

**The Articulation of Lynndie England to Abu Ghraib:
Gender Ideologies, War, and the Construction of Reality**

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Abstract

Hall (1980) argued that the media articulate non-necessary connections between messages and socially acceptable ideas. This research analyzes the process through which news magazines made a strong connection between Lynndie England and the Abu Ghraib prison scandal and how gender affected these articulations. By making England the symbol of the scandal, the media diverted attention away from broad issues and focused on an individual while reifying dichotomous images of women.

Keywords: Abu Ghraib, articulation theory, feminist analysis, gender and media, Lynndie England, news magazines, war coverage

Introduction

Journalists do not simply reflect or represent reality. Instead, their discursive work occupies a privileged location in the exchange of messages, the construction of reality, and the reification of ideologies and power. Much of this process occurs through a process of articulation. "Articulation" refers to the ways particular ideological elements within a discourse are linked to form a version of reality (Hall, 1980). Hall's theory offers a way to critique connections made within media texts that are neither necessary nor neutral, but are ideologically laden and create seemingly natural social understandings (Makus, 1990). Beginning with this premise, this article analyzes American news magazine texts surrounding

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the shocking visual images of abuse and torture at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. The television news magazine *60 Minutes II* first showed photographs of the prison abuse story in the American news media on April 28, 2004. *The New Yorker* magazine followed two days later with an online story by journalist Seymour Hersh, and soon stories with images depicting the inhuman treatment of Iraqi prisoners alongside the “grinning” faces of American soldiers were seen around the world (Hersh, 2004; Make it hell, 2004). These images have been cemented in the minds of many, but it is important to consider how journalists’ *texts* played a role in constructing the story of Abu Ghraib. In doing so, it becomes clear how dominant gender ideologies played a role in the articulation of a story and turned a complex event into a tale about individuals.

Journalists had reported on prisoner abuse in Iraq before the Abu Ghraib story broke, but the issue drew little attention until the powerful images surfaced publically (Prisoner abuse charges filed, 2003; Rosenberg, 2004; Schmitt, 2004; Shanker, 2004). Further, while more than a thousand still photographs and video images depicting Abu Ghraib exist (Zernike, 2005), understanding what happened is shaped mainly by a few photographs that editors and producers repeatedly chose to publish and describe. Three of the most prominent photographs in the media featured a female Army Reservist, Lynndie England. Along with these images, journalists and commentators constructed stories about life and events at Abu Ghraib—a textual representation that furthered our understanding of what happened. But these stories did more than shape our reality. Journalists—through the process of linking particular elements—formed an articulation between gender ideologies and the abuse, and transformed the story into one of individuals, especially one woman.

The research goals were twofold. First is to demonstrate the *process* by which articulation shapes the images of women in the media. Second is to show how journalistic practices reinforce this process of articulation, resulting in individuals being blamed for systemic social problems (Jewkes, 2004). Our analysis focuses on a gender-based critique that examines the discursive construction of the Abu Ghraib prison abuse within the context of a feminist theoretical framework and theories of ideology and articulation. Through a discourse analysis of 49 articles in seven news and opinion magazines, this research focuses on news-mediated articulations of England to identify the process by which news magazine accounts of the scandal constructed a discourse that maintained traditional gender ideologies and advanced England as the face of the scandal.

Selecting Images and Shaping Reality

The photographs tell it all. In one, Private England, a cigarette dangling from her mouth, is giving a jaunty thumbs-up sign and pointing at the genitals of a young Iraqi, who is naked except for a sandbag over his head, as he masturbates. Three other hooded and naked Iraqi prisoners are shown, hands reflexively crossed over their

genitals. A fifth prisoner has his hands at his sides. In another, England stands arm in arm with Specialist Graner; both are grinning and giving the thumbs-up behind a cluster of perhaps seven naked Iraqis, knees bent, piled clumsily on top of each other in a pyramid. (Hersh, 2004, paragraph 8)

This excerpt from the first print media publication of Abu Ghraib photos may not “tell it all,” but it offers important clues about the visual imagery surrounding the torture scandal. Several sources, including White House officials, said more than one thousand photos and video clips of abuse, humiliation, and torture at Abu Ghraib exist (Zernike, 2004). The press, particularly during the early part of the story, had access to relatively few of these (Rather, 2004). What is notable in reading Hersh’s first description of the photographs is that he identified only two of the soldiers in the images—Lynndie England and Charles Graner. Possibly more important is the realization that only about a dozen of the hundreds of photographs became common fare in U.S. news media. England played a prominent role in three. Along with the two of England that Hersh (2004) described, another of her holding a leash attached to a prisoner also played prominently in the press.



