Gender Trouble at Abu Ghraib?

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This essay explores the controversy spawned by the release, in April, 2004, of the photographs taken by U.S. military personnel at the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad. Its particular concern is with photographs that depict American servicewomen engaged in various forms of abusive conduct against Iraqi prisoners. In its opening half, the essay examines and criticizes the responses to these photographs offered, first, by right-wing commentators and, second, by American feminists, most notably Barbara Ehrenreich. All read these photographs as a referendum on feminism and, more particularly, its commitment to the cause of gender equality; and all do so, I argue, on the basis of a naive understanding of gender. In its latter half, accordingly, the essay offers a more adequate understanding of gender, one loosely grounded in the work of Judith Butler and the concept of performativity. Referencing various official interrogation manuals, as well as the investigative reports released in the wake of this scandal, the essay employs this concept in offering a more adequate account of the gendered import of the deeds depicted in the Abu Ghraib photographs. It concludes by arguing that what is important about these photographs is neither whether the perpetrators of the exploitation they depict are male or female, nor whether the deeds they portray somehow compromise the feminist quest for gender equality. Rather, what is important are the multiple ways in which specifically gendered practices, which can be detached from the bodies they conventionally regulate, are deployed as elements within a more comprehensive network of technologies aimed at disciplining prisoners and so confirming their status as abject subjects of U.S. military power.

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FIGURE 1. Pfc. Lynndie England and unidentified prisoner at Abu Ghraib. This photograph can be found at: http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4927273/ (October 27, 2005).

INTRODUCTION

"It's not a pretty picture," conceded Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in assessing the photographs taken by U.S. military personnel at Baghdad's Abu Ghraib prison complex during the final three months of 2003.[1] Shortly thereafter, en route to Iraq, Rumsfeld contended that "the real problem is not the photographs—the real problems are the actions taken to harm the detainees" (quoted in Brison 2004, 10). This claim is problematic insofar as it fails to appreciate the transformation of these images into so many free-floating weapons deployed to secure partisan advantage on various cultural and political battlegrounds within the

1. See Scott Higham, Josh White, and Christian Davenport, "A Prison on the Brink," *Washington Post*, 9 May 2004, sec. A. Many additional Abu Ghraib photographs released to the public are reproduced in Danner 2004, 217–24. These represent a small sample of the 1,800 still photos and videos that have been made available to the U.S. Congress.

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United States. This was perhaps nowhere so evident as in their mobilization to rehash the struggle over the contemporary import of feminism, especially in light of the equality/difference debate that has vexed feminists and their opponents for decades. The initial purpose of this essay, accordingly, is to explain how the mass media flap regarding the Abu Ghraib photographs indicates that gender, understood as a set of mobile disciplinary practices, can sometimes become unsettled, thereby provoking efforts to restabilize hetero-normative understandings of what it is to be masculine or feminine. Giving the defense secretary his due, however, I employ my discussion of the domestic reception of these photographs as a preface to asking how we might make better sense of the gendered import of the abuses committed at Abu Ghraib. To answer this question, in the second half of this essay I argue that much of what appeared so shocking when these photographs were first released can be read as extensions of, but also threats to, the logic of masculinized militarism. The most convenient scapegoat for such "gender trouble," to appropriate the title of Judith Butler's best-known work (1990), is Lynndie England, a military file clerk who was captured by the camera's eye while restraining an Iraqi prisoner at the far end of a dog leash.

MISTAKING LYNNDIE ENGLAND

Like all photographic images, those taken at Abu Ghraib do not speak for themselves. Henry Giroux (2004, 8) explains:

> Photographs such as those that revealed the horrors that took place at Abu Ghraib prison have no guaranteed meaning, but rather exist within a complex of shifting mediations that are material, historical, social, ideological, and psychological in nature. This is not to suggest that photographs do not capture some element of reality as much as to insist that what they capture can only be understood as part of a broader engagement over cultural politics and its intersection with various dynamics of power. . . . Representations privilege those who have some control over self-representation, and they are largely framed within dominant modes of intelligibility.

Giroux's point about the framing of photographic meaning in terms of "dominant modes of intelligibility" is well illustrated by the contest to determine what to make of the Abu Ghraib images that include Lynndie England. In addition to the photograph in Figure 1, another shows England standing next to a naked Hayder Sabbar Abd, a 34-year-old Shiite taxi driver from Nasiriya, as a cigarette dangles from her lips,

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the thumb of her right hand gestures upwards in triumph, and her left hand, with forefinger cocked, takes aim at Abd's genitalia, as he is forced to simulate masturbation. Still another depicts England, arm in arm with Specialist Charles Graner, as both grin and offer a thumbs-up sign while perched behind a cluster of seven naked Iraqis piled awkwardly atop one another in a human pyramid.

The general tenor of the mainstream press response to these photographs, which altogether displaced documented reports of the abuse of women prisoners at Abu Ghraib,[2] is indicated by the subtitle of an article written by *Newsweek*'s Evan Thomas in May, 2004: "How did a wispy tomboy behave like a monster at Abu Ghraib?" It may well be, as Cynthia Enloe has suggested, that the media's horrified representation of England as a sub- or inhuman creature indicates America's visceral response to her violation of conventional norms regarding the conduct becoming to women (2004, 91); and, as M. S. Embser-Herbert has suggested, the fixation on these particular photographs may well indicate that Americans today are better prepared to see women come home from Iraq in body bags than to see them return as quasi-sexualized aggressors.[3] There is some truth to both of these readings; it is equally true that the media's preoccupation with the photographs portraying women involved in "abnormal" conduct facilitated the Bush administration's interest in representing what transpired at Abu Ghraib as the "disgraceful conduct by a few American troops who dishonored our country and disregarded our values" (Bush 2004), and so as an anomalous departure from established military doctrine. However, neither of these readings fully captures the ways in which these photographs were mobilized, especially during the months immediately following their release, in the service of larger domestic political and cultural agendas. This proved most strikingly so when the proponents of various right-wing agendas seized on Lynndie England in order to advance a reactionary backlash aimed at reversing whatever advances women have made in the military, under the banner of gender equality, since termination of the all-male draft in 1972.

