶⁵ Report of the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Military, November 15, 1992, 23.

defined. The Commission, therefore, would not eliminate the possibility that circumstances might arise that would necessitate the role of women in the military. This approach is wholly consistent with past government and military action whereby the advancement of military women is advocated only reluctantly and institutionalized only slowly.

The Commission voted overwhelmingly not to prohibit potential combat roles for women, but the majority spoke more cautiously to specific issues. It took a traditional position, adopting recommendations that included that women be excluded from direct land combat units and positions, and that these exclusions be codified by Congress. The rationale for this exclusion ranged from unit effectiveness and cohesion to gender-based physical differences to the “inherent risks of injury, capture and death” that accompany combat. A research study reviewed and cited by the Commission in its reasoning found that cohesion problems might develop in part due to “Traditional Western values where men feel a responsibility to protect women.” The Commission, therefore, appeared to endorse the traditional perception of women as protected rather than challenging or discounting it. Further reasoning cited the increased risk of capture, a factor that will be developed in Chapter Five.

The Commission also recommended that current Department of Defense and Service policies with regard to Army, Air Force and Navy Aircraft on combat missions should be retained and codified. The Commission thereby recommended the reversal of one of the most significant congressional gains for women in the military in the post-Gulf War period: the repeal of statutory combat aircraft exclusion laws for the Navy and Air

Force. Again, the recommendations were rooted in the potential consequences of the use of women which included unit cohesion and women as prisoners of war.

While it would appear that the majority decisions of the Commission reflected a conservative viewpoint, the Report also contained a section detailing "Alternative Views." There, the case against women in combat was made even more directly and clearly reflected traditional images of men and women as protector and protected. The Commissioners who endorsed this viewpoint found that the grounds for opposition to women in combat resided in military necessity, combat effectiveness, as well as in deep-seated cultural and family values. In the words of one Commissioner: "Good men respect and defend women."³⁶⁶ They concluded that the "proponents of assigning women to combat [had] not made their case"³⁶⁷ based on this criteria. They had argued that strong leadership would resolve the negative consequences of that integration, including pregnancy, fraternization, harassment, physical deficits and morale. The Commissioners responded, however, that the "leadership did not solve these problems during the Gulf War."

The Alternative View section of the Report further qualified the majority recommendation concerning the possibility of combat roles for women. It advocated that such assignment should be justified "*only* in the most dire emergency where the nation's very survival is at risk and there is no reasonable alternative." As grounds for this, it cited testimony that suggested that if women were assigned to combat to "fight this nation's wars, the resulting damage to American culture and society would be monumental and

³⁶⁶ Ibid, 46.

³⁶⁷ Ibid, 47.

irreversible,”³⁶⁸ It concluded that based upon the majority of testimony and the majority of an estimated 13,000 letters written to the Commission, the assignment of women to combat “would be a fundamental departure from sound American and military values.” The essence of the question was whether American society should continue “to encourage men to respect, protect and defend women.” It further argued that the integration of women into combat would “necessitate a cultural change in that men would have to be discouraged from protecting women.”

Rear Admiral Smith offered perhaps the most revealing reference to traditional perceptions of both men and women. Smith’s testimony was used as justification for the exclusion of women from special operations due to the consequent (and unavoidable) fraternization: “I recognize that a woman might not have any interest in developing a personal relationship, but my experience in life tells me that men, being what we are, will in fact complicate this issue. Sex in males is the most powerful drive at a young age, and whether, in a given situation, a man or a woman initiates a relationship is irrelevant.”³⁶⁹ This perspective highlights the traditional perception of the sexual needs of male soldiers as natural, and therefore unchangeable.

The Presidential Commission ordered two Roper Organization Surveys to assess public and military attitudes toward the integration of women in the military. These polls both reflected traditional perceptions of women, although this tendency was more pronounced in the military sample. For example, the timely issue of soldiers leaving young children revealed a clear difference in gender expectations. While 43% of public

³⁶⁸ Ibid, 59.

³⁶⁹ Rear Admiral Smith, as cited in Ibid, 77.

respondents felt that married men with children should not be assigned to combat, 65% believed married women with children should not be so assigned. With regard to single parents, 48% said single fathers should not be assigned to combat, while 69% said no to single mothers. Further, when the case of a dual military service couple was considered, 55% said it should be the mother who is exempt from combat (2% said that the fathers should be exempt). Overall, the public attitude poll produced mixed results. When asked if women should fill direct combat roles, the public preferred the “only if they volunteer option” . Participants were also split as to whether or not they supported current policies restricting women from combat assignments.

The survey of the US military was particularly weighted toward males and tended to support existing policies. This was especially true among those combat specialty subgroups that were questioned. Overall 57% of those surveyed favoured current laws and policies restricting women from combat. That number rose to 72% when only the combat specialty subgroup was considered. Nevertheless, 57% (combined) of those questioned said the assignment of women to combat positions would have a positive or nil effect on the military’s ability to defend the nation and win a war. There was mixed response to the volunteer vs. mandatory assignment question. The issue of mothers in combat received similar results to the public survey in that 72% indicated a single mother should not be assigned to combat while 48% said a single father should not. For dual service, 65% said the mother should be exempt and 1% said the father should be (27% said nether should be exempt.)

The military poll revealed strong inter-service differences. The Marine Corps as a

group had the “most homogenous response rate and the strongest opposition to changing current policy (78% favoured current policy).” Further, those respondents in specific combat specialties (fighter/bomber pilots and ground combat MOSs) were the most homogenous subgroup and were consistently opposed to allowing women into any combat specialty. Overall, a Commission review of all testimony revealed that “men in combat units across all Services, were more likely to be against women entering combat positions than those in non-combat units of mixed-gender.”³⁷⁰

The Roper Organization poll suggested that many people felt that the assignment of women to combat positions would have a negative effect on cohesion. Most military personnel (55%) believed that male bonding was essential for “developing a cohesive unit capable of meeting the stress of combat” and the assignment of women would undermine this bonding. The public was less supportive of this sentiment, however, as only 41% agreed with this idea (50% were opposed). In addition, most military personnel (66%) believed that if women were fighting together with men in direct combat, men would be “less effective and at greater risk of being killed because they would feel they must protect women.” Of those in the public who favoured the current exclusion policy, 66% agreed with this perspective.³⁷¹ Based upon these findings, it would appear that the Gulf War did little to affect the image of women as protected, particularly as it relates to military opinions.

A 1992 Commission Survey of Retired Flag and General Officers revealed that a consistent majority of retired flag and general officers opposed the assignment of women

³⁷⁰ Ibid, C-89.

³⁷¹ Ibid, C-86.

to combat and combat specialties. This opposition varied, however, according to the type of combat specialty listed. For example, while 90% of those surveyed opposed women in the infantry, 76% were opposed to the assignment of women to combat vessels and 71% were opposed to women on fighter/bomber aircraft. This was not a random sample, but included all retired flag officers. Consequently, the survey group was predominantly male. The primary reason for opposition to assigning women to direct combat, cited by 56%, was the belief that there would be a negative effect on unit cohesion. The Commission concluded, therefore, that the "plurality of those who had prior military experience believe women should not be assigned to this particular combat role."³⁷² For this group, the Gulf War did little to alter the image of women with respect to combat.