This photo of Private Lynndie England was among the two that *New Yorker* journalist Seymour Hersh described in the first big story about the abuse and torture.



This photo of Pvt. Lynndie England holding a leash attached to an Abu Ghraib prisoner collapsed on the floor has become a symbol of the scandal.

The release and repeated publication of these three photographs of England among the many that exist, whether or not it was deliberate, refocused a public relations crisis regarding U.S. military actions of torture and abuse. Through continual linking of England to Abu Ghraib, journalists formed a strong articulation between the two. Exactly why news media outlets chose to repeatedly publish these images of England is beyond the scope of this study, though we believe the answers are firmly grounded in feminist theorizing about news media routines and coverage of women—dictates that identify what is newsworthy by what is unusual and strange, sexual, and salacious (Benedict, 1992). While the “why” might not be sufficiently answered here, the results of this photographic selection were indicated in the very first written account: England became a focus of the story. In fact, the photos of England have been described as “the most notorious” (Jagodzinski, 2006, p. 8), “icons of the scandal” (Tétreault, 2006, p. 41), and the “most widely publicized” (Mason, 2005, p. 40). CNN anchor Heidi Collins was among the many who described her as “the poster child of the scandal” (CNN, 2004).

Identifying the release of these three photographs of England as a starting point for the construction of the story as one centered on gender identities and ideologies, we argue

that journalists proceeded to frame the story in this way, reifying England's iconic position in the scandal. While evidence suggests this occurred through the continued publication of these photographs of England, we explore how news media texts might have reinforced the story.

Femininity, Masculinity, the Military, and Media

Women occupy contested terrain in U.S. culture when they serve in the military. Common cultural understandings of women and men are based on dichotomies that associate femininity with domesticity, nurturing, and motherhood, and weakness, softness, and purity (Green, Davids, Skaggs, Riopel, & Hallengren, 2008). Masculinity is associated with opposite traits—strong, in control of situations, active, aggressive, violent, and powerful (Nathanson & Young, 2001; Tremblay & Turcotte, 2005). When women enter into the public as soldiers, they are positioned outside the commonly understood notions of “woman,” and a conceptual crisis occurs.

Representations of women in the mainstream media often rely on dichotomous stereotypes like the virgin/vamp, the sex goddess/mother, or idealized and confining images of women as housewifely, passive, wholesome, and pretty (Benedict, 1992; Kitch, 1997). Not all women have access to all these roles, however. Race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation have played a part in positioning women in the various roles within American culture (Benedict, 1992; Carter & Steiner, 2004; Collins, 1994; hooks, 1984; Houston, 1992). Women in news are often positioned in domestic roles (particularly white women) within the private sphere of domesticity and have been structured in opposition to men, who have been seen as actors in a public world (Rakow & Kranich, 1991). A particularly powerful construction of true womanhood rests in the “achievement” of motherhood. This ideology of motherhood links the birth/raising of children as a woman's natural and greatest achievement (Johnston & Swanson, 2006; Oakley, 1975).

When women blur these culturally understood gender boundaries by serving in the military, journalists must find a space for femininity within what is viewed as a largely masculine arena. In the case of women, war, and media, women remain largely relegated to spaces that reinforce their traditional roles as the mourning widow or the all-feeling mother (Cohler, 2006; Lidinsky, 2005).

In the news media, coverage of women soldiers has been a continued negotiation between femininity and violence, a stereotypically masculine characteristic. Reporting on this subject “complicates women's military roles by representing stories consistent with the dominant patriarchal militaristic narrative” (Howard & Prividera, 2004, p. 89).

Most recently, during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan women have died, been injured, or been taken captive while serving in combat areas (Ginty, 2005). Nantais and Lee (1999) noted that before these wars, “women served in a variety of capacities, but were still

subject to policy restrictions that preserved their status as ‘protected’ soldiers, and the media reinforced the traditional imagery of protected femininity” (p. 189). By defining women as the passive “protected” rather than the active “protector,” the media feminize the female soldier and help resuscitate social stereotypes and cultural ideologies about women and war (Ross & Moorti, 2005).

Early in the U.S.-led war in Iraq, Private Jessica Lynch served as the epitome of “protected femininity” in the media, even though she has personally challenged this representation (Howard & Prividera, 2004). In the media, Lynch was “a hero not for saving others but living to be saved by a warrior hero. She is a hero for being an object, not a subject” (Howard & Prividera, 2004, p. 94). While news media were able to fit Jessica Lynch into the “virginal” role of protected femininity (Benedict, 1992)—arguably based in part on her whiteness and traditionally understood ideals of beauty—journalists had a new problem with another high-profile female soldier: Lynndie England.