Three examples, all published in May, 2004, less than two weeks after the Abu Ghraib photographs initially aired on CBS's *Sixty Minutes II*, suffice to illustrate this appropriation. First, the president of the Center for Military Readiness, Elaine Donnelly, asserted that the photograph of England with leash in hand "is exactly what feminists have dreamed of

2. Luke Harding, "The Other Prisoners," *The Guardian*, 20 May 2004.
3. M.S. Embser-Herbert, "When Women Abuse Power, Too," *Washington Post*, 16 May 2004, sec. B.

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for years." To explain, she represented England's conduct as an articulation of the dispositions displayed by those feminists "who like to buy man-hating greeting cards and have this kind of attitude that all men abused all women. It's a subculture of the feminist movement, but the driving force in it in many cases, certainly in academia" (quoted in Thibault 2004). On this basis, which figures feminists as so many would-be dominatrixes afflicted by a burning desire to transform men into obsequious lapdogs, Donnelly argued that the U.S. military should abandon its unofficial gender quotas, aimed at enlisting more women, and return to basic training segregated by sex. Arguing on behalf of the same counter-reforms, Peggy Noonan, columnist and contributing editor of the *Wall Street Journal*, claimed that before basic training became coeducational, women "did not think they had to prove they were men, or men at their worst. I've never seen evidence to suggest the old-time WACs and WAVEs had to delve down into some coarse and vulgar part of their nature to fit in, to show they were one of the guys, as tough as the guys, as ugly at their ugliest" (2004). On this reading, England is a young woman whose turn to the dark side can be explained by her desire to be embraced by her brutish counterparts, with the implication that she never would have acted as she did had she been excluded from their crass company. Finally, in a screwy twist on much the same narrative, the president of the Center for Equal Opportunity, Linda Chavez, suggested that England's participation in the abuse at Abu Ghraib can be explained by the mounting "sexual tension" that has accompanied "the new sex-integrated military." Because that stress produces hormone-crazed soldiers, which in turn undermines "discipline and unit cohesion" (2004), we should not be unduly surprised when those in uniform occasionally release their pent-up passions by sexually abusing their captives.

What Donnelly, Noonan, and Chavez share is the conviction, expressly articulated by George Neumayr, columnist for the *American Spectator*, that the conduct of Lynndie England "is a cultural outgrowth of a feminist culture which encourages female barbarians" (2004). Their concern that women are "losing their femininity" requires that an unambiguous masculine identity be refortified and that it be sharply distinguished from the equally unambiguous gender identity of women (e.g., by reconfining GI Janes to suitably ladylike roles on the sidelines of the military in accordance with their customary roles as civilizers of beastly men). Such claims presuppose an uncritical conception of gender, one which includes a dyadic conception of sexual identity, the naturalness (as well as the apparent irresistibility) of heterosexual desire, and stereotypical, if

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not essentialized, conceptions of masculine and feminine conduct. Lest there be any doubt on this latter score, also in May, 2004, the president of the Eagle Forum, Phyllis Schlafly, asserted that "the picture of the woman soldier with a noose around the Iraqi man's neck" demonstrates "that some women have become mighty mean, but feminists can't erase eternal differences" (2004).[4]

Unhappily, many readings of the Abu Ghraib affair advanced by mainstream liberal feminists have swallowed the bait proffered by the right wing. Embracing the construction of these photographs as a referendum on feminism and its commitment to the equality of women, these readings have demonstrated the stubborn persistence of conceptions of gender, which, though not wedded to the reactionary political agendas advanced by Schlafly and her ilk, are nonetheless quite problematic. This sort of appropriation is best illustrated by Barbara Ehrenreich, whose 2004 commencement address at Barnard College, following its publication in the *Los Angeles Times*, became a subject of widespread discussion, especially on the Internet.

"As a feminist," Ehrenreich began, the Abu Ghraib photographs "broke my heart. I had no illusions about the U.S. mission in Iraq—whatever exactly it is—but it turns out that I did have some illusions about women." These illusions were based on the belief that women are "morally superior to men," whether because of "biology," or "conditioning," or "simply the experience of being a woman in a sexist culture"; and it was on this basis that Ehrenreich "secretly" entertained the "hope that the presence of women would over time change the military, making it more respectful of other people and cultures, more capable of genuine peacekeeping." It is these illusions that were shattered when Ehrenreich first saw the image of Lynndie England, her Iraqi prisoner in tow: "A certain kind of feminism, or perhaps I should say a certain kind of feminist naïveté died in Abu Ghraib. It was a feminism that saw men as the perpetual perpetrators, women as the perpetual victims, and male sexual violence against women as the root of all injustice." But now, having witnessed "female sexual sadism in action," Ehrenreich rejects as "lazy and self-indulgent" any form of feminism that is "based on an assumption of fe-

4. It is perhaps no surprise that many other right-wing pundits, seeking to appropriate the Abu Ghraib images for partisan ends, did so by citing the alleged ubiquity of pornography, and especially gay porn, in American culture (see Rich 2004, 1). On this telling, England and her cohorts are marshaled in an effort to combat the excesses of a permissive culture whose primary causes, of course, include the rise of women's and gay liberation movements, both of which celebrate a promiscuous, if not depraved, conception of sexual freedom.