The Commission's findings were largely obscured by the 1992 Presidential Election as they were released on election day and the incumbent who had set up the Commission had lost. Further, the postwar furor advocating change for women in the military had largely diminished; public attention shifted to economic concerns. Serious attention to it may have been further compromised by the traditional, or "status quo", perspective taken by the majority report, as little change was recommended.

Commissioner Mary M. Finch (Captain USA) observed that the "conservative make up of the Commission did not allow for objective assessment [and that those] members with current or previous ties to conservative groups had the effect of tipping the results of Commission work against any progress for servicewomen." She further concluded that it took "great effort and much persuasion to get a majority of Commissioners to even

³⁷² Ibid, C-105.

acknowledge that any lessons could be learned from Desert Shield and Storm regarding the performance of women.”³⁷³ This perception was reinforced by other Commissioners including Mary E. Clarke, who pointed out that some “had come with a set agenda and no amount of facts or testimony would change their minds for expanding opportunities for women in the military.”

This type of stagnant assessment of the role of women within the military is consistent with the entrenchment of images of women as protected. For example, Ronald D. Ray commented in his statement that “men are inherently better designed for such savage activity.”³⁷⁴ Based upon this analysis, men’s entitlement is rooted in their nature, thereby making the link more difficult to sever. Enloe argues that the history of the Presidential Commission “underscores the ways in which women in combat is a concept shaped and reshaped by the gendered politics of an entire political system.” The majority determinations of the Presidential Commission in many ways reflected traditional images of women as protected and mandated only limited change.

An examination of the recommendations and reasoning of the Presidential Commission may reveal the impact of the role of women in the Gulf War on the image of women as the protected. While many advocates of an expanded role for women in combat, including Jeanne Holm, saw the war as effectively shattering myths about military women by replacing them with objective reality, closer analysis indicates that images largely reverted to their prewar status. Holm’s perception could in part be due to the fact that her analysis predated the release of the Commission’s final report.

³⁷³ Mary M. Finch, as cited in *Ibid.*, 106.

³⁷⁴ Ronald D. Ray, as cited in *Ibid.*, 114.

According to Holm, one such myth, “the presence of women in the combat area would destroy ‘male bonding’,”³⁷⁵ was replaced by the reality that mixed units demonstrated that a cohesive bond was possible. Despite this evidence, however, testimony as well as public and military opinion cited the issue of cohesiveness as a major factor in precluding women from combat. There was also evidence of the recurrence of the myth that “the American public would never tolerate women being taken prisoner or ‘coming home in body bags’.”³⁷⁶ While Holm argues that the public took the news in stride, this notion regained strength in the postwar justification for further excluding women from a greater role in the military. There was also the issue that men and women could not “share common dangers without feigning chivalry.”³⁷⁷ While Holm again argues that this myth was effectively destroyed by the reality of the Gulf War, testimonial and polling evidence from the Presidential Commission Report discussed above reveal the persistence of the protector-protected relationship.

Chapters Two and Three demonstrated that images of women during a conflict may experience some expansion and the realm of the protected may grow. In the postwar period, however, that image generally contracts. This process was referred to as the return to normalcy. It could be argued that the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Military represented the ‘return to normalcy’ in the Gulf War as the image of military women was contracted such that their classification as the protected remained largely intact.

³⁷⁵ Holm, 463.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

Conclusion

Despite the potential for the Gulf War to challenge the prevailing construction of the women as the protected, women were still predominantly portrayed as the protected both on the homefront and on the battlefield. Wheelwright concludes that given the press restrictions, the media “rarely challenged assumptions about the role women played in the conflict.”³⁷⁸ The image of the American servicewoman best served as a contrast to the comparatively oppressed Arab woman, thereby eliminating the need to place “either women’s struggle within an appropriate political or historical context.”³⁷⁹ Although the role and status of women had improved over time, as in previous conflicts, they remained the protected. This stagnation was evidenced in the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Military, where the status quo was advocated. It could be argued that the Commission’s report and the public’s relative lack of interest represented the return to normalcy in the post-Gulf War period.

³⁷⁸ Wheelwright, 131.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

Chapter Five The Case of Melissa Rathbun-Nealy

As discussed in Chapters Two, Three and Four, military women are subject to ambiguous expectations, roles and images. This was particularly true during the Gulf War. They were at once strong, professional defenders of the American state and weak, feminine support staff in need of protection. This ambiguity is well-demonstrated by a case study of Specialist Melissa Rathbun-Nealy³⁸⁰, the first female prisoner of war during the conflict.

The possibility of a female POW has traditionally been emphasized by those who oppose women in combat; it was generally thought that any capture would undermine popular support for the war. Accordingly, the case of POW Melissa Rathbun-Nealy is an interesting one. It offers insight not only into public and media perceptions, but indirectly into government and military expectations. On the one hand, the military claimed to use women as professionals and society thus perceived them as soldiers. On the other hand, the images that were conveyed were often those of a gendered society's protected citizens. While Rathbun-Nealy was a female soldier presumed to be protected by military policy, she was subject to a consequence generally reserved for men. She therefore had the potential to affect both those images in that her experience challenged the construction of each.

This case study will summarize Rathbun-Nealy's life and military experience, and analyze an interview with her in order to elaborate on the role ambiguity felt by female

³⁸⁰ Although Melissa Rathbun-Nealy has remarried and changed her name to Melissa Coleman, her name at the time of the Persian Gulf War was used for clarity.

soldiers themselves. This role ambiguity is important in that it appears to follow from the ambiguity within the image of the protected itself. Servicewomen are at once feminine support, fulfilling the traditional duties of the protected and competent defenders, fulfilling the duties of the professional soldier, within the boundaries established by the military. Rathbun-Nealy's POW status played an important part in postwar discussions of the military role of women, as expressed through the 1992 Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Military. Thus, a content analysis of leading American dailies will be included to determine the character of the media coverage of Rathbun-Nealy's capture, incarceration and release. Finally, this analysis will be supplemented by an examination of other media and government coverage.

Background

Melissa Rathbun-Nealy was born on March 9th, 1970 in Grand Rapids, Michigan.³⁸¹ She is the only child of retired schoolteacher Leo Rathbun and school secretary Joan Rathbun. She describes her upbringing as a "combination" of strict and permissive parenting styles. Her mother stayed home until she entered first grade, at which time she became a "latch-key child." As she grew, she became reclusive, and often stayed alone in her room. Her parents encouraged her to be independent.

Contrary to some media reports, she was not in ROTC in high school. She joined briefly, but the uniforms and rigidity did not suit her. Rathbun-Nealy joined the military on September 8, 1988 to "see different things" and earn money for college. Her parents,

³⁸¹ The information that follows was obtained from an interview with Rathbun-Nealy, May 17 1995, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

particularly her mother, were surprised at her decision to enlist, believing that she lacked the discipline necessary to serve. She did her basic training at Fort Dix, New Jersey and her Advanced Individual training at Fort Lennox, Missouri. There, she was trained as a truck driver, earning her rank as Specialist. Her first post was at Fort Bliss, Texas. Nealy was sent to the Persian Gulf on October 16, 1990, and was stationed in Dhahran. To fill the time, the soldiers played sports, watched movies and went to the gym. She says that in these early days, "it was pretty much fun."