Mason (2005) argued that a conflation of class and gender affected England’s image in the media. England joined the U.S. Army at age 17 to earn money for college (McKelvey, 2006). She grew up in a small, working class West Virginia town in a family of relatively little financial means (McKelvey, 2006). U.S. officials were reported as saying what happened was the work of “recycled hillbillies,” and the phrase resonated in the media; “discussions of Lynndie England as a gender-bending hillbilly pervert proliferated” (Mason, 2005, p. 40). By featuring her short, dark hair, Army fatigues, and a cigarette dangling from her lips, the media stereotyped England as a sexual deviant who existed outside the normal, accepted feminine bounds. Her sexualized images reinforced her role as a sexual deviant or a vamp (Benedict, 1992). Journalists used England as a marker to denote deviance and provide a simple explanation for a complicated story about politics, social values, and morality.

Articulation Theory

According to Stuart Hall (1980), the media encode messages with meanings that are then decoded by audiences consuming those messages. For Hall, the circuit of communication is complex and is constructed through practices of production, circulation, distribution, and reproduction.¹ Producers of media messages are able to create meanings by establishing connections between people, ideas, and events. The media, in an effort to “explain” the world and “reality,” rely on these connections to make their messages easier to understand. Often, this means “encoding” media messages by connecting them to socially acceptable images or ideas—as is often the case with images of women in the media.

Hall (interviewed in Grossberg, 1986) called this a process of articulation during which the media create a connection or link “which is not necessarily given in all cases, as a

¹ Within this system, audiences may accept the encoded messages, negotiate them, or reject them.

law or fact of life, but which requires particular conditions of existence to appear at all, which has to be positively sustained by specific processes, which is not 'eternal' but has constantly to be renewed" (Grossberg, 1986, p. 59). Hall's theory of articulation, then, provides a way of understanding how social and historical conditions help form discourses and become appropriated in the media. "It is a way of theorizing the 'contingent' but 'non necessary' relation between ideologies, practices, subjects, and social positions" (Pillai, 1992, p. 225). We argue that through articulation, journalists link individuals to problems and in doing so keep invisible real social and political explanations. Research has found that this type of individualized reporting, which focuses on a person and draws attention away from social problems and solutions, is often found in crime stories (see Jewkes, 2004).

This research examines how news articulated a connection between Lynndie England and the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal and how her gender affected the articulations in the media.² In conducting the analysis, the authors considered a set of broad questions. These included: How did the various texts reinforce the articulation of England to Abu Ghraib? In what ways did dominant gender ideologies manifest themselves in these various texts? How did coverage reify typical complaints about female coverage? And finally, did the resulting coverage aid in turning the narrative from a social/political problem into an individual problem?

Method

Hall's theory of articulation has methodological implications in that "analysis must be conducted through the critical concepts of ideology, power, and conflict interacting with social formations" (Makus, 1990, p. 503). By employing cross-disciplinary principles of discourse analysis, researchers can achieve this type of investigation. The analysis attends to "the identification of the communicational processes and strategies relevant to particular engagements, [and] the understanding and interpretation of what the relevant or significant communicational forms, meanings, and patterns are in a particular situation" (Jones & Collins, 2006, p. 42). With this approach to discourse in mind, the two authors each read all the texts multiple times and identified emerging themes and patterns.

For the analysis the authors chose to examine news and opinion magazine coverage and commentary about Lynndie England. Believing that magazines offer journalists an opportunity for depth and that assorted political and social perspectives might offer a broader discourse, we examined content in news magazines as well as leading opinion magazines, including those representing both conservative and progressive ideological

² The result of this focus highlights journalistic practices. Other research has focused on the abuse/torture scandal, England, and the photographs from Abu Ghraib as a rich site for analysis from various perspectives, based on race, class, sexualization of power, and ethnicity (see Jagodzinski, 2006; Mason, 2005; Tétreault, 2006).

perspectives. For a mainstream news perspective we analyzed content in what are known within the industry as the “big three news magazines”—*Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report* (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2004). These three magazines have a relatively high circulation, yet the most frequent readers are not extensively diverse in terms of age, gender, and income (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2004).

For opinion news magazines we chose the two leading publications—*The Nation* and the *National Review*. *The Nation* offers a progressive perspective, while the *National Review* presents a conservative position. To add richness to the data, the authors analyzed content in *Mother Jones*, another popular left-of-center magazine, and *FrontPage Magazine*, a top-ranked conservative publication.³

By conducting searches of each magazine’s website, we identified all content that mentioned “Lynndie England” and “Abu Ghraib” from May 2004 through January 2007 (although only five of the articles identified were published after 2005). After disqualifying three articles,⁴ the authors analyzed 49 stories, including both news articles and commentary pieces: three articles in *Front Page Magazine*, five in *Mother Jones*, 13 in *National Review*, eight in *Newsweek*, six in *The Nation*, 10 in *Time*, and four in *U.S. News & World Report*.