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male moral superiority." "A uterus," in sum, "is not a substitute for a conscience."[5]

In retrospect, Ehrenreich confesses, she should not have been so shocked to learn that "women can do the unthinkable," for, unlike her right-wing opponents, "she never believed that women were innately gentler and less aggressive than men." But the very fact that she was so shocked by England's conduct, as well as the fact that this response was situated at the far edge of comprehensibility ("the unthinkable"), indicates the deep-seated tenacity with which, too often, we cling to a vision of the world that neatly distinguishes between powerful men and powerless women, between those who are guilty of acts of sexual violence and those who are their victims. This vision of the world presupposes the self-evident intelligibility of the category of "women," as well as their fundamental differences from the equally self-evident category of "men"; and it presupposes problematic stereotypes about women, including, in Ehrenreich's case, the belief that because they "do most of the caring work in our culture," they are less inclined "toward cruelty and violence."[6] As such, and despite their very different political agendas, there are unsettling points of convergence between the conception of gender that Ehrenreich embraced before Abu Ghraib and the conception Schlafly and her cohorts continue to promote after Abu Ghraib.

Ehrenreich is to be commended for the intellectual honestly that prompted her to question this conception of gender (although she does not advance any more adequate alternative). It remains true, however, that she accepts her opponents' construction of the Lynndie England affair as a referendum on feminism and its quest for gender equality. That, though, is a misguided enterprise. It is problematic when the revulsion provoked by these photographs is predicated on retrograde gender representations, and it is pernicious when it animates an antifeminist backlash that seeks to resituate women in a world where they are compelled to live out those odious stereotypes. Moreover, this construction encourages sterile repetition of unproductive and arguably unanswerable questions (e.g., are women really different from men?); and it plays into the hands of feminism's detractors by inviting them to assert that the ultimate import of the quest for gender equality is revealed in the conduct of Lynndie England. This is not to suggest that we discard the category of gender in thinking about what happened at Abu Ghraib, but

5. Barbara Ehrenreich, "Feminism's Assumptions Upended," *Los Angeles Times*, 4 June 2004, sec. M.
6. Ibid.

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rather that we turn away from the conception that is presupposed whenever someone asks: "How could women do that?" (Hong 2004). Instead, I would urge that we think of gender as something constructed through engagement in a complex set of performative practices, including the abusive techniques deployed at Abu Ghraib, and that we ask how those practices en-gender persons in ways that are not readily reducible to what Ehrenreich or her adversaries mean when they uncritically speak of "women" and "men."

TECHNOLOGIES OF EMASCULATION AT ABU GHRAIB

The official investigative reports issued in the wake of Abu Ghraib do not themselves offer a more nuanced account of its gendered import. Read in light of a more adequate understanding of gender, however, they provide clues toward such an account. The principal documents include the Taguba and Fay-Jones Reports, both of which were commissioned by Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, commander of Coalition Ground Forces in Iraq; the Mikolashek Report, conducted by the Army's inspector general; and the Schlesinger Report, issued by an independent panel chartered by the secretary of defense. Though conceding certain failures of leadership in higher (but not too high) ranks, all explain what happened at Abu Ghraib in terms of the pathological and/or criminal conduct of a handful of rogue soldiers.[7] The Schlesinger Report, for example, concludes: "The events of October through December 2003 on the night shift of Tier 1 at Abu Ghraib prison were acts of brutality and purposeless sadism" (in Greenberg and Dratel 2005, 909). In much the same vein, according to the "psychological assessment" appended to the Taguba Report, the events at Abu Ghraib were the work of "immoral men and women" who engaged in "sadistic and psychopathic behavior," including "abuse with sexual themes" (in Greenberg and Dratel 2005, 448–49). Finally, the Fay-Jones Report determines that "the primary cause of the most egregious violent and sexual abuses was the individual criminal propensities of the particular perpetrators" (in Greenberg and Dratel 2005, 1007).

7. Those who have been prosecuted and convicted in the Abu Ghraib affair are now serving sentences ranging from demotion to prison time. A court-martial for shift supervisor Ivan Frederick concluded in a 10-year sentence, which was reduced to eight by way of a pretrial agreement. Specialist Charles Graner received the harshest sentence to date, 10 years in prison. Pfc. Lynndie England, following a botched plea bargain, was sentenced to three years in prison as well as a dishonorable discharge.

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These readings will not do. They de-contextualize these deeds, rendering them so many transgressions enacted by a few unruly anomalies. Once Abu Ghraib is defined in these disingenuous terms, these soldiers, including Lynndie England, can all too easily be assigned the role of patsies whose service to the military now includes distracting attention from the institutional forces that breed and sanction such exploitation. These readings also will not do because they occlude the ways in which gender is in fact constitutive of what happened at Abu Ghraib. The representation of these events as "sexual abuse" does not adequately specify the particular form of degradation involved here. That degradation is trivialized when James Schlesinger, former secretary of defense and lead author of the report bearing his name, refers to Abu Ghraib as "Animal House on the night shift" ("Abu Ghraib Was 'Animal House' at Night" 2004). To compare what happened on Tier 1 to so much reprehensible behavior on the part of intoxicated undergraduates at a fraternity bash is to confound the distinction between sexual abuse, on the one hand, and acts of imperialist and racist violence that mimic sexual exploitation, on the other. It is, moreover, to fail to ask *why* so much of the abuse meted out at Abu Ghraib, as the reports make abundantly clear, trafficked in gendered stereotypes, as well as what that might teach us about how gender operates as a complex vector of power within the context of masculinized militarism.

The acts of principal concern to me in this section are a subset of the larger group that exhibited sexualized dimensions. Although the distinction is admittedly problematic, I will primarily confine my attention to those that traded on misogynistic understandings, as opposed to those that were patently homophobic as well as arguably homoerotic (e.g., forcing prisoners to masturbate while being photographed; compelling prisoners to engage in simulated fellatio; and sodomizing a prisoner with a phosphorous light stick) (see Puar 2004). My chief concern is with incidents such as the following: compelling otherwise naked men to wear women's underwear, often red and often on their heads; having a servicewoman apply red ink to the face of a prisoner after she placed her hand in her unbuttoned pants and informed him that she was menstruating; forcing men to remove their clothing and then stand before women service personnel; and, lest we forget Lynndie England, placing a leash around a naked prisoner's neck while posing with him for a snapshot.[8]

8. With the exception of that involving fake menstrual blood, which is related in Saar and Novak 2005, 225–229, these incidents as well as others like them are related in the Taguba and Fay-Jones Reports in Greenberg and Dratel 2005, 416–17, 466–528, 1073–95.