She was captured on January 31, 1991, while riding in a two truck convoy with her partner, David Lockett and two other unnamed male soldiers. The vehicles missed a turn and came upon Iraqi soldiers near Khafji. The truck became stuck when they attempted to make a U-turn, and they were then fired upon by enemy soldiers; Rathbun-Nealy was wounded in the arm. The military initially classified her as Missing in Duty³⁸². It was only a week before she was released that her status was changed to that of POW. She was held by the Iraqis for 33 days, and states that she was for the most part treated well. She was released to the Red Cross on March 4, 1991.

Interview with Specialist Melissa Rathbun-Nealy

The ambiguity that accompanies the role of the female soldier, particularly in light of the rigidity of the images of the protector and the protected, has been established above. Rathbun-Nealy illustrates these ambiguities in the United States Military of the Gulf War. While she advocates a strong role for women in the military, she inadvertently

³⁸² According to Rathbun-Nealy, she was classified as "Missing in Duty" as opposed to "Missing in Action" because she was not involved in action.

characterizes much of her role in the Gulf as consistent with the role of the protected. This interview gives concrete meaning to many of the theoretical elements discussed in Chapter One.

As discussed above, masculinity is a foundation of military culture. Rathbun-Nealy illustrates this. While she believes that women have the ability, she does not think that “anyplace in the army is a place for women at all.” She finds that men “like to keep it all men and they only allow us [women] because they have to.” Further, she has experienced the frustration of the military in its attempts to accommodate women. For example, women have to be brought ‘personal packs’ and require regular access to shower facilities in order to remain in the field for a month. She believes that this is done grudgingly and that “if men had a choice and they knew they could win, women would not have anything to do with the military except maybe cook.” This evidence contradicts Kate Muir’s assertion in her book Arms and the Woman that, “The Americans were used to mixed units and found women in the field ordinary ... [resulting in] less pressure on the women who were not treated as aliens with strange ‘hygiene’ problems.”³⁸³ The reality according to Rathbun-Nealy is more consistent with earlier evidence which suggests the military has only expanded the role of women as the need for ‘manpower’ grew and often only as a last resort.

Rathbun-Nealy offered an interesting look at the concept of sexual harassment. Her own experience was that it was not usually her fellow enlisted soldiers that were guilty; it was her male superiors. This type of behaviour began during basic training and

³⁸³ Muir, 28.

continued until she left the Army. She offered several anecdotal reports of such incidents. One episode occurred while she was stationed at Fort Bliss, Texas. She was on night duty as a driver for a sergeant duty officer. At the time, she was dating Michael Coleman (who is now her husband). The officer said to her “So, do you ever fool around? Do you ever do this, you know asking all these sexual comments and making these little innuendoes.” When she explained to the sergeant that she did not appreciate these comments, he questioned whether she was “one of those people” who would report him for sexual harassment. She told him that she was not, but that if he continued this type of behaviour, there would be consequences.

She intimates that her reluctance to go through regular military channels to deal with these problems grew out of witnessing the explicit discrimination often experienced by her fellow servicewomen. She told of several instances of fraternization. Although expressly against military policy, sergeants became involved in relationships with lower ranking enlisted personnel, sometimes impregnating them. They would then deny any complicity. According to Rathbun-Nealy, these men would often receive no reprimands. Their careers remained intact. This is consistent with other examples of military attitudes toward women. Chapter Four, for example, highlighted the media’s exposure of the problem of pregnancy among servicewomen in the Gulf, and how it placed the blame exclusively with the women. The military appears to respond based upon its traditional assumptions concerning the nature of masculinity and femininity.

Rathbun-Nealy also offered a perspective on the issue of “mothers going to war,” a major theme in Gulf War media coverage. She pointed out that when a woman becomes

pregnant, she has the option to leave the military. The women who remain must be prepared to pay the consequences. She argued that any change in the policy would add a further obstacle for women in the military. Her reasoning is interesting in that it acknowledges, to a certain extent, the primacy of masculinity. She argues that women want to be admitted into “this men’s world and be treated as an equal in this man’s world, but then we want to have these little double standards set aside to where if we don’t feel like we want to do it then we shouldn’t have to do it. But the men have to do it whether they want to or not.” This explanation suggests that the military will remain a “man’s world” until barriers, such as combat and draft exclusion, are eliminated and all soldiers are equal. Nevertheless, Rathbun-Nealy and her fellow servicewomen did not necessarily favour the elimination of those policies.

Rathbun-Nealy also found that her talents, as well as those of other women in the military, were undervalued. Despite her demonstrated ability in truck driving, she received few assignments in the Gulf that required those skills. As was the case for many women in her unit, she was confined to KP and guard duty for most of the time. She was on her first mission the day she was captured. Even there, her lack of experience in the field compromised her stature relative to her fellow servicemen. She was the only woman in a convoy of three men. Once they had become unsure of their exact location (they would later learn that they had missed a detour) they met to discuss their course. When she saw the Persian Gulf, she knew they had gone too far; she argued that they were supposed to turn. The men dismissed her explanation; one of the men reminded her that she had not even been on any missions. They continued on their chosen course, despite her objections,

and two of them were captured. She concludes that she was a “victim of male chauvinism.” Her ability to communicate her ideas effectively was compromised by her lack of practical war experience. This situation has elements that are reminiscent of the Ferrarro case that was discussed in Chapter One. Ferrarro’s ideas regarding appropriate conduct during war were undermined by the traditional image of women in war. She, too, was a woman first, unable to separate her perceived nature from the duty of commander-in-chief.

During the Gulf War, Rathbun-Nealy argued that there were several concrete illustrations of the military mentality that “women in the military need protection.” Despite the blurring of lines between combat and non-combat roles that have been discussed above, the leadership still enforced rigid, if artificial boundaries. Rathbun-Nealy found that the military did not make it “allowable for us to be near the front lines.” They were technically classified as support. They might go to port to pick up vehicles, but the combat troops would bring them to the front lines. It was only the medics “that happened to be female flight surgeons” that were permitted to be there. The military, therefore, went to considerable effort to maintain the lines between combat and support and isolate women from the battleground.

Rathbun-Nealy attributed this policy to social pressure. In reality, however, it is more likely that society would accommodate a greater presence of women at the front. This is indicated by polls taken during and after the conflicts in Panama and in the Gulf. For example, a Newsweek poll released August 5, 1991 found that 53% of those surveyed would support combat assignments for women, but only if they wanted them. Support fell

to 26% when the assignment was involuntary.³⁸⁴ A Roper Organization poll in July 1992 found that 71% of the respondents said that they wanted to “maintain or increase the proportion of women in the military.” This support tends to diminish, however, in the case of direct, ground, hand-to-hand combat where only 38% of those surveyed advocated assignment.³⁸⁵

Rathbun-Nealy also addressed the question of whether she believed the presence of women undermined camaraderie in a unit, a criticism often made by those opposing the integration of women into military units (particularly combat units). Her response was interesting in that she appeared to assess herself as serving in the role of the protected in an unequal power relationship, rather than as an equal. She thought that women helped the cohesion in her unit because “even if there wasn’t maybe a lot of sexual activity going on at least the men had that availability to flirt so a lot of that tension was relieved from them just to be able to flirt and see pretty women.” Her attitude reflected the tendency in military culture, both implicitly and explicitly, to objectify women. Based upon this perspective, servicewomen in the Gulf could be perceived as satisfying many of the needs that pin-ups or even prostitutes had in the past; the military had once sanctioned these needs as necessary given men’s supposed ‘nature’. She commented that some men were able to relieve their sexual tensions and therefore go on to do their jobs with a clear head. She likened their presence to that of “all these beautiful women coming out and hugging the GIs” during USO tours in Vietnam. They served in ways consistent with the reward

³⁸⁴ Newsweek Poll, Newsweek, (5 August 1991): 27.