Analysis and Discussion

The analysis explored how journalists articulated Lynndie England to Abu Ghraib prison abuse and aided in the discursive (re)construction of the story into one focusing on a woman who behaved badly. Early in the coverage of England, stories and commentaries in each of the magazines studied began to name or situate her as the poster child of the Abu Ghraib scandal. This link was completed through a focus on issues of gender and femininity, sexuality, and the role of women in the military. Few differences in the articulation of England to Abu Ghraib were identified among the three mainstream magazines, but a distinction appeared between the conservative and progressive magazines. While both types of magazines still formed an articulation between England and the prison abuse, progressive writers more often called into question her “scapegoat” status, while the conservative magazines were more likely to question the role that gender played in the story. The three mainstream magazines less often questioned the role of England as a scapegoat or as a woman. The remaining portion of this article expands on these findings.

Symbol of a scandal

³ All the content of these magazines can be accessed through their print or online editions, with the exception of *FrontPage Magazine*, which is only published online.

⁴ A few articles in the search mentioned England’s name in passing, but they did not include any information about her and were unrelated to the Abu Ghraib scandal. The authors did not analyze these stories.

The pictures of Pfc. Lynndie England in Abu Ghraib—leading one naked prisoner by a leash and standing over another with a cigarette dangling from her mouth—made her *the face of the prison-abuse scandal*. (Stein, 2005, paragraph 2; emphasis added)

In both news coverage and commentary about the Abu Ghraib prison torture and abuse, England's name became synonymous with the scandal, as was clear in Stein's *U.S. News & World Report* article. In another example, a *Newsweek* story included an introductory paragraph and a section on each of the seven men and women charged with the actions at Abu Ghraib (Make it hell, 2004). England was the first to be identified—even before the supervising officers. The seven names were not listed by military rank or in alphabetical order. An article in *Newsweek* a few days earlier was titled "Explaining Lynndie England," with highlighted text that read: "How did a wispy tomboy behave like a monster at Abu Ghraib?" (Thomas, Scelfo, Gegax, & Wingert, 2004, paragraphs 1). An article focusing on England in *FrontPage Magazine* referred to her as a "key figure" of the "Abu Ghraib prison scandal" (Laksin, 2004, paragraph 1). *U.S. News and World Report* published an article that immediately focused attention on England, titled "A Lingering Prison Scandal" (Marek, 2005). The story began:

In hindsight, it might have been the first sign of trouble. In January 2004, Capt. Donald J. Reese, commander for the 372nd Military Police Company that would soon become embroiled in the Abu Ghraib scandal, had a problem with one of his charges. Spc. Lynndie England, a 21-year-old clerk, was carrying on a sexual relationship with one of her fellow soldiers, Cpl. Charles A. Graner. (paragraph 1)

This article not only identified England; it also pinpointed her sexual behavior as a likely hint of the more insidious things to come out of Abu Ghraib. Further, in the article Graner was described as her fellow soldier rather than her superior, which would be accurate and whose precise identification might serve to shift the emphasis from a clerk to a superior officer. By mentioning England's name or focusing on her, and often leaving most if not all of the other soldiers' names out of articles, the news media formed an articulation that resulted in her becoming synonymous with the scandal.

This simple mention of England's name (either as the first or only name mentioned) became a powerful tool of articulation even when the story was sympathetic to her. For example, in *The Nation* a columnist condemned the fact that low-ranking military troops were held accountable for the decisions of higher-ranking players (Cockburn, 2005). While the message may be admirable, the writer only named England—and did so in the first sentence, reinforcing the problematic articulation. Interestingly, there were several cases where magazine journalists illustrated reflexivity in the fact that England received differential treatment, as evidenced by their recognition that England had become a symbol for the

scandal and that she and Graner had become “household names” (Marek, 2005, paragraph 3). The following examples come from both news and commentary magazines and again demonstrate England’s positioning in the group of soldiers.