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How are we to make sense of these incidents? Loosely following the lead of Judith Butler (1990, 1993),[9] I propose that we think not about men and women in the unreflective sense in which all of the authors discussed in the previous section employ these terms, but, rather, about complex disciplinary practices that en-gender bodies by regulating, constraining, and constituting their conduct in ways that prove intelligible in light of the never entirely stable or coherent categories of masculine and feminine. "Men" and "women," in other words, are constantly being gendered as they participate in practices mandated by cultural norms of masculinity and femininity, which are themselves contingently related to anatomical equipment: "When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex," Butler argues, "gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one" (1990, 6). If this is so, then what we should be exploring at Abu Ghraib is the differential production of masculinity and femininity, as well as the ways in which specific performances sometimes unsettle foundational illusions about the dependence of gender on sex. This redirection of inquiry suggests that much, but certainly not all, of what happened at Abu Ghraib can be understood in terms of what I will call the "logic of emasculation," where the aim of disciplinary techniques is to strip prisoners of their masculine gender identity and turn them into caricatures of terrified and often infantilized femininity. What this implies for our reading of Lynndie England is the question taken up in this essay's conclusion.

In applying this performative account of gender to Abu Ghraib, it is useful to begin by doing precisely what the Fay-Jones Report, which insists that "no policy, directive or doctrine directly or indirectly caused violent or sexual abuse" (in Greenberg and Dratel 2005, 989), discourages us from doing: to relate the exploitation at Abu Ghraib to the U.S. military's approved techniques regarding the treatment of those detained during combat. For present purposes, the directive of principal concern is *Army Field Manual 34-52* (Department of the Army, 1992), which officially governed the treatment of those imprisoned at Abu Ghraib.[10] It

9. For a more complete account of my reading of Butler on gender, see Kaufman-Osborn 1997, 120–36.

10. In response to the abuses reported at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere, a proposed new field manual governing "detainee treatment," including interrogation procedures, was prepared and then posted on the Pentagon's Website, only to be withdrawn shortly thereafter. It is not without significance that

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is my contention that many of the practices commended in this manual, whether employed in the context of formal interrogations or in conjunction with efforts to "soften up" prisoners as a preface to such interrogations,[11] trade on specific conceptions of masculinity and femininity. One of the principal virtues of the Abu Ghraib photographs, accordingly, is the way they render visible this implicit content.

"Unless this publication states otherwise," *Field Manual 34-52* affirms, "masculine nouns or pronouns do not refer exclusively to men" (Department of the Army 1992, v). Because 34-52 is formally neutral, revelation of its gendered content must be a matter of plausible inference. An intimation of that content is provided by the Central Intelligence Agency's 1963 manual titled *Counterintelligence Interrogation*, which, according to a correspondent for the *Atlantic Monthly*, "remains the most comprehensive and detailed explanation in print of coercive methods of questioning" (Bowden 2003, 57–58). Unearthed in 1997 via a Freedom of Information Act request, what came to be known as the *Kubark Manual* is refreshingly candid in specifying the summum bonum of disciplinary techniques applied to the incarcerated:

> It is a fundamental hypothesis of this handbook that these techniques . . . are in essence methods of inducing regression of the personality to whatever earlier and weaker level is required for the dissolution of resistance and the inculcation of dependence. . . . [T]he circumstances of detention are arranged to enhance within the subject his feelings of being cut off from the known and the reassuring, and of being plunged into the strange. . . . Control of the source's environment permits the interrogator to determine his diet, sleep pattern and other fundamentals. Manipulating these into irregularities, so that the subject becomes disorientated, is very likely to create feelings of fear and helplessness. (CIA 1963, 41, 86–87)[12]

this manual includes the following statement: "OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense] is the sole release authority for photographs or videos of detainees" (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2005, II-25).

11. On "softening up" prisoners, as well as the way in which such practices blur the line between these efforts and formal interrogations, consider the following passage contained in a letter written by Sgt. Ivan Frederick, the senior enlisted officer convicted in the Abu Ghraib scandal: "Military intelligence has encouraged and told us 'Great job.' They usually don't allow others to watch them interrogate, but since they like the way I run the prison, they've made an exception. We help getting them to talk with the way we handle them. We've had a very high rate with our style of getting them to break. They usually end up breaking within hours" (quoted in Brown 2005, 978).

12. The precise role of the CIA at Abu Ghraib remains unclear because, as the Schlesinger and Fay-Jones Reports note, the agency "was allowed to conduct its interrogations separately," it operated "outside the established local rules and procedures," and its prisoners, "known locally as 'Ghost Detainees,' were not accounted for in the detention system" (in Greenberg and Dratel 2005, 942, 1024).