³⁸⁵ The Roper Organization, Attitudes Regarding the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces: The Public Perspective, August 1992.

and justification function of the protector-protected relationship. Her perspective is not surprising when one considers that she is a product of military culture, and was therefore trained in keeping with its ambiguous image of women. Her attitudes could be interpreted as consistent with the construction of the protected.

Rathbun-Nealy revealed that there was little discussion among the women and men in her unit about the “proper place” for a woman. The issue of whether the policies excluding women from combat were reasonable and fair was never raised by the men and women in her circle. She pointed out that the only problem that was ever raised was that of “if it ever came down to hand-to-hand combat, would the men be able to be in a foxhole with a woman and do his (sic) job the way he’s (sic) supposed to without having to worry about the safety of the woman.” This argument is often used by those opposed to having women in combat as a justification for their exclusion.³⁸⁶ Her view on this issue further reveals her own ambivalence about her role in the military. Regarding this issue, she commented, “You don’t have to worry about me, I’ll worry about me.” While Rathbun-Nealy asserts that she is capable of defending herself, she tacitly endorses the military policy that assumes she is in need of protection.

One of Rathbun-Nealy’s biggest complaints regarding the media coverage of her capture was the insinuation, despite her denials, that she was sexually assaulted. These stories appeared most frequently in popular accounts of the conflict, particularly after the war. They were reinforced after a second female POW, Rhonda Cornum, revealed that she had been raped. The Globe tabloid, for example, ran a story saying that Rathbun-

³⁸⁶ For example, this argument is addressed in David Horowitz, “The Feminist Assault on the Military,” National Review, (5 October 1992): 48.

Nealy had been sexually assaulted. (Later, she settled a lawsuit against the tabloid out of court). These media insinuations have continued even as recently as April 1995, when 20/20 aired a story on the SERE training program.³⁸⁷ She thought that the story, which used her image in the introduction, implied that she had been raped, although 20/20 denied to her any such implication. This belief was validated, however, by public and private reaction to the story. Rathbun-Nealy claimed she had many friends and relatives comment that “My God, you never told me it was so bad, you didn’t tell me you went through all that.” Once again, she was forced to reiterate, albeit privately, the truth. The general public perception, however, is less easily altered.

The connection between war and sexual violence was articulated in Chapter One. Rape in war is interpreted as an attack not only on the victim, but on the man entrusted with her protection. It demands a response on the part of the ‘failed’ protector to reassert his ‘manhood’. Rathbun-Nealy claims that this connection was explicitly played out during her incarceration. Several fellow soldiers told her that their commanders called them to order and claimed that she had been “found slit from [her] crotch to [her] neck, [her] head was cut off, [her] arms were cut off and this or that was cut off.” More than once, commanders were said to have reported she had been raped. These stories circulated throughout the military. Such propaganda is consistent with the ploy of “pumping up” soldiers, which often uses the protected as justification for action.

In the military, the belief that she had been raped persisted after her release.

³⁸⁷ The Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape (SERE) training attempts to simulate the prisoner of war experience. Trainees learn field techniques for creating shelter, finding food and water, and evading detection in a hostile environment. Both men and women are trained in coping techniques. Joint SERE Agency. Testimony before the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Military, 8 June 1992.

Rathbun-Nealy outlined an incident involving a doctor and her first Veterans Administration physical. After she told him that she had not been raped, he continued to press with questions: "You mean to tell me that they didn't try to rape you? They didn't rape you at all?" This type of treatment reflects the military's lack of accommodation for female soldiers. She was also asked during her debriefing if she had been raped, or in the absence of penetration, if any other sexual incident had occurred. (She did not know whether her partner, David Lockett, or any other male POW was similarly questioned.)

Rathbun-Nealy felt strongly that she did not deserve the level of media attention that she received. She was dismayed by the relative lack of attention paid to her partner, David Lockett, the only African-American male captured. She felt that this attitude was prevalent in the military as well. For example, when General Schwarzkopf came to the hospital ship Mercy to see the newly released prisoners, she offered her hand but he grabbed her in a big hug and said, "Oh Melissa, I'm so glad you're safe." As she describes it, he then turned to Lockett and said, "Oh, you're the other one."

Rathbun-Nealy also experienced the protection of her captors. This occurred despite media attempts to construct Iraqis as remorseless enemies. She was treated much differently than the men who had been captured; she was well fed, given exercise, and a measure of freedom. During interrogations, certain guards protected her, claiming that she knew nothing. Their only request was that she be truthful about the conditions of her incarceration, which she says she has been. Unfortunately, however, the mainstream media has only sporadically communicated these ideas.

The protected serve a symbolic function in war: they are a justification and

motivation. "Womenandchildren" symbolize why a nation goes to war. Rathbun-Nealy also believed she was filling that role. She felt that the numerous letters and prayers written and offered on her behalf brought the world together.

The perspective offered by Rathbun-Nealy during the interview highlighted the ambiguity that accompanies the role of the female soldier. That role is subject to conflicting expectations, largely due to the endurance and perpetuation of the image of women as protected. Rathbun-Nealy's experiences provided further evidence of the preservation of that image in (and perhaps despite) the Gulf War. In spite of her military role, she remained protected.

Content Analysis

News coverage of Melissa Rathbun-Nealy was examined in five dailies: The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Los Angeles Times, USA Today and The Detroit News, from January 31, 1991 through April 30, 1991. Items were selected that featured Rathbun-Nealy as the principal subject of at least one paragraph. The content of these items was then analyzed using a code sheet to determine the principal issues covered, as well as the character of that coverage. The data was then compiled to generate an overall picture of the coverage of Rathbun-Nealy over this period and was evaluated based upon the image of the protected and the protector. These findings were then supplemented by a more cursory examination of weekly popular magazines, including Time, Newsweek, and People Weekly.

In all, Rathbun-Nealy was the subject of 36 articles in the five dailies that were

examined over the period of her capture and in the two months following her release. Of those, 50% were in her “hometown” paper, the Detroit News.³⁸⁸ The overwhelming majority (75%) appeared on the inside pages, rather than as front page news. Those that were on the front page generally covered her in addition to other POWs. Overall, she was exclusive focus of only 50% of the articles and again the majority (83%) were in the Detroit News. While these numbers may at first glance appear low, they are put into perspective when coverage of her capture and release is compared to that of her partner, David Lockett. Over this period, he was mentioned only peripherally and generally in connection with her. Only one article featured the reaction of his family to his release. It can be argued, therefore, that Rathbun-Nealy received significantly more attention than her nearest counterpart.

The most prominent theme in the newspapers’ coverage was that Rathbun-Nealy was the first female POW or MIA of the Gulf War. This fact was mentioned in more than half of the articles (69%). Further, most articles dealt rather objectively with the details of her capture or release and the reactions of her family and hometown to the news. There was also a good deal of attention given to the media interest she and her family had received. There were reporters from around the world surrounding her family home, waiting for news.