From *Newsweek*: “*England’s company* came to Iraq to work as traffic cops.” (Thomas et al., 2004, paragraph 6; emphasis added)

From the *National Review*: “Is it not just possible that, had *Miss England & Co.* been educated in schools that did what schools once did fairly well—trained the faculties that make for strength and character.” (Beran, 2005, paragraph 5; emphasis added)

By using descriptors like “England’s company” and “Miss England & Co.,” these representations implied that England was a leading member of her unit. In reality, England was one of the lowest ranking officers and younger than most of the other soldiers in her group (McKelvey, 2006). Additionally, she was not a guard. Rather, she served as a clerk and was reportedly introduced to the activities in the prison through Graner, her then-boyfriend (McKelvey, 2006). The narrow selection of photographs by the news industry certainly worked to shape the media’s representations of England. However, through a relentless articulation of England to Abu Ghraib, the magazine texts reified her position as the symbol of the scandal. This articulation—neither necessary nor neutral—focused attention on England and away from the lack of leadership and training in how to handle prisoners and more complex issues about U.S. military actions. As coverage continued in the news magazines, England’s identification eventually became shorthand for the broader group of participants. Another example included a commentary in the *National Review* that referred to Abu Ghraib and used the phrase “Lynndie England and her companions” (Blyth, 2004, paragraph 4). A mere mention of her name represented the entire group involved in the scandal as well as the scandal itself. This was the case to some degree in each of the magazines.

Although the news stories positioned England this way, some journalists noted the problem with this young woman being the face of the scandal. This recognition was mostly identified in the progressive magazines. Graner, as these examples illustrated, was the second most mentioned individual, though this construction makes much more sense because he was a supervising officer. Examples included:

From *The Nation*: “Why are the current investigations only focusing on *lower-level troops like Charles Graner and Lynndie England?*” (Sifton, 2005, paragraph 7; emphasis added).

From *The Nation*: “Spc. Charles Graner and his girlfriend, Private Lynndie England, became the Bush Administration’s hand-picked scapegoats.” (Berman, 2005, paragraph 2).

From *Mother Jones*: “But any talk of recourse seems to lead back to Pfc. Lynndie England, her boyfriend, and a few of their friends” (Roychoudhuri, 2005, paragraph 1; emphasis added).

Describing England and dichotomizing gender

When the scandal first broke in 2004, the magazines were likely to include information about all seven soldiers involved in the incident. However, early on (as illustrated above), England began to hold a prominent position in the news coverage in these magazines. When all seven soldiers were mentioned, England’s name was almost always listed first. Equally if not more troubling, descriptions of England far outweighed those of any other participants, and the details concentrated on her physical appearance and personal life. An article in *Time* describes England in one of the photos without using her name but rather “petite” and “dark-haired” (McGeary, 2004, paragraph 2). The same story later named all the people charged for the Abu Ghraib acts, but offered additional information about England, setting her apart from the others:

From *Time*: On March 20, the military announced that Frederick, Harman, Davis, Graner, Specialist Megan Ambuhl and Private Jeremy Sivits of the Military Police were being held in Iraq... A seventh soldier, Lynndie England, the jaunty G.I. Jane in many of the photographs, who is now pregnant, was sent to Fort Bragg, N.C. (McGeary, 2004, paragraph 18).

Descriptions of England largely focused on her “tiny” (Wallis, 2004, paragraph 8), “pixyish” body (Zagorin, 2005, paragraph 1) and her “all-American” (Wallis, 2004, paragraph 1) “baby” (Whitelaw, 2004, paragraph 3) face, seen “cavorting” around the prison detainees (Thomas & Hirsh, 2005, paragraph 20). Not only was England portrayed with more descriptive depth, but journalists also used gendered language (words not typically used to describe men) and referred to her as a “girl” rather than a woman. Much of this rhetoric then positioned her as a mere child. For example, *The Nation* noted that England is “the fall girl for Abu Ghraib” (Klein, 2005, paragraph 11). While the progressive magazine was again pointing a sympathetic light on England, the articulation of “girl” (which connotes a whole different set of images from “woman”) to England was patronizing and disrespectful. A reporter at *Newsweek* wondered what made “a patriotic, pixie-ish tomboy who joined the army reserve to pay for college, become the poster girl for sexual humiliation and degradation at Abu Ghraib” (Thomas et al., 2004, paragraph 1). The tendency for journalists to describe women’s physical appearance more frequently than men’s is not surprising and has been documented in feminist research (Benedict, 1992; Norris, 1997; Ross, 2002). However, because England was treated differently from the rest of the seven military personnel charged, it not only reinforced gender dichotomies but also set her apart from the rest of the

story's actors. In the end, this highlighting of England formed a stronger articulation between her and Abu Ghraib.

One of the most shocking excerpts that detailed England's appearance came from a *Time* magazine story. The author speculated why England had occupied such a prominent place in the media and public mind:

For all the tangled nudes, the hideous hoods, the dangling wires and the dog leash, perhaps the single most shocking thing about the images from Abu Ghraib prison is the woman in so many of the pictures: smiling broadly or giving thumbs up or just standing casually in the demented scene as if posing in a college dorm. It's the all-American face of Private First Class Lynndie England. The girl next door, a Jessica Lynch gone wrong. (Wallis, 2004, paragraph 1)

This quote perfectly illustrates how England's gender became a more prominent aspect of the story than the actual abuse and torture because it was an image that could not be reconciled. While violence fits into our framework of the world and war, women engaged in this type of violence do not (Barker-Plummer & Boaz, 2005; Donald, 2001; Jeffords, 1993; Kimmel, 2001; Newsinger, 1993). This articulation successfully constructs a narrative about an individual woman who sits outside the norms of femininity.