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A 1983 revision of *Kubark*, titled *Human Resource Exploitation Training Manual*, goes on to state: "Throughout his detention, subject must be convinced that his 'questioner' controls his ultimate destiny, and that his absolute cooperation is essential to survival" (CIA 1983, sec. F20). This can be achieved by radically disrupting

> the familiar emotional and psychological associations of the subject. Once this disruption is achieved, the subject's resistance is seriously impaired. He experiences a kind of psychological shock, which may only last briefly, but during which he is far more open and far likelier to comply. . . . Frequently the subject will experience a feeling of guilt. If the 'questioner' can intensify these guilt feelings, it will increase the subject's anxiety and his urge to cooperate as a means of escape. (CIA 1983, K-1, c–e)

For those familiar with feminist literature on battered women, it is difficult to read these passages without recalling accounts of abusive relationships in which men seek to secure the wholesale subordination of women by isolating and terrifying them either through violence or threats of violence. Such compliance is best secured when a woman, consumed by fear, determines that her situation is helpless, and, still more perfectly, when she concludes that she is ultimately culpable and thus guilty for the abuse to which she is subject. In this light, consider the claim, advanced in *Kubark*, that well-designed interrogation techniques strip those undergoing questioning of all vestiges of autonomy, thereby transforming them into creatures who are "helplessly dependent on their captors for the satisfaction of their many basic needs, and experience the emotional and motivational reactions of intense fear and anxiety" (CIA 1963, 83–84). If such techniques harbor tacit gendered baggage, as I believe they do, then arguably the effect of their application is to emasculate subjects by dismantling the qualities conventionally associated with masculinity and replacing them with a hyperbolic incarnation of the qualities stereotypically associated with femininity: obedience, passivity, depression, anxiety, and shame.

Although certain of the harshest techniques prescribed by *Kubark* in 1963 were deleted from its 1983 revision, and are no longer present in either the original 1987 version of *Army Field Manual* 34-52 or its 1992 revision, there is little reason to believe that the basic logic of these disciplinary practices has changed in any significant way;[13] and there is

13. The 17 techniques in *Field Manual* 34-52 are listed as follows: direct questioning; incentive; emotional love; emotional hate; fear-up (harsh); fear-up (mild); fear-down; pride and ego-up; pride and ego-down; futility; we know all; file and dossier; establish your identity; repetition; rapid fire;

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every reason to believe that the latent gendered content of that logic announced itself at Abu Ghraib. Consider, for example, the tactics identified as "futility," which aims to demonstrate that resistance of any sort is hopeless, and "pride and ego down," which attacks "the source's sense of personal worth. Any source who shows any real or imagined inferiority or weakness about himself, loyalty to his organization, or captured under embarrassing circumstances, can be easily broken with this approach technique" (Department of the Army 1992, chap. 3, 18). How the general terms of these tactics were to be translated into practice at Abu Ghraib, as the Fay-Jones Report acknowledges, left "certain issues for interpretation" (in Greenberg and Dratel 2005, 1004). How those issues were resolved says much about the conceptions of masculinity and femininity, which, by and large, remain predominant within the U.S. military; and, although I will not deal with this issue with the care it deserves, it also says much about the possibilities of emasculating those who are already effectively infantilized, if not feminized, in virtue of their identity as colonized and racialized "others."

Consider, for example, the stripping of male prisoners, who were then forced to stand before American servicewomen. In addition to offending cultural sensitivities, especially those dictated by Islamic law regarding proper attire, this technique emasculates prisoners by exposing them in a way that is familiar from representations of women, including but by no means limited to those conventionally labeled "pornographic." What one sees here, in inverted form, is a sort of enforced vulnerability joined to a fantasy of absolute sexualized power. Much the same logic is apparent in the practice of smearing prisoners with red ink said to be menstrual blood; here, emasculation is a function of staining the male body with that which is taken to mark women's bodies as distinctively female and, as such, a source of degradation. Finally, with the requirement that some of those imprisoned at Abu Ghraib wear women's underwear on their heads for hours, days, and even weeks, the logic of emasculation

silent; and change of scene (Department of the Army 1992, secs. 3–14 through 3–20). Exactly how 34-52 functioned at Abu Ghraib is confused by the fact that its original version, produced in 1987, circulated throughout Iraq's detention facilities, even though it had been revised and superseded by the 1992 version. This later version deleted the 1987 version's very broad authorization to "control(s) all aspects of interrogations," including "lighting, heating, and configuration of the interrogation room, as well as food, shelter, and clothing given to the source" (Department of the Army 1987, chap. 3, sec. 2). That the earlier authorization to "control(s) all aspects of interrogations" received official endorsement is indicated by the fact that, on October 12, 2003, Lt. Gen. Sanchez issued a "new [*sic*] 'interrogation and counterresistance policy," which included the very language that had been deleted from the 1992 version (Douglas Jehl and Eric Schmitt, "Prison Interrogations in Iraq Seen as Yielding Little Data on Rebels," *New York Times*, 27 May 2004, sec. A).

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achieves its consummation in drag. In each of these cases, misogyny is deployed as a tactic to humiliate prisoners, where the term "humiliation" can be translated as "treat like a woman." That this aim often succeeded is confirmed by Dhia al-Shweiri, who, several months following his release from Abu Ghraib, was quoted as follows: "They were trying to humiliate us, break our pride. We are men. It's OK if they beat me. Beatings don't hurt us, it's just a blow. But no one would want their manhood to be shattered. They wanted us to feel as though we were women, the way women feel and this is the worst insult, to feel like a woman" (quoted in Faramarzi 2004).

This process, whereby the gendered import of formally gender-neutral disciplinary tactics becomes explicit, achieved its official confirmation when, in mid-2005, the U.S. Army released the results of an investigation, conducted by Lt. Gen. Randall Schmidt of the Air Force, into the treatment of those imprisoned at Guantánamo Bay (Schmidt 2005).[14] Making clear that many of the abuses now associated with Abu Ghraib were put into play in Cuba and later "migrated" to Iraq, Schmidt codified these techniques under the rubric of "gender coercion," which, on his account, includes authorizing servicewomen to "perform acts designed to take advantage of their gender in relation to Muslim males." Specifically, in late 2002, two "high-value" but resistant prisoners were subjected to the following actions in accordance with 34-52's "pride and ego-down" as well as "futility" provisions: "[T]he subject of the first Special Interrogation Plan [Mohamed Qahtani, the alleged twentieth hijacker in the attack of September 11] was forced to wear a woman's bra and had a thong placed on his head during the course of the interrogation"; had his face marked with alleged menstrual blood; had a leash clasped around his neck, after which he was led around the interrogation room "and forced to perform a series of dog tricks"; and, during a strip search, was "forced to stand naked for five minutes with females present." Concluding his investigation, Schmidt reported that "the creative, aggressive, and persistent" questioning of this prisoner, especially in light of his solitary confinement for 160 days, as well as his subjection to 18- to 20-hour interrogations over a period of 48 of 54 days, constituted "degrading and abusive treatment." However, because "every technique employed" by

14. For a table that charts the "evolution of interrogation techniques" at Guantanámo, including the temporary approval of "sleep adjustment," light and auditory deprivation, removal of clothing, hooding, isolation for up to 30 days, the use of stress positions, and the manipulation of prisoners' phobia (e.g., through the use of dogs), see the Schlesinger Report in Greenberg and Dratel 2005, 966–67.