14% of the articles discussed family and public concerns about how her Iraqi captors would treat her. Her father was initially quoted as saying that he “would rather

³⁸⁸ While not technically her hometown papers, both the Detroit News and the Detroit Free Press considered her to be part of the broader Detroit Community. This is particularly true in that these papers in many ways consider themselves larger market, state papers.

hear she is dead than captured”³⁸⁹ because of the way Saddam Hussein was thought to treat women. They were scared by the treatment that other prisoners were receiving. Obviously, the media’s construction of the Iraqis as looters and rapists was working and was here reinforced.

The articles analyzed provided only limited material on the impact of Rathbun-Nealy’s capture on the position of women in the military and in combat. On February 5 1991, an article by Endya Eames and Wendy Benedetto in USA Today highlighted the public “questions about whether women should be taking these risks at all.”³⁹⁰ The report in fact suggested that Rathbun-Nealy was capable of tolerating the situation. Further, only USA Today offered a look at other servicemen and women’s reactions to Rathbun-Nealy’s POW status. Its coverage reinforced the image of women as protected. A February 4th USA Today article by Judy Keen quoted Army Sgt. Leisa Frederick as not being able to keep from thinking the worst: “I shudder to think what they might do to her.”³⁹¹ It was also noted that men in their unit had “become more watchful,”³⁹² not letting women go anywhere alone. Thus, in media accounts, the men were behaving in ways consistent with their stereotypical roles as protectors.

Popular weekly magazine reports framed coverage in gendered terms more than did the daily newspapers examined. This difference may in part be attributed to the

³⁸⁹ Leo Rathbun, as cited in Kevin T. McGee, “Female Soldier’s Kin ‘Pretty Torn Up’,” USA Today, 4 February 1991, 2(A).

³⁹⁰ Endya Eames and Wendy Benedetto, “Both Men, Women Suffer as POWs,” USA Today, 5 February 1991, 9(A).

³⁹¹ Army Sgt. Leisa Frederick, as cited in Judy Keen, “Women in the Gulf Know Risk,” USA Today, 4 February, 1991, 2(A)

³⁹² Army Pfc. Melissa Dorman, *ibid.*

mediums' differing goals. While daily newspapers are largely concerned with fact, popular weeklies are also concerned with entertainment, and thus reflect much more the norms and expectations of popular culture. An 11 February 1991 Newsweek story questioned how the public would "react to seeing women held captive and possibly tortured." The author concluded that "For women in the military, attaining equality may carry a terrible price."³⁹³ Yet, it was a price that the public and the media seemed to accept for male soldiers. Thus, where analysis was presented, it generally reflected the prevailing military gender order.

Rathbun-Nealy's character was also a popular theme in magazine coverage. Family and friends expressly pointed out her strength and her stubbornness, perhaps trying to alleviate public and private concerns that she would be unable to handle the experience. The implication seemed to be that regardless of whether women as a group could survive captivity, Rathbun-Nealy as an individual could. This type of distinction had repercussions for military women. While certain postwar assessments of the female POW experience did acknowledge a relatively positive outcome for Rathbun-Nealy, there was a demonstrated reluctance to derive lessons for women overall. (This will be discussed further below.) For example, her seventh grade teacher summed up how many felt about Melissa: "If anyone has her, they're going to be in for a fight. She's a fighter, that one. She really is."³⁹⁴ Despite these reassurances, however, the same People Weekly article written prior to her release, quoted a friend as saying that "If they don't sexually abuse her, she'll get through this okay."³⁹⁵ Rathbun-Nealy's greatest vulnerability was therefore part of her

³⁹³ "Women in the Military: The First POW?" Newsweek, 11 February 1991.

³⁹⁴ Emily Middleton, as cited in Ron Arias, Benita Alexander and Fannie Weinstein, "As The War Claims Its First Female M.I.A., Melissa Rathbun-Nealy's Pals Recall One Tough, Spirited Kid," People Weekly, February 1991, 43.

³⁹⁵ Rainbow Millman, *ibid.*

nature as a woman and as the protected.

After Rathbun-Nealy was released, however, media coverage was more consistent with depictions of the protected. The coverage in USA Today, for example, reported that Rathbun-Nealy descended the steps from the airplane to “graciously” greet her military superiors. She then “fell into her mother’s arms,” with “tears streaming down her face.”³⁹⁶ This is contrasted in the same article with the Army Staff Sergeant Daniel Stamaris, who after sitting up in his gurney to greet the receiving line, saw his family members rush over and “shower him with kisses.” A quotation from spectator Lorraine Dwyer concluded the article and once again reinforced the gendered divisions: “All the Americans that went over there are my sons. That’s the way I look at it.”

The details of Rathbun-Nealy’s time in captivity were presented with great enthusiasm at first, based on family reports and her own limited statements. Army regulations forbade her discussing her experience in detail until after her debriefing.³⁹⁷ The press was quick to pick up on her own statement that the Iraqis saw her as “as brave as Stallone and as beautiful as Brooke Shields.”³⁹⁸ It seemed to fit well into the overall image the military had of its servicewomen: strong, but certainly female. Once she did finally give her entire story (in April), of the five dailies examined here, only the Detroit News provided coverage.

The foreign press offered less circumspect coverage of military women in general

³⁹⁶ Mimi Hall and Debbie Howlett, “USA ‘opening its arms to you’; ‘Someday finally came’ for ex-POWs,” USA Today, 11 March 1991, 1(A).

³⁹⁷ Mark Hornbeck, “Rathbun-Nealy embarrassed by attention,” The Detroit News, 17 March 1991, 8(A).

³⁹⁸ Edward Walsh, “‘As Brave as Stallone ... Beautiful as Brooke Shields’,” Washington Post, 6 March 1991, 23(A).

and of Rathbun-Nealy in particular. Rathbun-Nealy appeared on the cover of the popular French news magazine Paris Match in a “glamourized” senior class photo. Rathbun-Nealy commented during the interview that there were numerous members of the foreign press camped on her parents’ Newaygo, Michigan driveway. According to Rathbun-Nealy, the Japanese press, for example, falsely reported that her parents had given up electricity until her return and had taken photos of her father emerging from the shower. Her impression was that reporters such as these were desperate for any kind of news related to her and her family. This feeling was reinforced by the countless letters she received from around the world that sent best wishes and prayers for her release.

Wheelwright provides examples of British tabloid reports that tended to blatantly highlight the link between sexuality and war. For example, the British tabloid the Sun ran a front page story lamenting her fate, with the headline: “At the Mercy of the Beast” and stated that “Allied military chiefs think the Iraqis -- who treat their OWN women appallingly -- might abuse or even rape the captive.” The tabloid Today quoted an American senior officer as saying “a woman POW is the ultimate nightmare;” a sentiment that was never so explicitly put in the American coverage examined here.

Analysis of Study Results

Rathbun-Nealy was the first servicewoman classified as a POW since World War II. It might be anticipated, therefore, that a significant amount of coverage of her ordeal would appear. Moreover, given the public’s supposed uneasiness with the notion of women at the front and the risks they accept, it seems logical that numerous editorials

reflecting these concerns would appear. This content analysis, however, yielded strikingly different results.