This quote also illustrates how the news media, particularly the conservative magazines, placed England's representation in binary opposition to Jessica Lynch in the form of a virgin/vamp dichotomy (see Derbyshire, 2004; Lowry, 2005; West & West, 2005). Benedict (1992) explained the virgin or vamp dichotomy as a situation where women are separated into two distinct, oppositional, and narrow categories—either behaving within traditional female expectations or falling outside anticipated norms. Those who fit normative expectations are categorized as “virgin” in opposition to the “vamp” of women who behave badly (Benedict, 1992). Lynch, as media analyses have indicated, served as a symbol of traditional femininity and did little to disrupt sexist systems of power (Lobasz, 2008; Sjoberg, 2007; Sjolander & Trevenen, 2010). She was the “virgin” in opposition to England, who, with her grinning face and out-of-wedlock pregnancy, became a symbol of the ruined woman (Lobasz, 2008) or a vamp (Benedict, 1992). A *National Review* article pitted Lynch and England in similar opposition: “In Iraq, the most famous soldiers to emerge are PFC Jessica Lynch and PFC Lynndie England, a victim and a criminal, respectively” (West & West, 2005, paragraph 10). The media could easily position Lynch as a victim of war, but her counterpart did not fit so easily. For many journalists, there was too much visual evidence—photographs of improper behavior and a pregnancy—for England to be seen as a victim.

Reporters did not only focus on physical descriptions of England, which set her apart from the other soldiers involved in the scandal. England's personal life—a forbidden affair, a

pregnancy out of wedlock, divorce, and “the victim of a deprived or degraded socio-economic background” (Thomas, 2004, paragraph 8)—was further employed in these media texts to support her construction as a bad woman (see Marek, 2005; Roychoudhuri, 2005; Thomas et al., 2004). The media’s preoccupation with her personal life helped bolster her role as the vamp, continually mentioning her illicit relationship with Graner, a superior officer, and her out-of-wedlock pregnancy. For example, a *Newsweek* story described England as a “paper pusher” who would “wander over to the cells at night, where her boyfriend, Cpl. Charles Graner Jr....” (Thomas et al., 2004, paragraph 4). A *National Review* article implied her relationships extended beyond Graner, describing “the inanely grinning Pfc. England” and “her high jinks with male comrades” (Derbyshire, 2004, paragraph 7). According to a report about England’s defense, she “said her participation in the abuse was prompted by a desire to please her boyfriend, jailed ringleader Charles Graner” (August, Barovick, Bland, & Neuman, 2005, paragraph 2). While this excerpt illustrated ways the information of England’s personal relationship with Graner was relevant, oftentimes the knowledge was offered without context and acted more as a salacious detail, as the earlier examples showed.

The irrelevant information about England’s past marked a clear difference in the manner in which she was constructed in stories compared with others involved in the abuse and torture. It also helped to solidify the articulation of England to Abu Ghraib, as it focused attention on her. In contrast, the publications offered few details about the other soldiers’ personal lives, particularly the two other women soldiers, whose names, much less personal lives, rarely appeared in the coverage. England’s relationship and continued articulation to Graner structured her in the media as a Bonnie-type character in the image of a Bonnie-and-Clyde couple. When Graner and England were mentioned in an article, the context of their personal relationship was prominent (see Thomas et al., 2004; Wallis, 2004). However, judgment about the relationship—a private officer entering into a sexual relationship with a superior—was often directed toward England. For example, *U.S. News & World Report* mentioned that England was punished for their relationship, but no mention was made of Graner’s punishment or responsibility to end the relationship with his subordinate:

Spc. Lynndie England, a 21-year-old clerk, was carrying on a sexual relationship with one of her fellow soldiers, Cpl. Charles A. Graner. “We gave her a direct order. If she’s not working, she’s to be back in her room at night.... We had attempted to contact her a few nights, couldn’t find her. We didn’t know where she was,” according to Captain Donald J. Reese. After later catching her in Graner’s bunk, Reese reprimanded England for failing to obey order and reduced her rank from specialist to private first class. (Marek, 2005, paragraph 1)

In describing the relationship, journalists could offer proof of England's vamp status,⁵ because to mark her as a vamp helped explain the unexplainable—a woman torturing someone or “the single most shocking thing about the images,” as Wallis (2004, paragraph 1) had written.