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the interrogation team at Guantánamo Bay "was legally permissible under the existing guidance," Schmidt found no evidence "of torture or inhumane treatment at JTF-GTMO" (Joint Task Force-Guantánamo Bay). Accordingly, when Schmidt recommended that the commander at Guantánamo Bay, Maj. Gen. Geoffrey D. Miller, be "admonished" (Schmidt 2005, 7, 16, 19–20), he did so not because the specific techniques employed violated policy, but because Miller had failed to supervise the interrogation process adequately. That Miller was not in fact disciplined by Gen. Bantz Craddock, head of the U.S. Southern Command, is telling, as is the fact that Miller was subsequently dispatched by the Pentagon to improve the quality of intelligence extracted from those imprisoned at Abu Ghraib.

The Schmidt Report makes clear that interrogation taking the form of sexualized exploitation was conducted prior to the invasion of Iraq, and that the abuse perpetrated at Abu Ghraib was not an aberration. It is not implausible, therefore, to contend that the conduct of Lynndie England and Charles Graner, like that of Miller, was wholly within the parameters of the techniques specified in *Field Manual* 34-52. Indeed, Graner stated that when he ordered England to remove a prisoner from a cell using a leash, he was employing a legitimate cell-extraction technique;[15] and England informed military investigators that forcing prisoners to crawl, while attached to dog leashes, was a "humiliation tactic" intended to facilitate formal interrogations.[16] In this regard, Graner and England were not unusual, for many of the personnel at Abu Ghraib believed that their actions were entirely consistent with established military doctrine. As a warden in Tier 1 stated, "It was not uncommon to see people without clothing. I only saw males. I was told the 'whole nudity thing' was an interrogation procedure used by military intelligence, and never thought much of it."[17] That these scenes were so often photographed, absent any concerted effort to hide the evidence, may say more about the banality of officially sanctioned evil than it does about the "sadistic and psychopathic" impulses of England and her

15. Kate Zernike, "Behind Failed Abu Ghraib Plea, A Tale of Breakups and Betrayal," *New York Times*, 16 May 2005, sec. A.

16. Douglas Jehl, Eric Schmitt, and Karen Zernike, "U.S. Rules on Prisoners Seen as a Back and Forth of Mixed Messages to G.I.'s," *New York Times*, 22 June 2004, sec. A.

17. In much the same vein, the Fay-Jones Report states that "the use of dogs to 'fear up' [another of 34-52's authorized approaches] detainees was generally unquestioned and stems in part from the interrogation techniques and counterresistance policy distributed from CJTF 180 [Combined Joint Task Force], JTF [Joint Task Force] 170, and CJTF" (in Greenberg and Dratel 2005, 1084). See Kate Zernike and David Rohde, "Forced Nudity is Seen as a Pervasive Pattern, Not Isolated Incidents," *New York Times*, 8 June 2004, sec. A.

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cohorts: "We thought it looked funny," Lynndie stated matter-of-factly, "so pictures were taken."[18]

Cynthia Enloe is quite correct to claim that we will not completely grasp what happened at Abu Ghraib until we fully explore the culture of masculinized militarism, and, more particularly, "the masculinization of the military interrogators' organizational cultures, the masculinization of the CIA's field operatives and the workings of ideas about 'manliness' shaping the entire political system" (2004, 100).[19] Obviously, it is beyond the scope of this essay to offer what Enloe rightly calls for. That said, because it offers insight into the specific form assumed by certain of the abuses at Abu Ghraib, I close this section by citing one factor that contributes to the culture of masculinized militarism in the United States.

Some have suggested that the exploitation at Abu Ghraib articulates American servicepersons' knowledge of Muslim culture, as well as its alleged taboos and phobias.[20] With Enloe, though, it seems equally plausible to ask whether

> American military police and their military and CIA intelligence colleagues might have been guided by their own masculinized fears of humiliation when they forced Iraqi men to go naked for days, to wear women's underwear and to masturbate in front of each other and American women guards. That is, belief in an allegedly 'exotic,' frail Iraqi masculinity, fraught with fears of nakedness and homosexuality, might not have been the chief motivator for the American police and intelligence personnel; it may have been their own home-grown American sense of masculinity's fragility . . . that prompted them to craft these prison humiliations. (2004, 99)

But where and how might Graner and his cohorts have learned this fear of emasculation, which was then arguably incorporated into various techniques aimed at "softening up" his charges at Abu Ghraib?

18. Kate Zernike, "Prison Guard Calls Abuse Routine and Sometimes Amusing," *New York Times*, 16 May 2004, sec. A.

19. On the masculinization of the interrogators' culture, consider the following quotation from Sgt. First Class Anthony Novacek, an instructor in the approved techniques of *Field Manual* 34-52 at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. Teaching his new students that, even upon arrival, they already possess considerable intelligence-gathering skills, he offers the following example: "You're down at Jimbo's Beach Shack, approaching unknown females." Success, he continues, involves "assessing the target, speaking her language, learning her needs and appearing to be the only way she can satisfy them" (quoted in Jess Bravin, "Interrogation School Tells Army Recruits How Grilling Works—30 Techniques in 16 Weeks," *Wall Street Journal*, 26 April 2002, sec. A.)