Excluding the coverage of Rathbun-Nealy in The Detroit News (which made up nearly half of the overall coverage), other newspapers averaged 4.75 articles per paper over the period studied (which amounts to approximately one article every 12.6 days for February and March). While this coverage is significantly greater than that given to Rathbun-Nealy's partner, David Lockett (who was in general mentioned only peripherally), it was still less than expected. This level of mainstream print media attention could have indicated a society more accepting of greater risks for women in the military. In this sense, social acceptance is inferred through the lack of vocal media criticism. For example, the issue of mothers at war gained significant negative attention, indicating the level of societal disapproval. It would be unreasonable, however, to make an assumption of acceptance given the evidence to the contrary. The character of coverage of women in the Gulf War generally, as well as the need to preserve domestic support, suggest an alternate explanation.

It was commonly believed prior to the Gulf War that American society would not accept an American servicewoman as prisoner of war.³⁹⁹ In this view, Rathbun-Nealy's capture was problematic as it threatened the preservation of popular support. This support was perceived as particularly necessary in light of the legacy of Vietnam. Therefore, media reaction may be interpreted as reflective of the need to preserve public support by 'minimizing' her capture. Given the fact that the media were subject to strict

³⁹⁹ Martin Binkin, "The New Face of the American Military: The Volunteer Force and The Persian Gulf War," The Brookings Review, (Summer 1991): 10.

ensorship throughout the conflict, and because her capture violated military assurances that servicewomen were protected, it could be inferred (although not proven) that the government may have played a part in this process. This hypothesis is further supported by the present study in that President Bush made no specific comments and offered no analysis of her capture in the sources examined. In fact, the military refused to classify her as a POW for most of her incarceration.

Women POWs challenge the present construction of military women as protected. They create a contradiction between military policy and reality, for not only are women *not* protected by that policy, but they may not need that protection. If women were generally accepted as capable of successfully withstanding the POW experience, an image-reality dissonance with respect to women in combat could result. In that sense, the 'successful' experience of Rathbun-Nealy, if publicized, could have been used to force changes to military policy. The military, however, has implemented changes only slowly and often with reluctance. On the other hand, public outcry prompted by intense negative media attention could have jeopardized support not only for the war, but for the use of military women in general. While the military may resist the integration of women into combat, it needs women in support positions.

The link between sexuality and war remained intact and important throughout the war and continued after Rathbun-Nealy affirmed that she had not been raped. This link was evidenced after her release, as People Weekly summed up American popular and the family's private fears during her captivity: "if she were still alive, [had] she been the

victim of rape or torture like so many Kuwaiti women?"⁴⁰⁰ In reality, it was likely that Rathbun-Nealy was in relatively less danger than her male counterparts because of the dictates of Islam with respect to women. The media, however, virtually ignored this. While two articles did mention Hussein's vow to treat women according to the Koran's values, his assurances were greeted with skepticism.

In August 1991 congressional testimony, a Bush Administration official stated that both women POWs were "subjected to sexual threats, and one was fondled by her captors."⁴⁰¹ This statement was not qualified, however, and its ambiguity lent itself to various interpretations. This unclear depiction was further clouded by the later revelation by Rhonda Cornum that she had, in fact, been raped. The fates of the two women were thus linked by their shared status as POWs. Cornum's revelation, therefore, had implications for the public perception of Rathbun-Nealy. The divergence of public perception from her own statements could be attributed to the lack of significant contradictory print coverage, particularly of Rathbun-Nealy's side of the story. Thus, there was only limited public awareness of what actually happened to her.

In the aggregate, Rathbun-Nealy was portrayed by the print media not as a protector, but not necessarily as the protected either. This reflects the ambiguous nature of military women in general. The coverage was often neutral, with very little commentary or analysis provided by any paper.⁴⁰² Such low-key coverage facilitated a

⁴⁰⁰ Pat Freeman, Fannie Weinstein and Julie Greenwalt, "Survivor of 32 Too Many Arabian Nights, Melissa Rathbun-Nealy Heads Home From Baghdad," People Weekly, March 1991, 46.

⁴⁰¹ As cited in Melissa Healy, "Pentagon Details Abuse of American POWs in Iraq," Washington Post, 2 August 1991, 1(A). Wheelwright argues that the Bush Administration stressed the "ordeal of her captivity" and kept insisting on "the abuse Rathbun-Nealy suffered."

⁴⁰² 70% of the coverage examined was classified as "neutral". Assignment to that category was based upon the overall impression given by the language and presentation. A factual report that

continuation of traditional images that preserved and justified existing military policy. Whether the print media participated willingly in making it easier for the government to minimize potential revolutionary change with respect to the role of women in the military, or whether the government merely took advantage of the print media's relative silence on Rathbun-Nealy's story/experience, cannot be known. Nevertheless, the outcome is the same. The political repercussions of these perceptions were made clear in the aforementioned 1992 Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Military. The increased risk of women becoming POWs was a recurrent theme in the justification for the continued exclusion of women from combat roles. The decisive vote was cast in favour of reinstating the statutory exclusion due to the "POW factor."⁴⁰³ This was particularly true with respect to the exclusion in combat aviation, overall a less contentious issue and one with fewer concrete opposing arguments. This decision was made despite evidence in testimony that these policies did not eliminate the risk of capture, and despite the experience of Rathbun-Nealy and Cornum, who had demonstrated that their capture was not a "greater threat to national security than the capture of the men who were with them."⁴⁰⁴

This perception of the POW factor appears to be largely rooted in the understanding of women as protected, and their consequent vulnerability. While those representing the SERE program testified that there were no gender-based performance

used *gendered images* of the homefront in general were still classified as neutral. A "gendered" report was one that focused, for example, on Rathbun-Nealy's perceived vulnerability or nature as a woman.

⁴⁰³ Robert T. Herres, Mary E. Clarke, Thomas V. Draude, Mary M. Finch, James R. Hogg and Newton N. Minow, Report of the Presidential Commission, 82.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

differences in enduring captivity, instructors observed that men, as a result of the culture, felt “a need to do something, ... to stop it or ... to protect.”⁴⁰⁵ This perception is reinforced by Rathbun-Nealy’s own observations. There is also the concern that the mistreatment of female POWs would have a negative impact on fellow male captives, exposing a greater vulnerability to the enemy. Further, a Joint Services SERE Agency survey found that students thought that “females would be more likely to be sexually exploited than the males.” This attitude was explained by the SERE leadership as the result of the lack of popular attention to the sexual exploitation in the male POW experience.⁴⁰⁶ The survey also determined that despite this widespread concern, women were less concerned with being sexually exploited than were their male counterparts.⁴⁰⁷ This result is further evidenced by Rhonda Cornum’s testimony that the risk of rape is one that women accept when they join.⁴⁰⁸ Women, therefore, demonstrated a willingness to serve despite the risk.

Despite cognition and acceptance of this risk, the issue of women as POWs continued to play an important role in the Presidential Commission debate. This was particularly true in the Commission’s published Alternative View sections. This perspective argued that women POWs, regardless of the treatment they received, would have a “far more demoralizing effect on the American public than similar treatment of male prisoners.”⁴⁰⁹ Elaine Donnelly’s statement asked if it was “necessary to desensitize

⁴⁰⁵ Report of the Presidential Commission, C45.