A conservative commentary piece in the *National Review* detailed why the image of England, a “petite, pregnant woman,” was so shocking to the media and the American public:

That's why the image of Lynndie England at Abu Ghraib is more jarring than if she had been a Lionel or Larry England abusing prisoners. Either is bad. Both are embarrassing for all of us. Seeing England pregnant during her court martial somehow made it worse still. (Lopez, 2006, paragraph 12)

This type of commentary—trying to make sense of the nonsensical—appeared as journalists both questioned and explained the iconic space England occupied within the discourse. At the same instant, however, the probing texts reinforced her iconic articulation. Further, England's construction as a female was emphasized in the texts repeatedly through her status as a pregnant woman—a mother, the ultimate symbol of womanhood. Not only was England a woman; she was a pregnant woman. England and her pregnancy became so recognizable that *Time* reported the birth of her son in its “Milestones” section—a section usually reserved for events in the lives of celebrities, politicians, and other well-known individuals: “Born. To Private First Class Lynndie England, 21, soldier seen holding a leash in some of the most notorious photographs from Abu Ghraib prison.... The West Virginia mother is scheduled to stand trial in January on charges that carry a maximum sentence of 38 years in prison” (Bailey, Bland, Miranda, Rawe, & Sampson, 2004, paragraph 2). This highlighting of England's femaleness in relation to her involvement at Abu Ghraib worked to firmly situate the discourse within the bounds of gender ideologies. At the same time, this inclusion of information is contradictory, because as it brings ideologies of motherhood into the discourse, it highlights her position outside the realm of a good mother. The result of this gendered focus on England was threefold: Her gender set her apart and reinforced the male/female dichotomy in the military, it highlighted her status as a vamp in the virgin/vamp dichotomy, and it strengthened the articulation of England to Abu Ghraib.

⁵ While the image of a vamp might seem contradictory to images of a tomboy, the concept is in opposition to a virgin and, therefore, is not necessarily about the visual aspect of a woman but her behavior. A woman can be marked as a vamp for straying beyond the expected behavior of a woman—for being a loose woman, for example (Benedict, 1992). In the case of England, she is reported to have left her room at night for “high jinks with male comrades” (Derbyshire, 2004, paragraph 7) and to have spent time with her boyfriend, and, in the ultimate act of vamp behavior, she became pregnant out of wedlock.

Victim or criminal?

England served as a symbol for the Abu Ghraib scandal in all the magazines analyzed. As suggested above, however, the major differences in treatment of England in the various magazines emerged in constructions of her either as a victim or a criminal. The three mainstream news magazines, likely adhering to a more rigid goal of objectivity, often described England based on her appearance in the photographs as well as her personal life. While the news stories in these magazines questioned why England would be involved in the scandal, they did not overtly discuss gender as a broader social issue in relation to the event. Several progressive magazine stories criticized England's position as a scapegoat for the Bush administration but did not explicitly tie this to her gender, often naming Graner in this as well (see Berman, 2005; Prosecuting U.S. torture, 2004; Roychoudhuri, 2005; Sifton, 2005). One article from *The Nation* asked, "Why are the current investigations only focusing on lower-level troops like Charles Graner and Lynndie England?" (Sifton, 2005, paragraph 7).

The conservative magazines, however, often explicitly noted how gender affected the story. Further, while all the magazines articulated England to the Abu Ghraib abuses and, we argue, successfully moved the conversation from a social to an individual issue, the conservative magazines openly played upon this individualistic ideology. In other words, a number of articles in the *National Review* and *FrontPage Magazine* indicated the prisoner abuse scandal was not a large-scale conspiracy. Rather, an explanation was offered in the form of a few bad seeds (see Blyth, 2004; Smith, 2004).

For Ann Marlowe (2004) of the *National Review*, gender was actually part of the explanation for the prison abuse scandal: "When even sexual torture is co-ed, something has gone badly wrong with our ideas of manhood, womanhood, and shame" (paragraph 7). More explicitly, Marlowe blamed the collapse of traditional gender roles as having

something to do with the involvement of women soldiers in disgraceful behavior. (Specialist Sabrina Harmon, an MP, took the notorious human-pyramid photograph that shows a grinning Pfc. England standing behind naked, hooded Iraqi men, while the third female soldier of the six charged with abuse is Specialist Megan Ambuhl.) (paragraph 4)

Conclusion

The images of American women participating in abuse and torture at Abu Ghraib are situated well outside acceptable behavior, especially for women, and few images have prepared the world to see women acting in this manner. Conversely, through both entertainment and news images of war, we are better prepared to see men act violent and sadistic (Barker-Plummer & Boaz, 2005; Donald, 2001; Jeffords, 1993; Kimmel, 2001;