20. See for example, Howard Schneider, "In Breaking Taboos, Photos Add Insult to Injury," *Washington Post*, 7 May 2004, sec. A.

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Though not a complete explanation,[21] this question can be answered in part by pointing to the hazing techniques that remain so prevalent in basic training. Consideration of these techniques requires that, albeit incompletely, I reconnect the misogynistic and homophobic elements of the exploitation at Abu Ghraib, which, to this point, I have separated for analytic purposes, although they are clearly joined in many of the incidents recounted in the investigative reports and depicted in many of the photographs.

In a striking recapitulation of the central premise of *Kubark* (and, by extension, of *Field Manual* 34-52), a former head drill instructor explained that the key purpose of basic training is to "break [the recruit] down to his fundamental self, take away all that he possesses, and get him started out in a way that you want him to be. . . . Tell him he doesn't know a damn thing, that he's the sorriest thing you've ever seen, but with my help you're going to be worthwhile again" (quoted in Burke 1996, 214). Techniques employed to achieve this end, explains Carol Burke in a study of Australia's equivalent of West Point, include stripping recent recruits of their clothing; requiring them to run a gauntlet while those in their second and third year slap them with towels, belts, and suspenders; forcing them to sit naked on a block of ice, which is sometimes electrified in order to produce a shock; handcuffing and hooding cadets before their pants are pulled down and a vacuum cleaner hose is applied to their genitals; and the performance of Reverse Vienna Oysters, in which one freshman is required to lie on his back while another, atop him, performs push-ups in a simulation of heterosexual intercourse (1996, 214–16).

That these are not Australian idiosyncrasies is made evident when Burke, anticipating one of the more infamous Abu Ghraib photographs, explains how, at the U.S. Naval Academy, once a year, a 21-foot obelisk is greased with lard, and how all members of the outgoing freshman class, stripped to their underwear, "scramble to construct a human pyramid secure enough to raise a midshipman to the top more quickly than any preceding first year class." While the occasional woman cadet

21. Among other elements, a more complete explanation would require exploration of the masculinized culture of the American penal system. Several of the reservists at the center of the prisoner abuse scandal, including Graner and Frederick, were assigned to Abu Ghraib precisely because they had experience working in American prisons. Within these prisons, abuse not uncommonly assumes forms very similar to that meted out at Abu Ghraib: "In Pennsylvania and some other states, inmates are routinely stripped in front of other inmates before being moved to a new prison or a new unit within their prison. In Arizona, male inmates at the Maricopa County jail in Phoenix are made to wear women's pink underwear as a form of humiliation" (Fox Butterfield, "Mistreatment of Prisoners Is Called Routine in U.S." *New York Times*, 8 May 2004, sec. A.).

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sometimes joins in this ritual, they "never get far up the pyramid before her male counterparts toss her off, for no class wants to be the first to send a woman to the top of Herndon" (1996, 205). Furthermore, in her study of basic training at the Citadel, which erupted into mass-media frenzy when Shannon Faulkner became the first woman to be admitted, Susan Faludi found much the same logic at work. Specifically, one of Faludi's respondents explained how in basic training under same-sex conditions, upperclassmen play the role of men, while "knobs" play the role of women, "stripped and humiliated": "Virtually every taunt," Michael Lake confessed, "equated him with a woman. . . . They called you a 'pussy' all the time, or a 'fucking little girl.' " And when Lake showed fear, he was typically asked, "Are you menstruating?" "According to the Citadel creed of the cadet," Lake summarizes, "women are objects, they're things that you can do with whatever you want to" (quoted in Faludi 1994, 70).[22]

Obviously, unlike what happened at Abu Ghraib, where the aim was to emasculate in order to subjugate, the aim of hazing techniques employed in basic training is to destroy deficient forms of masculinity, but then to replace these with a construction built on what R. Claire Snyder has aptly characterized as an "unstable masculine identity predicated on the denigration of femininity and homoeroticism" (1999, 151). This combination is uneasy because it requires suppression of any "feminine" impulses soldiers may have harbored prior to enlistment, but also the very homoeroticism that is cultivated during basic training.[23] Coping with this tension requires that the well-disciplined serviceman perpetually reiterate what Snyder calls the ideal of "*armed masculinity*: He must constantly reestablish his masculinity by expressing his opposition to femininity and homoeroticism in himself and others. The anger, hostility, and aggressiveness produced in the process of constituting *armed masculinity* gets channeled into a desire for combat against [or, I would add, abuse of] the enemy" (1999, 151). In short, the exploitation at Abu Ghraib is perhaps best understood as an externalized projection of the anxieties bred by a masculine identity that cannot help but subvert itself.

22. That this misogynistic abuse often assumes a racist character as well is indicated by the fact that new cadets at the Citadel were often warned by their older peers about "food contamination" from the germ-filled hands and the hair follicles of its all-black mess-hall staff (Faludi 1994, 70).

23. For an account of the combination of homophobia and homoeroticism in the U.S. Navy's basic training, see Zeeland 1995. Zeeland describes "Navy initiation rituals involving cross-dressing, spanking, simulated oral and anal sex, simulated ejaculation, nipple piercing, and anal penetration with objects or fingers, such as the famous 'crossing the line ceremony' " (5).

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CONCLUSION

What about Pfc. Lynndie England? Is she or is she not a source of gender trouble? Given my representation of gender as a malleable signifier, and given my claim that women's bodies can act as vectors of patriarchal norms, whether as victims, as perpetrators, or as something more vexing than this binary categorization suggests, the answer to this question must be yes and no, depending on the contingencies of the context in which her deeds were first enacted, as well as the contexts into which those deeds subsequently entered via various cultural and media appropriations, domestic as well as foreign.