⁴⁰⁶ Colonel John D. Graham, JSSA, Testimony before the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Military, 8 June 1992, 212.

⁴⁰⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁸ Rhonda Cornum, Testimony before the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Military, 8 June 1992.

⁴⁰⁹ Report of the Presidential Commission, 70.

the nation to the grim possibility of women being brutalized on an equal basis with men, is that a step forward for civilization, or a step backward? And if the military is being asked to lead the way for social change, where will it lead us?"⁴¹⁰ In this view, women remain the protected in a fixed gender binary whereby men, as protectors, are necessary.

The fear of women as POWs appears to reside less in their ability to withstand the ordeal than in the negative impact of the image of the captured protected on military effectiveness and public support. This perspective is supported by evidence in testimony to the Presidential Commission and in its findings. Rathbun-Nealy's relatively positive experience as POW was not enough to prompt the conversion of the image of the protected as it relates to servicewomen.

Conclusion

The presence of a female POW during the Gulf War had the potential to challenge the prevailing image of the female soldier. If Rathbun-Nealy emerged unscathed, then the notion that women were in some way ill-equipped for the risks of combat would be undermined. If she emerged tortured or raped, then there would have been further justification for excluding women from the combat arena. Media coverage in the dailies examined above was generally neutral, although several elements reinforced the imagery of the protected. Coverage of Rathbun-Nealy was only a small portion of the coverage of servicewomen in the Gulf. Consequently, her experience seemed to have a negligible impact on the image of military women as "protected". This was particularly true with

⁴¹⁰ Elaine Donnelly, in *Ibid.*, 103.

respect to the POW factor in the debate on women in combat. The postwar evaluation of the role of women in the military discounted the revolutionary value of her experience, and relied instead on traditional perceptions and assumptions of women as the protected. The evidence suggests that despite the sometimes ambiguous media portrayal of Rathbun-Nealy, the image of women in the military after the Gulf War was still that of the protected. The preservation of that image has political repercussions, which will be further discussed below.

Chapter Six **Conclusion**

American society defines citizenship in part by the individual's obligation to defend the state from external threat. The United States thus embraces Mill's conception of citizenship, which demands that all those who enjoy the protection of society owe a return for that benefit. Minority groups, of which the best example is the African-American community, have thus perceived full and equal integration into the military mainstream as a necessary prerequisite to full citizenship. American women, however, have traditionally been precluded from serving as full combatants. This restriction is partially rooted in the images generated and perpetuated by popular, political and military cultures.

This study has attempted to isolate the prevalent historic and contemporary images of women with respect to war. Evidence has suggested that women have been more comfortably considered as society's protected, while men have been endowed with the responsibilities of the protector. These images, while not deliberately orchestrated by the military, serve its needs by providing a foundation for its military efforts. The lines between battlefield and homefront are rigidly drawn along gendered lines creating images that endorse and justify military action. The study further attempted to determine the current construction of the protector-protected relationship, particularly in light of the Gulf War. Although the Gulf War was perceived by many to successfully challenge the traditional image of women in war, evidence suggests otherwise; like those conflicts examined in Chapters Two and Three, there were few concrete benefits realized by women in the postwar return to normalcy.

The protector-protected relationship operates at several levels. As well, the two concepts are inextricably linked; neither can exist alone. At a societal level, the protector exists to protect his dependents. In return, the protected facilitate, support and reward these actions. While the protector fights on the battlefield, the protected attempt to preserve the ideals of the homefront. This relationship can, therefore, become important both implicitly and explicitly in its capacity to justify intervention and to motivate protectors into service. This relationship also exists within the military itself. Even military women, who have regularly taken the same risks as their male counterparts, have been considered as protected support staff. While women are essential as soldiers in a support capacity, it could be concluded that women in general are even more important as symbols representing the protected homefront. The relationship facilitates the traditional conduct of war.

The protector and the protected are images that are endowed with the characteristics of masculinity and femininity. The protector's application of lethal force has had a traditionally strong association with practical masculine ideals; combat has been perceived as an integral expression of this association. The protected symbolize the virtue of the homefront, as expressed through the nurturing qualities of femininity. These links are reinforced in popular, political and military cultures. The endurance of these images over time can be traced throughout the history of American military conflict.

Women in the American Revolution were important contributors to the war effort both on the homefront and on the battlefield. While they were briefly transformed from political observers into actors necessary for victory, the end of the war yielded few

concrete benefits. In effect, women were relegated to the realm of the protected as they were generally excluded from full and formal citizenship. This was best expressed in the postwar case, *Martin v. Massachusetts*, where women were perceived as a detriment to the defense of the state. The gendered binary was thus publicly sanctioned.

During the Civil War, women were once again called upon to serve, and did so on a significant scale. The realm of the protected was expanded after a time of unprecedented gender rigidity, especially in the South. While women's roles did expand, they were unable as a group to overcome socially validated gender norms. Once again, men expected women to return to their prewar values and standards to complete the return to normalcy. For example, southern women, tired of the rigors of war, embraced a return to the security of prewar gender roles. The roles of women remained tied to the home.

World War I was a transitional event, as women served officially, but in a limited military capacity. Overall, they hoped that their patriotic support, especially in the military, would translate into political gains. While women did gain suffrage, they were once again called to duty out of necessity, and once the war ended, they were confined to their prewar image as the protected. If anything, the relationship between women and war became even more disparate at this time, as the increased feminization of the peace movement reinforced their construction as the protected. The relationship between women and peace, as well as women's subsequent support of the war effort despite the prewar commitment to peace activism, were both consistent with the role of the protected.

Women in World War II filled many traditional, as well unconventional roles. Their participation was necessary to fill the shortages in both civilian and military sectors. This need prompted a temporary adjustment of the prevailing image to accommodate their expanded role. Women remained the protected, however, as their service was framed in terms of their femininity and duty. They were, in fact, facilitating their own protection. They remained the enduring symbols and justification for war. In the postwar period, the preservation of the traditional home was equated with normalcy, and women's role was once again contracted.

The Vietnam War also needed women. They served in the military predominantly as nurses and infrequently as non-medical support. During the war, men gave women the protection they were believed to need, and women, in return, were nurturers, offering support and reward. Despite their importance, however, women were virtually invisible in coverage and analysis both during the war and after. The lasting image of the Vietnam War was not that of the active female veteran, but of the emasculated American male; this image could not accommodate its protected soldiers.

It was in Panama and in Grenada that women and their expanded military responsibilities were publicly noticed and scrutinized. Women remained largely protected, however, as they were publicly banned from combat assignments. The image of women in war was in flux, as there was tension between the image of women at home and on the battlefield. Nevertheless, the image-reality gap was not sufficient to shatter the equation of women and the protected. Women as protected soldiers became symbols of American femininity, operating within their boundaries as protected. They lent legitimacy to the

military's image as equal employers without provoking sustained public demands for unwanted change.

The image of women as protected, therefore, endured through the late twentieth century, despite an expanded role for women both in the military and in society. After each conflict, society supported a return to prewar normalcy. Because women have traditionally been part of the homefront, the literature suggests that a social presumption exists that it is through the return to prewar gender relations that the psychological social balance is restored. These historic conflicts did not sufficiently challenge the construction of women as protected to change postwar society's images of men and women in war.