Newsinger, 1993). Journalists, by the nature of their work, construct realities out of everyday occurrences and are at the forefront of negotiating, situating, and framing discursive knowledge, and articulating meaning through the linking of elements (Phelan & Shearer, 2009). Under the complex circumstances surrounding what happened at Abu Ghraib, journalists were forced to make sense of it. How journalists formed an understanding of the torture at Abu Ghraib tells many stories about American ideologies, including those about race, heterosexuality, sexual politics, nationalism, religious beliefs, and class (see Jagodzinski, 2006; Mason, 2005; Tétreault, 2006). This research, however, focuses primarily on the gendered narrative that American magazines constructed and how the articulation of one woman to the Abu Ghraib prison atrocities simplified the narrative. The resulting tale centered on a badly behaving woman rather than a complex social and political problem.

With a constant articulation of England to Abu Ghraib, these magazine texts constructed England as the symbol of the scandal and moved the discussion from one about a complex social and political issue to an individual narrative. This article illustrated how this articulation occurred within media texts. The magazines analyzed for this study showed how journalists treated England differently from other members of her company. But beyond this articulation, the texts also highlighted England's gender and, in doing so, reified notions of a "vamp" in the virgin/vamp dichotomy. These three steps worked in tandem to (re)articulate a story about prison torture and U.S. military actions into a simpler story primarily focused on one woman.

England became a symbol of the prison abuse scandal after news media published photos of her, but the articulation was strengthened as journalists focused on her role in the scandal. By listing England's name first when other soldiers were mentioned or otherwise setting off her name with descriptions, reporters isolated England as one of the key figures in the scandal—making a strong connection, or articulation, between England and the scandal. Journalists offered physical descriptions of England and details of her personal life and sexual involvement with a superior officer that resulted in an out-of-wedlock pregnancy. Journalists did not treat the six other soldiers involved in the scandal in the same way. For example, from the stories it is not evident whether any of the other soldiers—other than Graner—had been divorced or become a parent after the abuse became public. This articulation successfully shifted the story to one about the individual character of a female situated outside the norms of femininity (Barker-Plummer & Boaz, 2005; Donald, 2001; Green et al., 2008). This example also served to highlight why the journalistic practice of focusing on individuals—often with the goal of humanizing or putting a face on a story—can be problematic. This type of reporting, if done compulsively for one tale, shifts interest away from broad, complex narratives and societal-wide solutions and articulates individuals to problems. If an individual is the problem, then broad-based solutions are not needed.

This story, however, did not always remain at the individual level, although the shifted perspective was equally problematic. The narrative at times shifted to a gendered

story focusing on (or blaming) women more broadly for the problem. Dominant gender ideologies in the texts allowed the articulation to ultimately move from that of England and Abu Ghraib to that of the inevitable problems associated with allowing military women in combat zones. This was, however, a narrative restructuring that occurred in conservative texts.

Journalists often seemed compelled to explain England's involvement through the use of gendered language—she was described as a “girl,” “grinning,” or “jaunty.” Ideologies about gender manifest themselves in these descriptions. She fell so far outside the boundaries of acceptable femininity that journalists sought an explanation for her behavior. It was her relationship with Graner that allowed many journalists to mark her as a “vamp” and, therefore, not a victim in this scandal.

Magazine journalists' coverage of Abu Ghraib reified dualistic gendered understandings of men and women and narrowed constructions of women that also form the dichotomy of the virgin/vamp or victim/criminal. England's pregnancy marked her as female but was treated as something other than the ultimate sign of womanhood. For England, the fact that she became pregnant by Graner while in Iraq offered evidence that her sexuality was out of control, furthering the constructed image of her vamp status (Mason, 2005).

There are many consequences to the articulations that journalists made between England and the Abu Ghraib scandal. As Tétreault (2006) argued, “Inside, women were used to humiliate and torment prisoners in the vigilante acts captured by photos.... Outside, the participation of women domesticated these acts, making them seem trivial rather than criminal. Reporters and commentators fastened their attention away from both those who organized the torture events and those who endured them” (pp. 40-41).

In an effort to move away from gender dualisms that pit women as helpless victims or out-of-control vamps and men's use of violence as acceptable and expected, journalists must not rely on articulations that reinforce these stereotypes. Although journalistic norms and routines favor time-saving cultural constructions, journalists should question these constructions. By questioning why England was the symbol of the scandal, journalists may have uncovered more details that further explained what happened at Abu Ghraib. In addition, journalists must be aware of whether they are treating their subjects differently and ask why that may be. Had reporters included more information about all seven of the soldiers involved in the scandal rather than focusing on England, the public may have had a different understanding of what happened at Abu Ghraib.

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