Within the context of Abu Ghraib, one might argue that England conducts herself in exemplary accordance with pathologized norms of feminine submissiveness. Located in the midst of an institutional culture predicated on the ideal of masculinized militarism, England found herself obliged to play by the rules of the game, which, in this case, included doing what she was ordered to do by her superior officers: "I was instructed by persons in higher ranks to stand there and hold this leash. . . . To us, we were doing our jobs, which meant doing what we were told."[24] This reading is reinforced by the testimony of a psychologist who, during England's court-marital, argued that her "overly compliant" personality rendered her incapable of making an independent judgment about participating in the exploitation at Abu Ghraib, thereby justifying a defense on the grounds of "partial mental responsibility."[25] This characterization would appear to be cemented by the fact that, according to one of her defense attorneys, her love for Graner, who allegedly has a history of abusing women, and who is the biological father of the child with whom England became pregnant while at Abu Ghraib, rendered her inordinately susceptible to bad influences: "She was an individual who was smitten with Corporal Graner, who just did whatever he asked her to do. Compounding all this is her depression, her anxiety, her fear."[26]

Yet this reading becomes problematic when we recall that England was at the same time participating in abusive conduct aimed at emas-

24. Quoted in Kirk Johnson, "Guard Featured in Abuse Photos Says She was Following Orders," *New York Times*, 11 May 2004, sec. A.

25. David Cloud, "Psychologist Calls Private in Abu Ghraib Photographs 'Overly Compliant,'" *New York Times*, 24 September 2005, sec. A.

26. David Cloud, "Private Found Guilty in Abu Ghraib Abuse," *New York Times*, 27 September 2005, sec. A.

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culating Iraqi prisoners, who were thereby reduced to something akin to the sort of submissiveness she apparently displayed in her relationship with Graner. If, as Snyder's analysis implies (1999), Graner must perpetually seek to bolster a troubled conception of masculinity by transforming the targets of his abuse into so many incarnations of a despised conception of femininity, then England's conduct surely complicates this task. That a woman who appears more master than slave is the means of propping up that identity, in other words, would appear to spell gender trouble for Graner (which, although this is entirely speculative, may partly explain why he ultimately left England in favor of another, but less calumniated, of the women of Abu Ghraib). Graner's conundrum, moreover, may be ours as well. As Zillah Eisenstein suggests, England and the other women pictured in the Abu Ghraib photographs are, in effect, "gender decoys" who "create confusion by participating in the very sexual humiliation that their gender is usually victim to" (2004).

I do not intend to choose between these rival readings of Lynndie England. Instead, I want to suggest that the apparent tension between them will begin to dissipate only when we abandon the conception of gender discussed in the first section of this essay and embrace that commended in its second section. On the latter account, what is significant about the Abu Ghraib photographs is not whether the perpetrators of such abuse are anatomically male or female, nor whether Lynndie England is a woman or some sort of gender-bending monster. Rather, what is significant are the multiple ways in which specifically gendered practices are deployed as elements within a more comprehensive network of technologies aimed at disciplining prisoners or, more bluntly, at confirming their status as abject subjects of U.S. military power. In the photographs of principal concern here, gender as a complex structure of asymmetrical power relations has been detached from human bodies, and, once detached, deployed as something akin to so many weapons, weapons that may be employed by and against anyone, male or female. What we see here, in sum, are so many scripted practices of subordination that achieve their ends through the manipulation of gendered stereotypes, all of which work precisely because degradation, weakness, and humiliation remain very much identified with matters feminine. If Barbara Ehrenreich is shocked by Lynndie England, I would maintain, it is not because she is not a "true" woman, but because her conduct reveals the artificiality of normative constructions of gender, as well as the untenability of any essentialized account that

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insists on its rootedness in anatomical equipment. Whether Phyllis Schlafly and her kin can recapture England in a way that deflects her revelation of the way in which gender performances can sometimes simultaneously reinforce and trouble hetero-normative strictures remains to be seen.

What I have offered in this essay is a first step toward making better sense of certain of the Abu Ghraib photographs. This reading does not, however, capture all the complexity of the gendered permutations at work in the Abu Ghraib photographs. Although this essay refers only briefly to the virulent homophobia among U.S. military personnel, my analysis does imply that when these assaults appear to assume the character of homosexual acts, what is salient is not the imputed sexual orientation of any of the participants but, rather, the fact that the abused are once again forced, at least in the minds of the perpetrators, to assume the position of those on the receiving end of sexualized violence. A more extended reading would more adequately grasp the complex interplay of race and gender in these photographs and the incidents they depict. We must not forget that the three U.S. women who appear in the Abu Ghraib photographs, Megan Ambuhl, Sabrina Harman, and Lynndie England, are all white women, and that those they abuse are all brown men. Similarly, finally, a more extensive reading would more adequately explicate the larger political logic, that of neocolonialism and imperialism, from which these practices derive much of their sense.

Mark Danner was certainly correct when he contended that "officials of the Bush administration . . . counted on the fact that the public, and much of the press, could be persuaded to focus on the photographs—the garish signboards of the scandal and not the scandal itself" (2004, 47). Saying so, he effectively indicated the strategic foolishness of Rumsfeld's contention that "the real problem is not the photographs—the real problems are the actions taken to harm the detainees." From the vantage point of the Bush administration, far better to encourage a single-minded fixation on these photographs since that, in a culture too much saturated by obscene (which should be distinguished from pornographic) imagery, cannot help but depoliticize what happened at Abu Ghraib. To overcome such depoliticization, we ought to ask how these photographs expose the tangled strands of racism, misogyny, homophobia, national arrogance, and hyper-masculinity, as well as how these strands inform the U.S. military's adventure in Iraq. What we ought not to ask is whether or how these photographs should be read as a referendum on the feminist quest for gender equality.

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