The images of the protector and the protected were most convincingly challenged, however, in the Gulf War. In that conflict, an unprecedented number of women served. There was a perception in society and among many scholars that women had effectively shattered the myth of women as protected through both their actions and the media's portrayals. The notion of women as unsuited to the rigors of combat and society's presumed intolerance of women in this role was apparently dispelled, leading many to believe that gender-based restrictions on combat assignments would be eliminated. Women were believed to have emerged as capable professionals. Women would thus achieve equality in the military and realize greater political gains. This belief was further reinforced by immediate postwar Congressional action that sought to dismantle the statutory limits on women's military service.

This common perception is refuted, however, by the results of the present study. Despite the unprecedented attention paid to women's military roles, the image of women

as protected endured. The character of the media coverage revealed a perception of that role that was not far removed from that of earlier conflicts. Women served in a variety of capacities, but were still subject to policy restrictions that preserved their status as protected soldiers. The media, both by its portrayal of the homefront and the battlefield, framed women's roles as that of the protected and reinforced the traditional imagery of femininity. While the Gulf War highlighted inconsistencies in military policies that were supposed to offer protection, the challenge was not sufficiently sustained to provoke revolutionary change.

As a result, the myths concerning women in war were only briefly, and often superficially, suspended. They reappeared in postwar debate and particularly in the 1992 Presidential Commission on Women in the Military. While Congress removed statutory barriers, it could be argued that the action taken was the *minimum* that could have been expected -- the ban against combat air craft was the least defensible. Elimination of that prohibition could also be explained as that least disruptive to the construction of women as protected. Ground combat is far too fundamental a male privilege. As well, the military's postwar action to integrate women as equals has been slow and reluctant, and has preserved their construction as protected soldiers. Currently, the protector-protected relationship serves many significant functions in the military system; functions the military may perceive as essential.

The link between men and combat was evidenced in a Presidential Commission military poll. Among those interviewed, respondents serving in specific combat specialties were most consistently opposed to allowing women into any combat specialty. These

results could be the product of the prevalence of the image of the protector as most rigid in its link to masculinity in these combat assignments(fighter/bomber pilots and ground combat MOSs). The image of men as protectors and women as protected may be particularly entrenched in these specialties, as male-only status enables the image to be perpetuated without significant challenge. These opinions may be based more exclusively on that image, as they are without sustained challenge in the person of female soldiers.

The preservation of the image, as well as the ambiguity it produces for military women, was demonstrated by the case study of Melissa Rathbun-Nealy. The possibility of a female POW has traditionally been emphasized by those who oppose women in combat; it was generally believed that the public would not support a war in which its women were not protected. Her relatively positive experience as a POW, therefore, could have shattered many of the arguments against women in combat, and could have fundamentally undermined the image of women as protected. Her own recollections of her time in the military, however, reveal that she was more often fulfilling the role of the protected, rather than that of the soldier in the field.

The content analysis of print media coverage of Rathbun-Nealy in The Los Angeles Times, USA Today, The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Detroit News, as well as less systematic examination of supplementary sources, further revealed that the image of women as protected had not been effectively subverted. The print media coverage of Rathbun-Nealy largely did not reflect perceived public concern. As was pointed out, this media reaction could be interpreted as indicative of the need to preserve public support by “minimizing” her capture (which would indicate a more

protected, rather than objective, presence). Moreover, the relative lack of attention to her endurance as a POW further undermined the revolutionary value of her experience to challenge the prevailing image of women as protected.

The image of the protected was reinforced by the popular media's attention to the link between sexuality and war. For example, they addressed the question of rape in the context of Rathbun-Nealy's capture. Speculation about her vulnerability continued during her incarceration, and even after her own assurances to the contrary. The ambiguity surrounding the details of her capture frustrated accurate public perceptions. The truth was further undermined by the later revelation by another female POW, Rhonda Cornum, that she had been raped. Thus, there was only limited public awareness of what actually happened to her. This lack of public knowledge compromised the potential for change.

The issue of female POWs endured despite the evidence provided by Rathbun-Nealy's experience. These political repercussions were made clear in the Presidential Commission. The increased risk of women becoming POWs with relaxation of the combat restrictions was a major theme of discussion. As has been demonstrated, this perception of the female POW was largely rooted in the understanding of women as protected and their consequent vulnerability. The debate over the full and equal integration of women into the defense of the American state was largely caught within the parameters of the image of the protected. Consequently, the assessment of "can" they serve was rarely addressed exclusive of the question of "should" they serve.

There is significant evidence, therefore, that the Gulf War conformed to traditional historical patterns. While there was a superficial expansion of the realm of the protected

as female soldiers fought in the Gulf, the construction of the feminine homefront was essential to the maintenance of public support. Moreover, the liberated American female soldier was useful at the level of symbol as a positive contrast to her Arab counterpart. The postwar period failed to yield the benefits expected as a result of women's expanded roles. Instead, the prewar imagery was reasserted and once again became explicit in its support of women as protected. Thus, the Gulf War conformed to the historical pattern as the postwar return to normalcy included a retreat to the intact image of women as protected.

The endurance of the image of women as protected, despite social change and challenge, provokes the question of where change will, or should, originate. Change in a fundamental cultural image demands that the underlying belief be undermined. In order for the image of women as protected to be effectively subverted, society would have to stop perceiving them as soldiers fundamentally in need of protection and thus as fundamentally distinct from their male counterparts. An examination of racial integration into the military may be instructive for the full and equal integration of women into the military structure.

Chapter One examined Edwin Dorn's assessment that there were "instructive similarities" between the integration of African-Americans and women into the American military. African-Americans were initially subject to myths and misconceptions born of their racial 'nature' that were used to bar them from full integration. It was believed that these differences would undermine unit cohesion and thus military effectiveness. These myths and their implications are not unlike those currently used against women. In the

case of African-Americans, it was only after the military embarked on an aggressive campaign against these stereotypes that racial tensions began to subside and full and equal integration was possible.

The impetus for cultural change with respect to women in the military will have to come from within that culture. Change has rarely been provoked by outside pressure, and is most often dictated by military necessity. Images of African-Americans with respect to war were altered as a result of deliberate military action. When necessary, modifications in the image of women as protected have come from the military, as in World War II where the realm of the acceptable was expanded. Dorn concludes that eliminating the combat exclusion policy may improve the "status and regard of women" in the military, as did the Presidential Executive order for African-Americans. This analysis gives further weight to the argument that problems such as those of sexual harassment and fraternization will not be resolved until the image of the military woman evolves. It must be distinct from that of the protected, such that men and women interact in ways not necessarily dictated by the dimensions of the protector-protected relationship. Women cannot be equal until all barriers are removed and the risks and responsibilities of the male soldier are those of the female soldier.

The American military is an institution that helps to define American citizenship. The exclusion of women from the obligations of military service places limits on their citizenship. President Truman's 1948 Executive Order 9981 stated that: "it is essential that there be maintained in the Armed Services of the United States the highest standards of democracy, with equality of treatment and opportunity for all those who serve in our

country's defense." The current military structure falls short of this equality for women. Women are arbitrarily restricted, despite evidence of their ability. This restriction is in part born of their image as the protected. If women are to achieve full citizenship, and are to bear not only the rights but responsibilities of that role, this construction of women as protected must change.

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